

West Heath Lawn Tennis Club



Part I

The First Half-Century History

by Ludwig Berlin, May 2002

Part II

Some Reflections from 1950 or So

by Vince Sudbery, June 2009

vinrosa2000@yahoo.co.uk

Postscript

Early Memories of West Heath

Ken Percival, November 2000

There were several earlier family connections which should be in the club records, but my first memory of the club was in 1928 at the age of 8, during the summer holidays when home from boarding school.

My father was C. A. E. Percival. For his services as treasurer from 1910 to 1926 the members of the club presented him with a silver bowl, now owned by my nephew. A great family friend, Basil Clarke, was secretary. Committee meetings were often held at our home in Honeybourne Road.

My mother (maiden name S. Gwen Moreland) was also a good tennis player. My parents married in 1919, but I do not know whether they met through the club. Mother's sisters were Ida and Joan Moreland, who were members, although they also belonged to the Cumberland Lawn Tennis Club.

My maternal grandfather was Richard Moreland who lived in Frognaal and had connections with the Hampstead Cricket and Bowls Club¹. The family firm of Richard Moreland and Son, Engineers from late 18th century and Structural Steelwork fabricators from 1910, designed and fabricated the original roof of the Wimbledon Centre Court, only recently replaced with a larger one. From this connection the family held debenture tickets which I was allowed to use on a few occasions after World War II. The Moreland Hall in Hampstead is named after him, if this is still in existence.

Dorothy Percival, father's sister, lived near by at 57 Redington Road. This had a grass court at the end of the garden, from which a path went down to Ferncroft Avenue. My aunt was also a member.

My sister and I were junior members, not allowed to play on Saturdays, and there was no play on Sundays before World War II. We would often be at the club with our parents and climb around the outside of the courts looking for lost tennis balls or picking blackberries on the slope next to Westfield College. At the far end of the top lawn, when bored, we would play French Cricket and, on some occasions, climb the wall and go on to the brick water tanks, again, ostensibly, looking for lost balls.

I was always keen on tennis and at school was in the first batch of boys allowed to play tennis instead of the cricket that was normally compulsory around 1936. I have dim memories of some junior tennis tournaments in the summer holidays at West Heath.

I am not quite sure when the hard courts ² were built, but I believe my father helped with some of the costs and, if my memory serves me correctly, he was not finally repaid until after the war.

I was released from the Royal Engineers in June 1946, by which time I was married with a son. We created a flat on the top floor of the family home at 57 Redington Road - the house with the grass court and path. My aunt was very upset when I dug up half the court to grow vegetables, as we were encouraged to do, to help to feed the family. The West Heath committee asked me to be treasurer and asked Paddy Agor (then single) to be Secretary. The aforementioned footpath was very useful as it came out opposite Paddy's house.

I can't remember whether the hard courts were used during the War, but I can't believe anyone was around to look after the grass courts.

After the war we found an ex-army Irishman as a groundsman. Pat McMulkin was probably more of a handyman and some of the good players felt he was not getting the best out of the grass courts and he was given notice after four years. As a person he was very likeable and always helpful. He looked after the bar too, which brings back memories of the very cold winter of '47 (or was it '48?) when syphons of soda water froze and, being under pressure, exploded everywhere!

In 1946, at the start of the season, for the first and only time I had to use my army reserve rank to obtain a Union Jack from Gamage's so we could fly it on Saturdays.

We obtained used tennis balls from Wimbledon - you probably still do³. The club used to get centre and number 1 court tickets for the Championships for which there was a ballot. In those days they were amateur matches and I can remember going to the final of the Ladies Singles - was it Yvonne Goolagong? - when it was rained off and played on the Monday. There was no Sunday play in those days.

One AGM was very lively, when apart from Paddy and myself all the older members of the committee were replaced with younger and newer members. Was it '48⁴?

Around this time my father was made President, which pleased him immensely. He died in '55. I moved out to Hertfordshire with my family in 1952.

I remember two club dances. One was held in the restaurant above John Barnes and there was another below a block of flats in the Finchley Road, near West End Lane. At the latter a young lady had too much to drink and was seen in the ladies cloakroom spending a long time trying to get her hands clean - she was wearing black kid

gloves. She was the daughter of a Judge but I can't remember her name.

I hope with other club records these recollections may be of use to club members interested in the past history of West Heath.

Ken Percival
November 2000

Editor's footnotes

1. *Now merged with the Cumberland, with tennis replacing the bowls at some stage.*
2. *Now known as shale.*
3. *Not always true. The balls used at the 2001 men's team practise had "Roland Garros" stamped on them and in 2009 a number of social tennis balls came from the Cumberland ITF Futures tournament and were stamped "Head ATP"!*
4. *Records confirm this was indeed the 1948 AGM.*