

The History of Temple Fortune Club 1922 – 1997

written by Mr Anthony A Akers with the assistance of members.

1922 TEMPLE FORTUNE CLUB FORMED

The Club was formed in 1922 and the finance was largely raised by ex-officers from the 1914-1918 war.

The cost of the land was £1,958.10.6 and the cost of construction of the playing surfaces and buildings was £4,114.16.10.

The finance was raised by the issue of 680 debentures of £75.0.0 a mortgage of £1,500.0.0 and guaranteed loan of £850.0.0. from Lloyds Bank Ltd.

This money provided for the construction of six red shale tennis courts, a bowling green and a croquet lawn, together with pavilion, bar, changing rooms, bowls shelter and croquet pavilion.

The subscriptions laid down in the first rules were as follows:

Entrance Fee

Bowls or Tennis	£4.4s.0d
Croquet Only	£1.11s.0d
Tennis.	£3. 3s. 0d
Summer or Winter	£3. 3s. 0d
All Year	£5. 5s. 0d
Bowls	£3. 3s. 0d
Croquet	£1.11s. 0d
Honorary.	£1. 1s. 0d

There were also

Founders Entrance Fees

2 members of a family £75. 0s. 0d

Single Membership £50. 0s. 0d

Entitling the above to life membership for all games.

New rules were passed in 1926 and these indicate that subscriptions for founder members were increased half a guinea per annum whereas new tennis members paid four guineas for summer or winter and *six* guineas all year. The Bowls section was perhaps struggling for members since its subscription was unchanged.

The Club originally employed a paid secretary but was obliged by the state of its finances in 1931 to dispense with his services.

Apart from the original rules and brochure, no minutes or accounts survive until the report and accounts for 1928/1929. At this time there were about 145 tennis and 55 bowls members. Croquet/Putting seems to have been reduced to part of the social membership.

During the period 1928 to 1937 bowls membership increased from 55 to 72 members, while tennis membership decreased from 145 to 96.

Subscription income was reduced from £1,035.0.0 to £850.0.0

In 1929 the Club received an influx of strong tennis players from the defunct Hampstead Garden Suburb Club.

The men's team won the Middlesex Third Division in 1929 and the Second Division in 1930. In the county mixed doubles the Club lost in the final to a team, which included both Fred Perry and Frank Wild.

In 1932 the Club pavilion was rebuilt at a cost of £720.0.0d including a generous gift from a member. The outstanding feature of this building was the wonderful Canadian maple dance floor which withstood even the hob nailed boots of the Home Guard and remains with us to this day, thanks to the efforts of some members who insisted on taking it up, cleaning and relaying it in our present pavilion.

The information and records for this period in the Club's history were supplied by W K Hardie, who was an honorary member till 1989, and who served the Club in a number of capacities not least Chairman and Tennis Captain from 1928 until the early post war years.

In addition it is worth noting that Arthur W Mackenzie - who served the Club for so long, first as Secretary and then Treasurer - first joined the Management Committee in 1932.

There is not much information available about the Club during the last war, but it is known that both tennis and bowls continued throughout, although courts 7 and 8 were not used, became derelict and were never re-instated. The Home Guard used the pavilion as its Headquarters and it is believed that its use of the bar contributed to the survival of the Club financially. A bomb fell at the bottom of court 5 some time during this period and the crater was filled in.

After the war the returning members found a Club in a poor state with very little cash for refurbishment. The tennis members, under the capable supervision of the groundsman, Mr Brunsdon, re-laid courts 5 and 6.

The bowls section restarted but without a ladies section. There is no record of how this was achieved, but older members believe it to have been a triumph for the male chauvinist lobby at the time. Nevertheless, it should be noted that a Mrs Batsford won the EWBA Singles in 1939 and that a Miss Sneath was a formidable competitor in ladies bowls.

