



## Pinner Lawn Tennis Club – A Short History

By Mark Hirst - Former Chairman and Trustee

Whilst we are officially celebrating this as our 125th anniversary, we have uncovered evidence that shows that the story of Pinner Lawn Tennis Club actually begins slightly earlier, back in 1895, when Mr James Heaton, a local resident, approached the parish council to be able to use a small corner of the then new recreation ground in West End Lane to lay out tennis courts for the use of the local community to play tennis.

**RECREATION GROUND.**  
A letter from the Metropolitan Railway Company was read, stating that the Company would be pleased to let the Council have the field now used as a recreation ground, on condition that Mr. Carley surrendered the whole of the land, and the Council to take it for £10 10s. per annum, and pay all rates and taxes, the tenancy to be yearly, subject to one month's notice. If wanted for railway purposes the swings, &c., to be the property of the Council. The costs of the agreement to be paid by the Council.—Mr. Toovey moved that the terms of the Railway Company be accepted.—Mr. Parkhouse seconded, and it was carried.—The Chairman said there was a letter from Mr. Heaton, which said he had attended a meeting which had been held to organise a tennis club to be held on the Recreation Ground, to consist of tradespeople and others of the village, the ground asked for to be in the further right-hand corner of the field. The club was willing to re-lay for two courts, and the members of the club to have the sole right to the use of the courts at a rent of 10s. per annum.—Mr. Cross asked if all persons would have the right to join the club?—Mr. Parkhouse said he supposed they could do so.—Mr. Toovey proposed it be left to the favourable consideration of the Recreation Ground Committee.—Mr. Gregory seconded, and it was carried.

*Snippet from the Uxbridge, Harrow and Watford Journal dated 9<sup>th</sup> November 1895*

**The Lawn Tennis Club.**—The new courts for the Pinner Lawn Tennis Club are being laid on the Recreation Grounds, this portion being rented from the Parish Council by the Club. There are a few vacancies for members, and the secretary will be glad to receive names as early as possible to make up the requisite number.

*Snippet from the Harrow Observer, dated 20<sup>th</sup> December 1895*

a flourishing condition to their success, when present president and secretary, Mr. G. T. Skilbeck and Mr. Arthur Toovey respectively. Mr. Nugent is President of the Pinner Lawn Tennis Club, the Football Club and the Rifle Club, and acts as Chairman and one of the Joint Treasurers to the Village Sports Committee. He is a Vice-President of the Cricket Club and the Young Men's Institute; a sidesman of the Parish Church, and a member of the local Lodge of the Oddfellows.

*Snippet from the Watford Observer, dated 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1909*

Following the club's start, its popularity grew, with very prominent local resident, Mr Christopher Robert Nugent, becoming the club president. Play appears to have continued on Pinner Recreation Ground (with some matches and club tournaments being played on the grounds of The Hall) with regular payments being made over a number of years to the parish council for the use of the courts, however the land on which the recreation ground stood (and ironically still stands) was on a rolling annual lease from the Metropolitan Railway Company, and as no firm commitment was forthcoming to either enter a longer lease term, or to sell it to the council, play was moved to the grounds of The Hall, owned at the time by the Nugent family, with the club continuing to be run by Mr Nugent, with committee minutes in evidence that date back to 1911, showing that there were 49 members in that year, each paying 1½ guineas per year for the privilege.



Play appears to have continued in the grounds of The Hall until approximately 1926, when notice to quit was given to the club by Mrs Mabel Agabeg, then resident of the Hall. At this point, the club decided that it wanted to find itself a permanent home and 5 members, under a share holding agreement, were able to purchase the freehold on a 7-acre site in Little Moss Lane in 1927 from Frederick Dunbar Thomas, which was then leased to the club and was originally laid as 3 hard shale clay courts, with this being expanded to 6 hard courts and 3 grass courts in 1928 with the grass courts being sold-off at some point later for the building development that became Moss Close.

AN EXHIBITION LAWN TENNIS MATCH by Mrs. Lambert Chambers, Miss Harvey, J. M. Gilbert, D. M. Greig, will be given on Saturday, November 5th, at 2 p.m., on the new hard courts of the Pinner Lawn Tennis Club, entrance through their gate in Moss-lane. Admission, 1s. 6d. Equipment and balls by Messrs. Slazengers, Ltd. It will be in aid of the Northwood, Pinner and District Hospital, so please all come who can. U195

Snippet from the Uxbridge and West Drayton Gazette, dated 4<sup>th</sup> November 1927.



