



HIGH WYCOMBE LAWN TENNIS CLUB

FOUNDED 1947



The High Wycombe Lawn Tennis Club that we know today was founded in 1947 but the club's roots can be traced right back to the 1880s.

HIGH WYCOMBE
TENNIS.—The Wycombe Lawn Tennis Club, commenced their third season on Easter Monday, at their ground near the New Mill, London-road. There was a good attendance of members.

Although we can't be sure exactly when it was formed, on 30 April 1881 this article was published in the *Buckingham Express, Winslow, Stony Stratford and Brackley Times*. Wycombe Lawn Tennis Club were playing on a court near New Mill, London

Road. At one point there were 35 mills on the River Wye between West Wycombe and Loudwater. Only Pann Mill survives today.

As the club was starting their third season it would seem that the club was formed in 1879.

Tennis in High Wycombe must have been quite low profile as on 6 June 1890 an article was published in the *South Bucks Standard* in which the correspondent wondered why there wasn't a lawn tennis club in High Wycombe.

How is it, I wonder, that neither Wycombe nor Marlow can boast of a Lawn Tennis Club? Maidenhead has a capital club, and so have Slough, Reading, and Newbury. Now, Mr. G. R. Ward and Mr. A. J. Thurlow, try your hands at organising the lawn tennis players in your respective towns, and let not Wycombe and Marlow be behind other towns in respect of this popular summer pastime.

In response, the Hon Secretary of High Wycombe Lawn Tennis Club stressed the club was successful and had been for at least five years. In 1890 the club had 23 members.

The modern game of tennis had been patented in 1874 by Major Walter Clopton Wingfield. It initially appealed to the Victorian upper classes who mainly played it on lawns in private gardens but quickly caught on

and became a popular pastime for the elite and was particularly popular with women as it was the only sport they could play where they were regarded as equals.

The All England Croquet Club was founded in 1868 and in 1877 changed its name to The All England Croquet & Lawn Tennis Club. The original ground was in Worple Road, Wimbledon. In 1877 the inaugural Championships were held solely as a men's singles tournament. It was an amateur event that occupied club members and their friends for a few days in the summer.

HIGH WYCOMBE LAWN TENNIS CLUB
To the Editor of the "South Bucks Standard."
SIR,—Allow me to point out an error in your last issue. You ask why Wycombe cannot boast of a Lawn Tennis Club? Well, Sir, a Tennis Club has been in existence certainly for the past five years, and this year we have been particularly successful with it, for we have almost doubled the number of members (twenty-three in all) we have ever had before. Tournaments with neighbouring Clubs are being arranged for (particulars of which I hope to send for publication in your paper next week), and we reckon to have the best court in the town. Our only complaint is that we cannot this season get a second court, which we could easily keep filled, so inadequate is our present space.
Please give publicity to this error by correcting the statement in your next issue, and oblige
Yours faithfully,
H. E. VERNON SHONE,
Hon. Sec.
High Wycombe, Bucks, June 11th, 1890.

LOCAL NEWS.
HIGH WYCOMBE.
LAWN TENNIS.—The High Wycombe Lawn Tennis Club will play Mr. F. J. J. Culhane's team (from Marlow), on the Club Courts in the Wycombe Cricket Field to-morrow (Saturday) to commence at 3 p.m.

South Bucks Standard Friday 1 August 1890

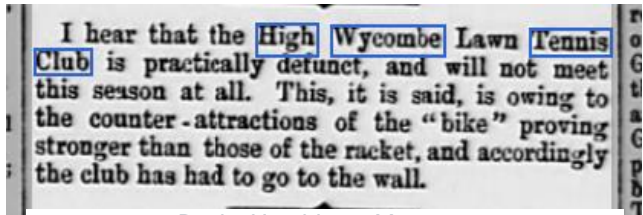
The first newspaper reports of tennis matches between HWLTC and other local tennis clubs also appeared in the *South Bucks Standard* in 1890 and contrary to the report in 1890, it seems that there was also a lawn tennis club in Marlow at that time as High Wycombe played their team on Saturday 2nd August

1890. They were now playing on the cricket field on The Rye, and they played there for several seasons.

The cricket field is still the home of High Wycombe Cricket Club, which was established in 1823. Matches were played home and away on a friendly basis and never on Sundays! The season was short, from May to the end of August.