1945 PRESTONS AND MORGANS DOMINATE THE TENNIS SECTION

The post war tennis section was dominated for well over a decade by two couples, the Prestons and Morgans, both before and after marriage. They won most of the Club Open Trophies and formed the basis of some very strong Club teams - men, women and mixed. As a result the Club could hold its own with all but the very best clubs in the county. Individually, there were some notable achievements in outside tournaments some recorded on the honours' board.

The bowls section also had a strong team and in 1952 J Stewart won the Middlesex singles and other honours.

On the social side the basically furnished bar was well supported by members and controlled by the Ashdown family and Barrie Morgan. However, there was a dreadful shortage of beer, relieved on one occasion when a pin of beer was rolled down Bridge Lane from the local off licence and served immediately. When mild beer only was available, port was added a horrible experiment to pep it up.

The first surviving minutes of the Club recorded the Annual General Meeting of November 1949. Subscriptions income was £597.0s.0d slightly exceeded by bar profit and catering of £628.0s.0d.

The Chairman recorded his thanks to members who had wire netted the courts, repaired roofs, protected pipes and improved the green surrounds. The bowls section had been awarded a match against the EBA President's team, a rare honour and the first in the Club's history. Tennis had been badly affected by the drought and social events poorly supported. The Chairman was asked if the Club would support the installation of a hot shower for the men and a hot water supply to the ladies' dressing room. He was not favourably inclined but offered personal financial support.

The Club building at this time consisted of the original 1922 wooden pavilion used as men's dressing rooms, the main pavilion of brick, asbestos and timber built in 1932 with a ladies' dressing room at the end of that structure. The men's changing rooms, were falling to bits, had leaking roofs and had the luxury of a cold shower over concrete slab. The ladies' room was of sounder construction but had no shower and a cold water supply only.

Subsequent minutes record a refusal by the committee to sanction a hot water shower but grudging permission for the finance to be raised from members. This was duly done and eventually a portable metal cabinet installed with a coin operated gas meter.

It is interesting to note that the reported attendance at the 1949 New Year's Eve dinner and dance was 136.

Early in 1950 the Management Committee became alarmed at the Club's financial position due to lack of new members and increased expenditure. An EGM was called on 25 March 1950 to approve an increase in subscriptions of £1.0s.0d. bringing bowls to £4.14s.6d. and all year tennis to £5.0s.0d.

The bowls section refused to sanction more than 10/6d and the tennis section refused to pay any more than the increase for bowls. The Club therefore had to survive without adequate funds and the chairman, disappointed at the lack of support from some committee members proposed to resign.

By October 1950 the men had had their hot shower installed and the committee now approved, again subject to the ladies raising the money themselves that they could have an Ascot water heater in their changing room, notwithstanding that they had recently had a footbath installed.

The June 1951 minutes, record that the Ladies' Tennis Team had lost in the final of the Middlesex First Division Cup to Cumberland LTC.

1950 FIRST THEFT REPORTED

The first case of theft from the changing rooms was reported.

At the November 1951 AGM a record number of acceptances for the qualifying rounds of Wimbledon was recorded.

Men's Doubles Messrs Morgan and Flack

Ladies' Singles Mrs Preston

Ladies' Doubles Mrs Preston and Miss Dron

Mixed Doubles Mrs Preston and partner from another Club who qualified and played at Wimbledon

The ladies' tennis team again reached the final of the Middlx County competition.

The Club this year had a strong junior section. In the bowls a record number of members had entered the County competitions. During the year the funds had been raised to supply curtains for the pavilion.

In 1952 C W Brunsdon the Club's long serving groundsman gave a month's notice, as he had accepted a post

elsewhere. This was a big blow to the Club as he had been a tower of strength before the war and would be impossible to replace. (Subsequent minutes confirm this as the Committee tried to find a satisfactory substitute.)

In July 1952 Club membership was reported as:

Bowls 70 members Tennis 70 members Social 50 members

In his report to the members at the 1952 AGM, the Chairman recorded the first ever tennis county success. Mrs East and Mrs Morgan won the Middlesex Ladies' Doubles. There were five other wins in outside club tournaments. A proposal from the floor to increase club subscriptions because of lack of support for fund raising social events, found 20 members in support and 4 against and the remainder sitting on their hands.

