

KENILWORTH TENNIS CLUB MOVED FROM QUEENS ROAD, KENILWORTH TO CRACKLEY LANE IN JANUARY 1961. (Peter Dennis joined the tennis section in 1967)

HOW ASSOCIATION CROQUET STARTED WITHIN KENILWORTH LAWN TENNIS CLUB by PETER DENNIS

In 1989 John Kelley approached Doug Taylor with the idea of forming a Croquet Club, knowing that others from outside tennis were interested – Bill Sidebottom, Neil Stevenson, John & Nancy Robinson plus Peter Dennis.

Two redundant tennis courts became a full-sized lawn [Lawn 2] albeit with a noticeable slope, and Doug Taylor managed the lawn cutting, weeding, marking of lines, etc.

Chris Hudson, from the Croquet Association (CA), came to give some very basic coaching in the first year or so. At this stage the only game played was Association Croquet.

During this time we had no storage facilities, and the hoops, mallets and balls had to be fetched from, and taken back to, a store in the basement of the squash courts building, for every game. Thanks to the good spirit within the small membership, this continued as a necessity until John Leader's pavilion was completed in 1998/99.

HONOURS BOARD

The names of six of the original members - Bill Sidebottom, Peter Dennis, John Kelley, Neil Stevenson, Roger Tribe and Doug Taylor, all appear on the early Honours Board of these years. The first cup, St George Cup, has an interesting history. According to an inscription on the cup, it was originally presented by Boston House Motors (Coventry) Ltd to the Royal Society of St George, Warwickshire Branch, for their annual Croquet Competition cup, and the winners' names from 1981 to 1986 are still engraved on the sleeve. Doug Taylor was offered the cup and gave it to the club which started using it in 1991, with Bill Sidebottom carrying off the trophy in 1991 and 1992, followed by John Kelley in 1993 and 1994.



In 1994, a second cup was donated to the club by Doug Taylor, the Taylor Cup, first won by Neil Stevenson, followed by Peter Dennis in 1995. The Taylor Cup was to be played on half lawns, and still is today, because in those days, the single lawn was divided into two halves to allow more games to take place.

These six members continued to share both cups for the first 10 years of competition until, in the year 2001, a new name appears on the Honours Board - John Leader, who triumphed in the Taylor Cup.

The Douglas cup, presented by Doug Taylor in 2002, was used as the trophy for a high handicappers' competition, with the first two years' winners being Peter Mills and Ray Clipson.



A salver, known as the Fellows Salver, was presented by Henry Fellows when he left the club. This was used for an AC Handicap Tournament with invitations to local clubs in May/June each year.



Other cups were donated in later years. For AC croquet, John Leader donated the Bill Browne Cup, which he and his fiancée had won in a car rally in 1963, in memory of Bill Browne, and Bill Sidebottom donated the Castle Cup which he had been given, and which is ornately engraved and features three croquet mallets and balls, with two hoops as handles.





The Secunderabad and Pindi Cups were brought back from India by John Handy, whose mother had won them there for tennis, and he donated them for AC and GC respectively.



Early Members of the Club

Left to right:

Bill Sidebottom, Doug Taylor, John Robinson, Roger Tribe, John Leader, David Taylor, Bill Browne, Jim Ward

CONSTRUCTION OF LAWN 1

In order for the croquet club to attract more members, Doug Taylor & Bill Sidebottom suggested the best idea was to create a half lawn because that would avoid any work to the encroaching sloping bank.

However Peter Dennis said this was short-sighted and if the bank were removed, plus other major ground works carried out, a full-size lawn could be achieved.

This idea was agreed, with Peter accepting the task of “masterminding” this huge project on a limited budget and with limited manpower.



Work commenced in October 1994 with the first job of digging out the encroaching embankment to make room for a full-sized lawn. Peter spent hours daily using a mini excavator, with the small band of helpers wheeling barrows of clay across to the pond adjacent to the car park. Adverse weather conditions and ‘that clay’ meant ‘blood sweat and tears’ was the order of the day.



100 tons of topsoil (poor quality and stony) was then barrowed, spread and roughly levelled. 250 pegs were put in by Peter, patiently assisted by Bill, and then levelled to give a flat playing area. Strings were then strung over the pegs to break the area down into smaller areas and to act as a template for raking the topsoil to the finished surface.



This process went on daily over several weeks before finally being declared to be ready for seeding. During this time David Taylor was to be seen ‘heeling’ over the whole area to compact the topsoil – an enormous task.

Finally the grass seed was cast by Doug in both directions with two raking afterwards, starting at 8.00am and finishing at 6.00pm (a mechanical spreader was beyond our financial means).

Two weeks later there was a bright green sward to behold and such a contrast from the months of seeing clay and a stony topsoil.



During the germination period there was a serious dry period which spelled disaster. The problem was solved when Peter approached the Leamington Fire Service, which resulted in the fire tender arriving early one morning and the crew running out the hoses to flood the lawn area until well under water.



The grass miraculously appeared and Doug Taylor gave the lawn the first cut in October 1995. The lawn was left to settle down over the winter until the normal Spring opening in April 1996.

There was only a small number in the club but all members took part and whilst hard work, the achievement of creating a new lawn was very rewarding.

Lawn No 1 was finally opened for play in April 1996. At that time winter play was not allowed, giving the lawns time to recover following all the end of season treatment. Clubs with more than 2 lawns were able to keep playing through the winter.

MAINTENANCE OF THE NEW LAWN 1

Peter took responsibility for cutting the grass and devising a programme of all maintenance work throughout the year, particularly at the end of a season, and within the limited budget available.