Photo showing the club that was taken as part of the Britain from Above project in 1938

THE PINNER LAWN TENNIS CLUB in Moss-lane, which is the oldest tennis club in Pinner, is building a new clubhouse and further hard courts, so that when the Summer season opens on May 1, six hard courts and three grass courts will be available. Particulars of membership may be obtained from the hon. secretary, Mr. H. O. Seyd, Hillbarrow, Paines-lane, Pinner.

Snippet from the Harrow Observer, dated 30<sup>th</sup> March 1928

The club, now in its new, permanent home, officially affiliated with the LTA in 1928.

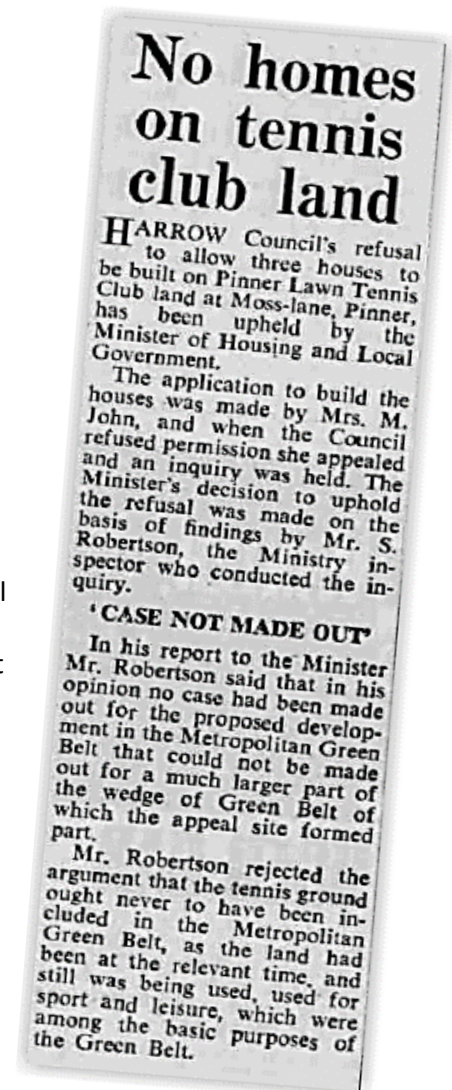
Everything seemed to run smoothly for the next decade until the war began, and whilst little is known about how the club survived the 1939-45 war years, it managed to, seemingly with the help of many club and community members.

At some point, the five original freeholders had dwindled to just two; Sidney Winckworth and Reginald Hubble, and whilst the two owners supported the clubs continuance, they would only grant 1 or 3 year leases, which gave the club no long-term stability and began to make it more difficult to attract members, however in 1954, then committee member Bill Freeman negotiated a 14 year lease, giving the club some much needed stability – or so they thought.