Subscription income for the year had been £688 and bar profit £458.

At the end of 1952 a few members got together to produce a scheme, which would improve what was a very shoddy bar and add a little space to the pavilion.

Messrs Pyne, Bradford and Akers put forward the plan and were given the go ahead in March 1953, subject to raising the necessary finance.

1953 was a year in which the bowls and tennis committees complained about the condition of the bowling green and the tennis courts. Nevertheless, the green was used for a Middleton Cup Country game between Middlesex and Hertfordshire, a rare honour, and an expert from En-Tous-Cas pronounced the tennis courts to be in better condition than the hard courts at Wimbledon.

Tennis honours included the winning of the Berks County Ladies Doubles at Reading by Mesdames East and Buckeridge and Mesdames East and Morgan - losing finalists in the Middlesex pairs.

Una East and Betty Buckeridge observed that the Club's social side was poor, asked the Management's permission to improve things and called themselves BUTA.

Thereafter the social scene improved with new enterprises. A concert party was created and a regular news sheet on Club affairs was produced and financed by donations. After hiccups the improvements to the bar were completed which improved the social ambience. Arthur MacKenzie began his long service first as Secretary and then Treasurer in 1953.

The first burglar alarm was fitted to the bar in May 1954 following several burglaries.

In July 1954 the Chairman reported that the Club had insufficient funds to get through the winter and asked the two sections to give urgent consideration to increasing revenue by one means or another.

In November 1953 W K Hardie resigned as Chairman thus ending an association with the Management of the Club dating from 1928. The post-war decade was one in which the Club was always short of money, all expenditure approved only after close scrutiny but with Management and members alike reluctant to increase subscriptions for fear of losing members. Nevertheless, very strong teams both in tennis and bowls had been maintained throughout the decade.

This was illustrated in the Chairman's final report to the AGM when he reported that Una East and Betty Buckeridge had won the Middlesex Ladies Doubles Championship.

He also paid tribute to Ernest Taylor, who had died during the year but had been Chairman, Treasurer and President from 1930 onwards and had been largely responsible for the Club's survival during the war.

A proposal that lady bowlers again be admitted to membership was rejected by the bowls committee in March 1955. In April 1955 at the suggestion of Mrs Houghton and Betty Buckeridge the first Open Junior Tournament was held resulting in a profit of £15.

At the AGM in December the Chairman reported that a Club bowls rink and a triples had been defeated in the finals of the London and Southern County Championship. It was unique for 7 out of 20 players in these finals to come from one club.

A plan had been produced for a new pavilion at a cost of £6,000.

1956 - 1957 were years in which the Club was struggling to raise enough money to relay three tennis courts and make other much needed improvements. A proposal to sell the two derelict courts for housing to raising to £2000 to £3000 was being investigated.

On 7 June 1958 an EGM was held in which it was agreed by 52 to 11 members for a scheme to sell the land. At the AGM, the Chairman said that the Club finances were so bad that it might not be possible to get through the next season. A proposal to install a fruit machine was carried unanimously.

At the 1959 AGM it was reported that the Committee had deferred further action on the sale of land hoping to raise money by other means. In the first year, the fruit machine made £200 a very large sum at the time.

1960 saw membership, dropping by 45. A proposal was passed that the Committee should again consider admitting ladies as bowls members - mid-week only. Only 35 members had attended the AGM. However, Mr F Herzog and a team of members had completely re-roofed the men's dressing rooms and carried out other important maintenance work.

In early 1961, Mr George Pengilly offered to install a fruit machine in the Club which would in due course become the property of the Club and this proposal was accepted by the Management Committee. This decision was to have significant effect on the Club's finances.