Knowledge was based on information gained from Royal Leamington Spa Bowling Club, who were constructing a Championship lawn at the same time; from Chris Charman, of Warwick District Council and from Rigby Taylor, who advised on supplies of seed, fertilizer, etc.



Top dressing - we always used top quality kiln dried lawn sand from Cheshire and this was only put on when the ground was bone dry so that it rolled into the low spots easily by using the small lute and exposing the existing grass so that it would continue to grow. Remember the weather conditions vary every year and this was always an added challenge.

It was relentless work but the rewards were very satisfying - a job which I enjoyed immensely for 12 years - and resulted in having two croquet lawns as good as most others in the West Midlands area.

Ray Clipson took over as lawn manager in 2008 with the aim of following a similar annual maintenance programme to ensure improvements could be maintained.

JOHN LEADER'S PAVILION

The pavilion was designed by John Leader in the late 1990s. A cardboard model was made of the hexagonal building. Secretary John Leader and Chairman Doug Taylor were successful in obtaining funds from the KLTSC for building the pavilion. Peter Dennis quickly volunteered to "do as he was told" both in John's garage and later in erecting on site - great fun and laughs including "Measure twice, cut once" and "When I nod my head, hit it hard."



It was built in John's garage in sections, transported to Crackley Lane and erected on the hexagonal base they had also made. When completed, all the equipment could be stored safely in the pavilion. The main benefit was that the pavilion provided shelter for the members, and ability to watch games being played on both lawns, 1 and 2.



As a result of Autumn winds which affected the swing of the mallets, Peter Dennis designed and made a weathervane, based on Doug Taylor's croquet style. Unfortunately it got 'lost' after the construction of the new pavilion around 2013.

The Ashby Clock



Ashby, Sapcote, Edgbaston and Kenilworth competed in the first Kenilworth Festival Competition for Midlands Clubs in 2009. The Kenilworth pair of Adrian Morris and Rachel Rowe were victorious. Ashby Croquet Club enjoyed the day so much they presented us with a donation which was used to buy a clock for the pavilion, the Ashby Clock.

WCF WORLD GOLF CROQUET CHAMPIONSHIP 1998

The World Golf Croquet Championships 1998 took place at the Royal Leamington Spa Bowling Club. This was the only year in which croquet was played there. Our new no 1 lawn was inspected and deemed to be of an acceptable standard in case of need. Bill Sidebottom and John Leader had recently qualified as referees for Association Croquet and were invited to be referees for the Championship. Jim Ward, Peter Dennis and two others acted as ball boys, due to the hard hitting.



The players were all from Egypt except for Mick Mehas from USA and 3 other players. None of the top UK Association players played in the tournament. The Egyptians played with a shortened home-made mallet, hence the exaggerated low hand grip, high back swing and an extraordinary hard-hitting shot. The final was between Mick Mehas (USA) & Khaled Younis (EGY), played under floodlights with a noisy small crowd - pure theatre. Khaled Younis became the World Champion.



6th World GC Championship Southwick 2004

Dennis Bullock (NZ) put his winning ball in the hoop. This left a clean jump shot from 3-4m for Azmed Nasr, who was successful and became the Championship winner.

CROQUET MEMBERSHIP DEMOGRAPHICS

Association Croquet

Members who joined between 1999 and 2005 and played Association Croquet included John Leader, David Taylor, Peter Mills, Geoff Eames, Peter Moody, Jim Ward, Bill Browne, Pauline Dennis, Alan Richardson, Ray Clipson, John Handy, John Copping, Edgar McCarthy, Charles Wade, Frank Hibberd, John Lovett, Peter Mallen, Cyril Corke, Gina and Jeff Munden, Diana Jeffcott, Brian Kerr, Pat Wright, Adrian Morris, Henry and Sylvia Fellows.

This was the peak time for Association members.

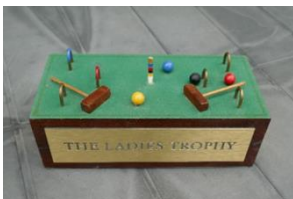
Golf Croquet



Shortly after the World Golf Croquet Championships in 1998, the CA produced the first book of Golf Croquet rules in 2001.

As a result of this, Golf Croquet started up as an added version of the game, and led to an increase in membership from 2006 to 2008, in Kenilworth and in line with the rest of the country.

The first cup for Golf Croquet, the Kenilworth Cup, donated by James Ward, was won by another new name, Edgar McCarthy in 2001.



The Ladies' Trophy was introduced and made by Diane Jeffcott, who won it for its first two years, 2004 and 2005. The Charlecote Cup was donated by Ray Clipson in 2010 and played for the first year at Charlecote Park while our lawns were closed. It was won by Nick Hegan and thereafter played on the Kenilworth courts.

FUN PHOTOS



The first real crowd for an Association Tournament in 2008

John Leader entered 3 tournaments: won 2, but lost the last game to Bill Browne (pictured). I tried to get publicity in the local papers with the caption "John won 2 matches but lost his head in the 3rd" and was rejected as too scary by the press.



Peter Dennis always claimed that lawn 1 was completely level but after a very heavy rain storm there was a ponding which showed that that was incorrect. 'Surfboards' were brought out for an afternoon's 'windsurfing' and the ponding was corrected with top dressing over the next few weeks.



Spot the weed!

Peter Dennis was offered Honorary Life Membership by the KLTSC in 2010, for the time and effort he had given to the club over 33 years, in his roles as helper, organiser, playing member and social supporter. This is a rare award which had only been given to two previous members, Dan Riley and Doug Taylor.