

John Robert Sparling Wilkes (1872 –1933)

Madame looked forward...She welcomed ideas from abroad, ...appointing a Canadian expert to undertake the coaching of Lacrosse, a game then unfamiliar in girls' schools.

E.R and W. Clarke BÖU Magazine 1970

Robert Wilkes was born in Quebec. He came to England in 1901 and may have begun his coaching career at The Princess Helena College in Ealing in 1902.

Robert Wilkes taught lacrosse at Madame Bergman Österberg's Physical Training College from 1904, but he also taught in a number of girls' schools and was probably responsible for organising the early college lacrosse matches against these schools. It is possible Madame realised the PR potential of inviting the school teams to college. She was very hospitable and the visiting lacrosse teams were entertained, after the matches, to gymnastic and dance displays.

In March 1906 *The Badminton Magazine of Sports and Pastimes* suggested that the students at Madame Österberg's College showed the game to be a graceful and healthy game for ladies.

E.R. Clarke (1906) recalled that Mr Wilkes expected them to place their left hand at the top of their lacrosse sticks and their right hand at the bottom. She also said that quick sticks, introduced as a new skill in the 1960s/1970s, was not a new skill but how they had been taught to play.

Robert Wilkes was one of several male experts Madame appointed to ensure her students received excellent tuition. E.R Clarke probably took over the coaching of lacrosse when she was invited to join the college staff in 1910.