On 30 October 1891 there was a newspaper report of an end of season party on Friday, 30 October attended by more than 90 members and friends at The Royal Grammar School. The entertainment included a musical performance, a comedic singer and a single act farce!

In the late 1890s cycling became a very popular activity in High Wycombe, in particular "The Wycombe Wheelers" cycling club, and it seems the popularity of this new sport led to a lack of interest in tennis and by 1898 the tennis club appears to have been virtually defunct.



Bucks Herald 21 May 1898

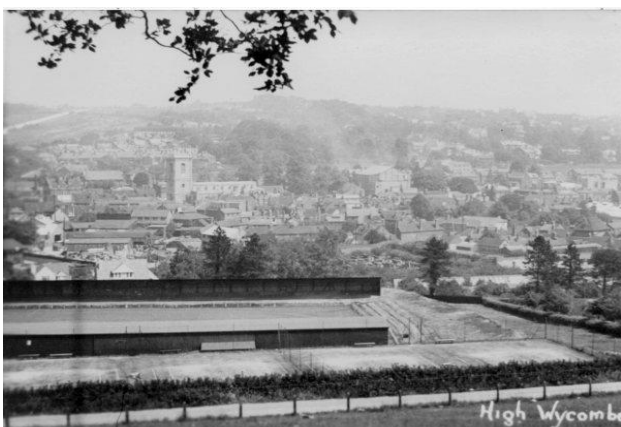
Enthusiasm for cycling appears to have been relatively short-lived and within five years tennis in High Wycombe was revived.

The new Wycombe Lawn Tennis Club was inaugurated in May 1903 with an opening ceremony performed by the Mayor of High Wycombe, who was appointed President of the club. A "number of influential gentlemen" were secured as Vice-Presidents, including Sir Robert Dashwood of West Wycombe and William Grenfell MP, 1st Lord Desborough, a great all-round sportsman of the time who became President of the Buckinghamshire Lawn Tennis Association and the British Olympic Committee.



Their home ground was now Loakes Park, part of the Loakes Manor Estate which once spanned thousands of acres, and at the turn of the century was owned by Lord Carrington. There were six courts plus a croquet lawn and they had use of a pavilion.

The tennis club ground later became the training ground of Wycombe Wanderers Football Club. Wycombe Hospital buildings and car park now stand on the land where the courts used to be. The original Loakes Manor is now the home of Wycombe Abbey School.



View from Tom Burt's Hill

The new Wycombe Lawn Tennis Club was a great success in terms of members (approx. 100, although some were non-playing) and enthusiasm. However, newspaper reports at the time show their success did not extend to winning matches or tournaments. In fact, they were soundly beaten on a regular basis!

In 1905 the tennis courts were merged with the playing area of Wycombe Wanderers Football Club.

Wycombe Wanderers Football Club began life in 1887, having been started as a football team by a group of young furniture factory employees who wanted to play matches, hence their nickname "The Chairboys".

In the 19th-century, High Wycombe was the chair making capital of the world with The Windsor Chair being the most famous product of the trade.

For the next 10 years the club remained successful, playing matches against other local teams including Aylesbury, Thame, Maidenhead and Uxbridge and holding popular open American Tournaments.

Following the outbreak of World War I in 1914 all tennis activity stopped for the duration. The South Bucks Standard, which had covered all the High Wycombe tennis activity from 1890, closed down at the start of the war and was never revived.