In his 1961 report to the AGM, the Chairman reported on a depressing year in which membership was considerably down with a consequent drop in income. There was a general apathy of members both to playing and social events and he did not see how the Club could survive unless this trend was reversed. The annual report shows that membership was down from 231 to 193 and subscriptions income down from £658 to £562.

Fortunately in 1962 membership recovered to 222 and subscriptions to £793. The profit from the fruit machine had reached £523 and in the following years it was to increase in inverse proportion to the number of members so that by 1964 it exceeded by over £100 the subscription income of £705 to £601 and membership down to 208.

Thus George Pengilly's generous gesture in supplying the Club free when the cost had been recovered, with these machines and maintaining them, had effectively assured the Club's survival without resorting to the sale of surplus land.

No Management Committee minutes exist from 1961 to late 1976 and it seems probable that these may have been lost, when the Club Secretary during some of that period died, and any records he had retained were destroyed.

For the history of this period, we therefore have to rely on the memory of the writer and various other documents that remain in the archives.

Early on in this period, an energetic member of the Tennis Committee convinced the Committee that two courts must be relayed obtained an L T A loan and the overdue improvement was completed. Len Crawford proposed that an indoor bowling green be built on the derelict courts and a croquet loan. Plans were drawn up, estimated cost of £52,000, planning permission obtained and the project approved at a long special general meeting. The project lapsed because the organisers were unable to come near to raising the money.

The income from the fruit machines peaked in 1965 and began to drop as the novelty began to wear off. The biggest blow, however, was the introduction of a licence fee of £150 per machine.

The Club continued to struggle on, first about paying its way until the boom in squash persuaded a number of members that the answer lay in selling our unused land and using the proceeds to build two squash courts. This was to prove the biggest improvement in finance and membership in the Club's history.

The year was 1970, and the prime movers on the project was Peter Gill and Roger Draper. The land was offered for sale and after a number of absurdly low offers were rejected, it was sold to G E Wallis & Sons for a price of £32,500.

Planning permission proved very difficult to obtain and the plans were continually being rejected for what seemed trivial reasons. At last the plans were passed in September 1970 and a contract sum of £22,500 was agreed for the building, subsequently increased by various extras to about £27,000 - but the year was now 1971.

Peter Gill's notes at the time state that "The original work comprised:

1. *Demolish changing room, kitchen and bar.*
2. *Erect squash courts, changing rooms, committee room, kitchen and bar with passageway.*
3. *Demolish old pavilion and groundsman shed*
4. *Erect new bowls pavilion on suitable foundation.*
5. *Prepare surface of car park*

It is worth noting that the old dressing rooms were still the 1922 originals and were in a bad state of repair despite valiant efforts by group of members, led in most cases by Fred Herzog, to renew roofs and rotting timbers. Some years previous a youth, who was subsequently caught, set fire to the old pavilion but unfortunately a member was passing just as the fire was getting established, called the fire brigade and instead of getting a new pavilion, we had to settle for a small roof repair

The aforementioned groundsman's shed was situated at the bottom of the present car park. This contained the only lavatory adjacent to the bowling green with floor boards so rotten that members had to approach with great care, as more than one accident occurred.

As a preparation for the demolition of the old dressing rooms, etc. a temporary bar was constructed, again by Fred Herzog, at the end of the pavilion next to the ladies' changing rooms and a men's dressing room was created with a few? and low partitions. The lavatories presented the most serious problem since the two in the ladies dressing room were all that was available and had to be used by all with much knocking on doors and negotiation on availability. However, in this way tennis was able to continue and a limited social life offered.

What seemed to most to be huge foundations, were prepared by the builders and coincided with a period of very wet-weather when pumps were constantly used to dispose of the water. Observing these very deep foundations where the bar was to be constructed, we were delighted to find that the builders were able, with very little extra work and expense, to construct a cellar. This was totally unplanned and is the reason why members have to watch their heads when changing barrels, etc.

It is difficult to pin point the exact start of the building but from correspondence still available, June or July 1971 seems probable and notes of a site meeting state Wallis had expected completion to be by 31 January 1972.

