

# The History of the Club 1931- 1958

By Denis High.

This is the story of the Tennis Club. George Blay, a local builder, was building houses in roads on either side of Grand Drive from 1929 onwards, his first road being called Firstway, situated near Raynes Park Station. He liked playing tennis and so, in 1931, he built his own tennis courts – so simple...

There were just three courts and a hut. No grass, no paving, no electricity, gas or water. After a few years – luxury of luxuries – they added a (chemical) toilet. And the Tennis Club, called Grand Cross, progressed until the start of the war (for younger members – ie the under-60's – this was in 1939).

After that, I don't know whether the courts were used during the war but in 1947 they were in a pretty awful state – the courts were in bad condition, the netting surrounds almost non-existent and weeds were everywhere.

However, Arthur Rodford, The Residents' Association Chairman, wanted the Association to buy the land, but this idea came to nothing. So Arthur himself formed a company and persuaded local people to buy ninety-seven £5 shares – quite a sum in those days. With this money, and with a £133 contribution from the Council, he bought the land and had electricity, gas and water installed. And there we were – three cheers for Arthur Rodford and the local benefactors! But still no paving. The total cost was just over £452.

The Sports section, a subsection of the Residents' Association, was in charge of courts and clubhouse in 1947. It paid rent to the Holdings Company (the landlords) and it controlled all the games sections: tennis, cricket, football, rambling, bowls, table tennis, darts and Uncle Tom Cobley. However, by 1962 only tennis and cricket had survived and the Sports Section was wound up. There seemed little point in having a section to control just cricket and tennis.

And so, in May 1963, the tennis section negotiated a lease for 21 years with the Holdings Company to ensure security of tenure. For the first time it was known as the Tennis Club and it was now in control of its own finances, and in complete control of courts and clubhouse. Trustees were appointed as nominal owners of the property.

There were occasional attempts by the Club to buy more shares in the Holdings Company, perhaps to obtain overall control and possibly to buy the freehold, but the Association was having none of this. In 1962 the annual rent was £26.

So now we are in 1947. The first tennis was played in April and the subscription was 50 shillings (or £2.50) for six months' membership. In October a winter membership cost 10 shillings (50p) and we were still trying to persuade the Sports Section to have the courts resurfaced – it controlled all the money.

The Junior Section was formed in 1948 and it flourished under the enormous enthusiasm of John Greenwood.

In 1949 the Sports Section at long last decided to get the courts resurfaced and the Tennis Section agreed to repay the money over three years. In this year new membership was sometimes refused to save the numbers exceeding 100 (!).

In 1951 all the paving was laid – from Grand Drive, from Crossway and in front of the Clubhouse. This was mainly carried out by George Winter, a local builder, Club Captain and a giant of a man (you had to be a giant to lay all that paving).

By 1952 main sewerage was installed, the surrounding posts strengthened and by 1954 the tennis section was flourishing. The Handicap Tournament was started in 1955 and Wednesday evening club nights in 1957. Before 1956 we had one issue of balls, not two. These were not always new and had

to last the entire weekend....! Lobs late on a Sunday afternoon were always risky because the ball might just float away .....

There were resurfacings in 1949 and 1958 but neither was very satisfactory.