After the Great War, tennis resumed and in 1923 as a result of effort from members of local clubs including Aylesbury, Beaconsfield, Chesham, Gerrards Cross and Great Missenden, the Bucks County Lawn Tennis Association was formed. Although by this time there were 450 tennis clubs in the country there is no record of how many clubs there were in Bucks, but only six Bucks clubs affiliated themselves to the new association. High Wycombe was not one of them.



Ordnance Survey 1925

It's unclear when tennis courts were established on the present site, but the Ordnance Survey map of 1925 shows an outline of what could be the tennis courts alongside the remainder of the watercress beds.

The whole of the triangular area of land between London Road, Chestnut Avenue and Bassetsbury Lane was known as Copper Mead or New Mead. It was originally part of Bassetsbury Farm and Estate (owned by Lord Carrington) and was used to grow watercress. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries watercress was a common crop in the low-lying

marshy land along the River Wye.

There was a corn mill on the river where the houses on Bassetsbury Lane now back onto Court No 1. Eight of the houses on London Road with back gardens adjoining the tennis club car park were built in the early 1920s.

Between 1926 and 1933 these four individual parcels of land that made up this triangular area, changed hands several times being variously owned by Henry Turnbull, a local company director, Gaston Caramelli Hugo, an Italian who owned a furniture factory in West Wycombe Road and John Hickman, Millwright of 1 Bassetsbury Lane. Henry Turnbull was a member of the club until 1966.

By 1938 all the land between Bassetsbury Lane and Chestnut Avenue on the north side of the river, as well as the parcel of land and tennis pavilion on the south side had been purchased by Frank Adams.

Frank was a former Wycombe Wanderers Football Club player, helping the club win the Spartan League Championship twice. He played for several clubs and finally retired from football in 1928. He was an all-round sportsman, sports shop owner, ran a photographic business and was a very prominent figure in High Wycombe.



The first verified record of tennis courts on our present site off Bassetsbury Lane is in 1930 when this photograph was taken.



The wooden clubhouse was across the river and reached by a bridge over the river.

Ralph and Margaret Ives were members at the time and used to take their young daughter Margaret (now Stevens), to the club with them. She was about 10 years old when she joined and 75 years later is still a member. She remembers that the juniors played on the hard court on that side of the river.

Although there is no evidence of the court, the line at the front of the picture could be the outside tramline or baseline of the court. The girls in the picture were pupils at St Augustine's School, Daws Hill Lane, High Wycombe.

On our present site there were six hard courts and they were used by three different clubs. One court was used by NALGO (The National Association of Local Government Officers. At that time nearly every branch office had sports teams), two courts were used by Bassetsbury Tennis Club and the Wycombe Hard Courts Club used the remaining three courts. The Wycombe Hard Courts club was run by Frank Adams.

The aerial photograph below dated 1935 shows the six courts on our site with three separate units along the left-hand baseline and the wooden clubhouse and one court over the river.



At this time there was still a lot of open land around the courts but some houses had been built on London Road, Chestnut Avenue and Bassetsbury Lane.

The branch railway line from High Wycombe to Maidenhead can be seen crossing the road where the Lidl car park is now. On the corner of London Road and Chestnut Avenue, where the Hire Shop and Sea Cadets are now, was the Walls Ice Cream factory. The High Wycombe Lawn Bowls Club on Chestnut Avenue is also visible.



The 1930s was considered a golden era for tennis. Participation was increasing and it was no longer a sport solely for the well-to-do.

There was even a dedicated magazine "Lawn Tennis and Badminton".

As an amateur, Fred Perry won the US Open in 1933 followed by three consecutive Wimbledon Championships in 1934, 35 and 36.

In 1935 he was the first player to win the Career Grand Slam and remains the only British player to have done so. He turned professional at the end of 1936 and finally retired from tennis in 1959 at the age of 50.

Tennis was still being played at Loakes Park and they now called themselves The Rio Club. Frank Adams was also a regular player at the club.