1972/73 LADIES ACCEPTED TO THE BOWLS SECTION

There is no record of the time that the bowls section decided to admit ladies but the first post war ladies' champion appears on the honours' board in 1973 and the AGM notice for September

1971 shows that bowls membership had been reduced to 22 with a further 12 all in members. The hard core of resisters had already bowed to the inevitable and fled to the security of men only clubs and the change would have come about in 1971 or 1973.

1972 SQUASH SECTION FULL

No records exist to show the date for the opening of the squash section, believed to be January, but the first AGM of the section was held on 20

September 1972 when the Captain - Richard Draper - reported that the section was full and by July 1974 the membership was reported to be 237.

The Club enjoyed a few years modest prosperity but this came to an end with advent of the dry summer of 1975. The main pavilion, previously declared safe, was seriously affected by the drying of the clay on which the foundation had been laid and building was declared unsafe for anything but casual use.

This presented the Club with a huge problem of selecting a replacement and raising the finance for it. Once again Peter Gill played a leading part in raising the necessary finance and choosing the new building. A letter to Club members from the President in June 1976 outlined the ambitious plan for the rebuilding and asked for financial support as follows:

Donations

Life membership £300 single sport
 £450 multi sport

Loans interest free or free with a subscription ?. There was generous support from the members and some ex-members and by early August £3,664 had been raised. The financial figure being £7,000. At the Management meeting in November 1976 it was reported £25,000 was needed to be raised already

Start Fund	£ 4,000
Members	£ 7,000
Sports' Council	£ 5,000
	<hr/>
	£16,000
Barnet LTA & other loan	£ 9,000
	<hr/>
	£25,000

1976 MIXED CHANGING ROOMS?

Demolition was completed in December 1976 and completion was expected in April. The ladies were now without a dressing room and once more Fred Herzog came up with an ingenious solution. This entailed a partition down the middle of the men's changing room with access for men at one door and at the other door for ladies. A swing door was fitted which could bolted in one position when men were showering and in another position when ladies conducted their ablutions. Some embarrassing situations occurred particularly as the men's lavatories had to be used by both sexes but good humour prevailed.

More than one man was embarrassed when a protest from a lady, as he described his physical condition after a hard game of squash, showed that the partition was no barrier to sound! One member returned to the bar after attending to nature's needs to announce that a naked lady was washing herself at the wash basin, neither had been perturbed.

ORIGINAL CANADIAN MAPLE FLOOR RETAINED

Before demolition some older members of the Club refused to accept that the pavilion floor of irreplaceable Canadian maple, was not worth the expense of retaining and took it up themselves, cleaning and preserving it for relaying in the new pavilion where it still remains.

It was imperative that a new pavilion was erected as soon as possible, a brick replacement would have taken too long and a pre-fabricated modular building was selected. The records show that the new building was to be opened on 9 July 1977 just six months after demolition. By December furnishings had been completed and the last snags corrected.

The next few years are recorded as a time when the Club's finances gradually improved but there were no great sporting achievements, except that John Poll reached the finals of the London and Southern Counties Bowls Singles in the summer of 1978.

By the end of 1978 the loans from the Club members to help finance the new building were repaid.

In 1980 the basic subscriptions were agreed to be;

Bowls £21,

Tennis (all year) £:33

Squash £23

1980 FLOODLIGHTING COMESTOTFC

In April 1980 a planning application was submitted to Barnet Council for floodlighting of two tennis courts. In October it was reported that the Council feared that the haze from the lights would upset the observatory at Mill Hill. By April 1981 work had started on the installation and it was completed by September.

The Committee minutes over the next few years contain constant references to the difficulties of getting volunteers for the bar, leaking roofs, declining squash membership and problems with employing a suitable groundsman.

At the meeting on 13 January 1983, Arthur Mackenzie announced his retirement from the Committee after 50 years service on various committees - a record unlikely ever to be broken.

