

WESTFIELD'S TENNIS CLUB

A BRIEF HISTORY



By LESLIE W. FORBYAN

WESTFIELDS TENNIS CLUB

FORMATION & DEVELOPMENT 1924-1938

At a meeting held on March 25th 1924 and attended by 17 people the Westcotes Church Tennis Club was born. The meeting was chaired by Mr. Percy Russell, who as Vice-President for 20 years until leaving Leicester, gave great help and guidance to the Club. Arrangements were being made with the Parks Superintendent to reserve two grass courts on the Western Park. Twenty people had indicated their intention to join and it was decided to limit the membership to 36. The Rev. Bernard Uffen was the first President, Mr. E. Northfold the first Secretary, and the subscription was fixed at 25/-.

The Club operated at the Western Park for the first two seasons when towards the end of 1925 three grass courts in Eastfield Road owned by Mr. W. Smith, were looked at, and at the A.G.M. in February 1926 the Secretary was instructed to start negotiations for the lease of these courts. To cover the extra expense the membership was to be raised to 60, and the Club thus first played at the Eastfield Road site in 1926.

However, by September 1926 dissatisfaction with the poor condition of the courts was expressed and three points were put forward -

- 1) to remain on Mr. Smith's courts,
- 2) to return to the Western Park,
- 3) to lease two hard courts from Mr. Cooper at the rear of the Celyan

Bungalow on Hinckley Road nearly opposite to Western Park Road.

A decision was taken to negotiate with Mr. Cooper to lease the courts at a rent of not more than £80 a year; and so a move was made to the third location in four years. Play commenced Easter 1927 and the subscription raised to 42/- for a full year including provision of balls for the Summer season.

As the court area was rather restricted (many a point was won by a 'dirty' angled shot into the side netting) members sending balls out into the adjoining gardens were fined 6d. (2½p.) on each occasion, later reduced to 3d. No balls were allowed to be retrieved, and a 'minute' of December 13th, 1927 noted that Mr. Cooper had recovered 40 balls at the end of the season. In those days a bell was rung on the Western Park about 15 mins. before the closing of the Park, and this bell was also a signal that play must cease at the end of the game being played. This was not popular with members as a fair amount of daylight was often still left.

The first Club tournament was held during the season and the Celyan Cup was given by Mr. and Mrs. Cooper. The first Tennis Drive was held on Eastern Monday 1929. In 1930 Mr. Frank Cooper Watson was

Foreword

Having first joined the club as a monthly member in August 1930 and thus in 1980 completed 50 years of playing membership, I felt that something of the Club's history should be put down in writing for the benefit of present and future members.

As I have been actively engaged in the affairs of the Club for a large part of the time, my own memory plus the help of the Committee and General Meeting minutes has enabled me to achieve this aim.

Over the years I have had a great amount of pleasure from the Club and I hope by this History to give a little back in return.

I was very much indebted to Mr. Frank Cooper Wilson for providing me with the early pre-war Minute Books, without which the account would not have been complete.

L. W. F.

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appointed Secretary and was an active officer of the Club until 1958 when he retired from the Club and was made a Vice-President in appreciation of the work done during his many years as a member. Records for this year show that a Cup for the Ladies Doubles was presented by Mr. & Mrs. Percy Russell; also that a Flannel Dance was held on September 11th, the Band - Morrells Melody Makers (cost £3 for four players) tickets 2/6d. each. A profit of £1. 10s. 4d. was reported.

In 1931 a suggestion of the Club moving to three grass courts at the Westcotes Bowling & Tennis Club was rejected, but in September 1932 negotiations were completed for the take-over, from the Westfields Tennis Club, of their ground at the rear of the Western Park where they had been operating since 1922, consisting of one hard court and three grass courts with pavilion etc. It is as well to note here that this is the same pavilion that we are using today. The land was owned by the Westcotes Estate and the lease terminated in 1935. This, however was extended to 1941. The pavilion and equipment were bought for £80. As the hard court was in poor condition and a second hard court was needed, an estimate of £147. 10s. 0d. was accepted to do this work. £150 in loans to cover this work was raised after an offer of £75 from Mr. P. Russell, who eventually took over all the outstanding loans. The official opening took place at the new courts on Saturday May 6th, 1933. The Mens Singles Cup was presented by Mrs. Edith Watson during 1932.



The Pavilion after re-erection 1956 with new toilet block on the left.

It is interesting to recall that there was no water laid on at the new courts, and water had to be collected from a stop tap on the other side of the field in a large galvanised container, suspended on a metal frame with two large wheels. One can imagine the hazards of wheeling this even half full of water back across a bumpy field. Elsan toilets had to be used, and Primus Stoves to boil the water. Milk was collected for Thursdays' and Saturdays' teas from Coopers Farm across the next field, occasionally entailing a wait while the cows were being milked; literally straight from the cow. So life was quite exciting if a little primitive. However we were at this time right out in the country.

1934 saw the entry into Group 6 of the Leicestershire Mixed Doubles Tennis League after becoming affiliated to the L.T.A. A Putting Green alongside the courts was opened and a Table Tennis table and Darts Board installed in the pavilion. Darts in the Pavilion however proved to be somewhat hazardous and didn't survive too long. The following season saw the commencement of the L.T.A. Coaching Scheme for promising young players, Juniors having been taken in the previous season. It is also noted that the Ladies Single and Mixed Doubles Tournaments were not finished and left over until 1936, so that problem isn't new.

At the February 1937 A.G.M. it was disclosed that a loss of £15 had been made on the Season, and the loans outstanding were £117. The following November the future of the Club was discussed. A number of the younger members having improved in their play had left to join other Clubs to obtain better play and some other members had resigned, so the possibility of amalgamation with Bond Street Church, or the West End Adult School was put forward. If no support could be obtained a special meeting was to be called to discuss the closing of the Club and the selling of the Lease of the courts. At the January 1938 meeting the Secretary said that no help was forthcoming from either of these two Clubs. However, Mr. Darrall Sugden informed the Committee that the Church of the Martyrs were interested and had promised that approximately 20 would join.