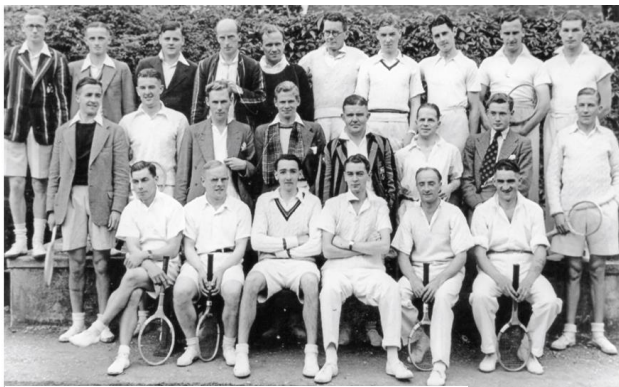
In 1935 they organised a successful tennis week for local players with Frank Adams becoming triple champion.

Whilst the players at Loakes Park were known as the Rio Club, High Wycombe Tennis Club players were known locally as "The Scroungers". We can only imagine how they got this nickname! Later they were also known as The London Road Club.



Loakes Park football pitch and tennis courts 1930

The two High Wycombe clubs were great rivals for many years.



Middle row - Howard far left/Stan far right

Howard Pountney (who was to become HWLTC President) and his brother Stan began playing tennis in their late teens at The Rio Club. Stan was the better player and played singles for the Bucks County team.

This image was taken at an open tournament held at Marlow Tennis Club in early 1939. Like many, they were unlucky to have their tennis careers interrupted by the war.

After the war people were desperate for life to return to normal and were keen to start playing tennis again. In October 1946 an inaugural dance was held by the newly-formed High Wycombe Tennis Club at The Red Lion Hotel in the High Street, High Wycombe which was attended by 150 people. The intention was to start the 1947 season with a full programme of tennis, including the first of many very successful American Tournaments.

Around this time, Wycombe District Council announced that they were interested in buying the tennis courts for public use.

This news wouldn't have gone down well with the members of the new High Wycombe Tennis Club and a group of them rallied together and raised sufficient funds to purchase the courts and pavilion. In February 1947 they paid Frank Adams the sum of £1,900 for the freehold of the site and formed the High Wycombe Lawn Tennis Club Limited.



Frank Adams was also concerned about the Loakes Park grounds and the future of Wycombe Wanderers Football Club.

Having previously negotiated with Lord Carrington to purchase the land used by the football and tennis clubs at Loakes Park, in 1947 Frank Adams generously gifted the land to the football club. A few years later, the Rio Tennis club built new courts at Fryers Lane, off West Wycombe Road, which were opened in 1953. Wycombe District Council eventually bought these courts and the club moved to Broomwade in Hughenden Valley. That club is now defunct.

Mr MB Parry-Jones, a local solicitor, was elected President of the newly formed High Wycombe Lawn Tennis Club and Frank Adams was the first Chairman. Other founding members were Howard Pountney and his brother Stan, Ralph and Margaret Ives and their 10-year-old daughter, Margaret (now Stevens), John Stevens who was later to become Margaret's husband and Barbara Stuart.

Barbara was the first ladies' captain and she remained a member of the club until her death in 2008. We honour her memory and contribution to the club by playing the Barbara Stuart Rose Bowl Tournament every year in June. In 2022 the tournament is being combined with a party to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the founding of HWLTC.

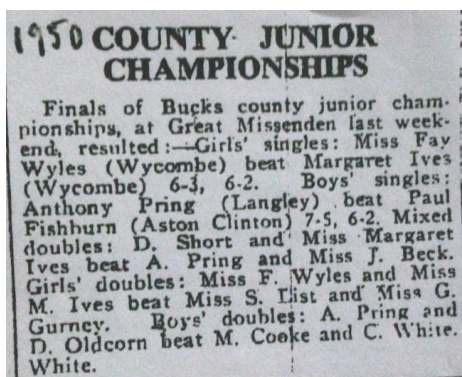
The courts were refurbished and a new pavilion (a former Nissen hut) was erected

Junior tennis also resumed in 1947 and the club was very fortunate in having two very promising young girls.