Mrs Mitchell had started to raise funds to finance the re-laying of courts 5 and 6 and this major improvement was completed in the autumn following a £3,000 loan from the LTA.

In November 1983, Mrs Gill reported the Club membership to total 362. The playing sections being

Tennis 75,
Bowls 48
Squash 101.

The balance being made up of multiple and social membership.

At the end of the year the Club was "running on a shoe string" financially and might have to resort to a bank overdraft during the next months.

1984 Squash Section without a Captain or Committee

A year later the Squash Section AGM was so poorly attended, it was only just possible to find a quorum and it had not been possible to find a Captain or elect a committee. The Management Committee therefore had to assume responsibility for the section until April 1985 when a new Captain was appointed.

By the end of 1985, the expense of re-roofing the squash courts had depleted the Club's reserves and the Treasurer made tentative arrangements for a bank overdraft. The next few years show constant references to dwindling bar receipts and use of squash courts.

1990 Artificial Grass Courts Laid

By 1990 the Club's finances had recovered sufficiently to enable three artificial grass courts to be laid together with appropriate netting. This could only be achieved with a loan of £25,000 from the LTA repayable over ten years.

1990 The Birth of The Toasted Sandwich

About this time, faced with a surplus of food from a social evening, Pam Dillon made some toasted sandwiches for sale and this was such a success, that with the help of a number of devoted lady members it continued to this day (1997) - making a substantial contribution to Club funds together with an increase in bar takings.

1990 was a year in which the Club's fortunes took a turn for the better with increased income from subscriptions and bar takings. The difficulty in getting volunteers to man the bar continued.

The committee became concerned about the amount of petty theft, mostly from non-members walking into the Club, stealing food and anything else of value and a security system was therefore fitted to the main door.

The new business charge resulted in a big increase in the amount the Club had to pay Barnet Council and the Treasurer began, in concert with other local clubs, a long fight to get a reduction of this charge. Although the Government encouraged Councils to give big discounts to sports clubs, Barnet Council refused to do so. The Club continued to thrive financially and by the end of May 1991 had £20,000 on deposit.

In 1991 the total membership of the Club was 441, with the sole playing membership being

Tennis 96,
Bowls 64
Squash 86

The remainder being multi-sports, social and junior members.

Membership fell over the next few years, but in 1995 a European Court ruling enabled us to reclaim all the VAT we had paid in 1990-1993 and with interest this amounted to £19,000. In addition our future, vis-a-vis VAT would be much more favourable.

Darts Finals in a "Cow Shed"

Now in 1997 we can look back on 75 years which have seen many changes and some odd features - a notable one being the Thursday night darts sessions. These continued for over 25 years in a ramshackle room, accurately described as a "cow shed" by a lady member. Here male members spent an always convivial evening with two

dart boards, a rotting floor and inadequate heating provided by two inefficient radiators. Gallons of beer were drunk, play rarely finished before midnight and even the severest weather failed to deter the enthusiasts. With the building of the squash courts, the "cow shed" disappeared and with it "darts nights" - nobody has played regularly since.

Recovering from the war time neglect, the Club slowly developed into more of a family Club, where married members discovered that they could safely have their children of any age to play in the woods and where camps were made and tree houses built. Two members started an allotment and it soon became standard practice for several families to have Sunday lunch in the pavilion, which allowed maximum use of the bar and play before and after lunch. This continued for many years with as many as twenty members lunching but the loss of the land sold to produce the squash courts has made the woods inaccessible and less safe and these happy occasions are no more.

The national open junior tennis tournament started, as recorded earlier, in 1955 and run by the Polls the Akers and then by Joyce Mitchell who has also supervised the more recent Ratings Tournaments. A number of young competitors in the junior tournaments progressed over the years to play for England and even in the Davis and Wightman Cup Competition. No doubt this had led the LTA to look favourably on our application for loans from time to time.

After 75 years, many of which the Club has struggled to survive, the Club has reached a threshold from which the committee are now considering the way forward.

We hope for a good future.