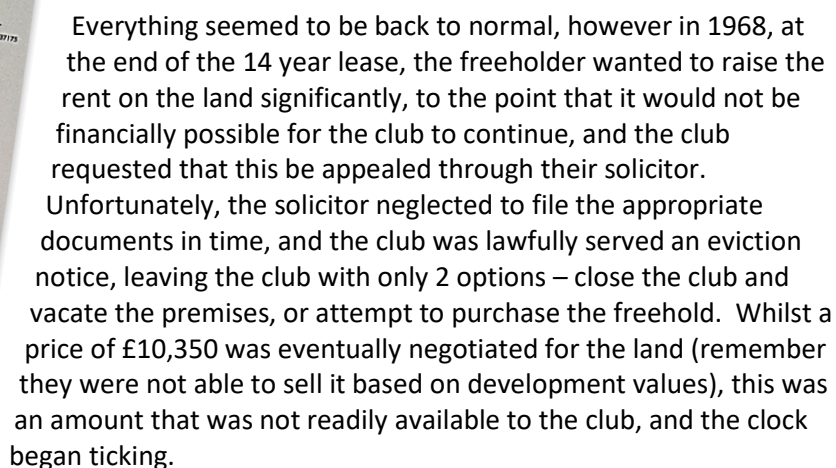


Snippet from the Harrow Observer, dated 10<sup>th</sup> March 1955

10 years into their 14-year lease, with the club's membership figures sitting at a healthy 231 members, including 75 juniors, the club were informed that all the shares were now in the ownership of just one person, Mrs Mary John, nee Winckworth, the daughter of Sidney Winckworth, and that she was proposing to evict the club from the land and sell it to developers to build housing. The original proposition was challenged and rejected on the basis of unsuitable access to the site for such a large development, and a further proposal for just 3 houses on just the frontage of the land – in Little Moss Lane – was submitted. This was further challenged by club members, local residents and local councillors on the basis that the club formed a vital part of the local community, and it was argued that whilst the land had been inherited by Mrs John, it had been inherited as a tennis club within the green belt rather than land for development and that re-zoning it for development would not be appropriate. The appeal was upheld and the proposal for any development on the site was rejected.



Snippet from the Harrow Observer, dated 7<sup>th</sup> January 1965



Over the next few months, then Chairman Brian Montieth and his committee worked tirelessly to raise the required funds beginning with a “fighting fund” from members, friends and residents which raised several thousands of pounds in just under 3 weeks – particularly touching was the amount of pocket money donated by many junior members. These donations along with loans negotiated with the Lawn Tennis Association, the Department of Education and Science and the solicitors that neglected to raise the original lease appeal, the full funds were secured, and in May of 1968, the club purchased the freehold and were finally in control of their own destiny.

Part of the sale agreement was to ensure that the club not financially benefit from the sale of the grounds in the future should the club ever cease to exist, and a covenant was agreed in the constitution of the club, that should the land ever be sold, any profits would be given to the National Tennis Coaching Fund of the LTA – a covenant that remains in place to this day to ensure that there would never be a vested, financial interest in the club, that could lead to the club folding for the wrong reasons.

With the future of the club now in its own hands, they were able to focus on making the club the best it could be, and in 1974, they built and opened a pavilion – the same one that is in place today. This was followed in 1975 with the bar becoming officially licensed.



In 1979, the first all-weather courts were installed on courts 5 & 6, to replace the original clay shale courts, followed in 1982 with court 4 being replaced as well.

Following all the big decisions that had been made over the history of the club, you would think that they wouldn't want to consider any other big challenges, however the club decided to look at the potential to amalgamate with Headstone and West End tennis clubs to form a new "mega club", to be called the West Harrow Tennis Centre, which was to house 12 outdoor courts, 8 indoor courts, a swimming pool, restaurant and clubhouse on land provided by Harrow Council. This consultation lasted 2 years from 1987 to 1989 and went right through to the planning stage but was ultimately rejected due to some of the stipulations required by the LTA and the Council to enable the clubs to secure the land and required funding.

In 1990, the top 3 courts were converted to their current surface type, followed in 1992 by the bottom courts, with floodlights following in 1993 after some challenges with planning and ultimately the support of the local MP.

There then appears to have been a period of stability, with the club running smoothly under the watchful eye of the members who volunteered their time to serve on the committee on behalf of their fellow members.

In more recent years, the club has again had to pull together to ensure its survival whilst working through the issues thrown up by COVID – with multiple lockdowns and restrictions - the committee and members had some significant challenges, but with the support of the whole membership and some fantastic financial management by Martin Simonis as the long-standing Honorary Treasurer, the club came out stronger and were able to return to normality quickly, and with a newly refurbished clubhouse.

In 2023, following his sad passing, the club made the decision to rename court 2 the "Martin Simonis Court" to honour Martin's long commitment and dedication to the club and his embodiment of the spirit of what has kept the club alive for so many years.



To quote one of my previous historians "The resilience, fortitude and team spirit displayed by the club and its members to overcome the difficulties it has faced throughout its history is clearly evident, and that the current times are relatively tranquil is a result of the efforts and sacrifices of all the members who have given of themselves" and something we hope to see continue for a long time to come.



Thank you to the previous "historians", Brian Montieth and Jeff Perry for their research and notes, without which, we would not have been able to put together such a comprehensive story.