The Bucks County Junior Tournament was held at Great Missenden and attracted a large number of entries. There was only one age group and the Girls' Singles Tournament was won by HWLTC's very own Fay Wyles. Fay went on to win the County Girls' Tournament four years running, from 1947-1950. A feat that has never been repeated in the girls' competition. As County Junior Champion Fay played in the National Championships, reaching the last 16, and she was also invited to play in the Junior Wimbledon Championships three times.



Fay Wyles



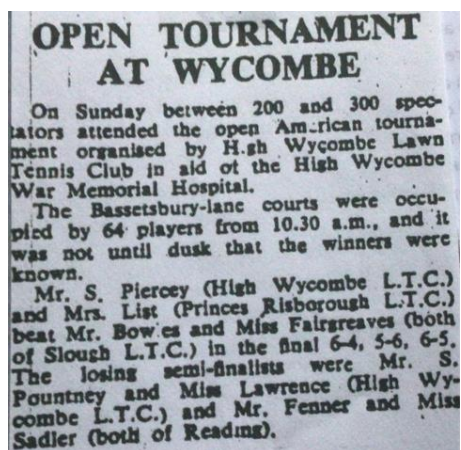
Following in Fay's footsteps was her good friend and doubles partner, Margaret Ives, who was a couple of years younger than Fay. Fay and Margaret were County Junior Doubles champions in 1950.

Although she lost the County Junior Girls' Singles Championship final to Fay in 1950, Margaret was nominated for special training with the LTA. In 1951 she won the Bucks County Junior Championship. Although eligible, she did not defend her title in 1952.

Due to an administrative error, Margaret never got her chance to play in the Junior Wimbledon Championships.

In 1948 HWLTC entered a men's and a ladies' team into the Bucks Shield leagues for the first time and a very successful open tournament was held in aid of the High Wycombe Memorial Hospital.

Also, in 1948/49 an exhibition match between the great Fred Perry and Dan Maskell, voice of Wimbledon for the BBC for many years, was played at the club. They were great friends for many years and toured the country in the late 1940s/early 1950s playing exhibition matches and giving coaching lessons.



Doug Timms 1950

In 1949 Doug Timms, another HWLTC junior, won the Bucks County Boys Singles. Doug also played at Junior Wimbledon (effectively the national championship), winning the junior mixed doubles in 1950 and finishing as runner-up in the junior boys doubles.

In 1953, to celebrate the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, HWLTC introduced the Coronation Cup, which was presented to the club by Frank Adams at an open mixed doubles tournament.



The standard of the HWLTC men's team was high and in the mid 1950's they were the team all the other clubs wanted to beat.



Front: left - Howard Pountney

In 1951 Howard and Stan Pountney reached the final of the County Men's Doubles and Howard was part of the successful High Wycombe Lawn Tennis Club team that won the County Shield in 1956.

HWLTC men won the County Shield again in 1957. They also won twice in the 1960s and 4 times in the 1970s and lastly in 1996.

Unfortunately, the ladies' teams never achieved the same success.

In 1960 the land across the river was sold to developers and a new wooden pavilion was built and erected on the site of the current clubhouse by local tradesman and member, Ralph Ives, (Margaret's father). Ralph was a very skilled carpenter by trade and worked in the furniture industry. His initials are stamped on the foundations.

He also ran a business in High Wycombe making wooden tennis racquets. Not only did he make the racquets, but he used to string them as well by hand using cat gut, which was all that was available at that time.



Ralph was an original founding member of the club after the war and remained a member and vice-president until 1989.

Ten years after the success of Fay, Margaret and Doug the club was lucky enough to have another top-class young player. Diane Tuckey (now Bennett), who learnt to play at High Wycombe Lawn Tennis Club, won the Junior County Championships aged 14 in 1957, and again in 1958 and 1960. She was accepted into the Junior Wimbledon Championships four times. She reached the top of the game, playing singles, ladies doubles and mixed doubles in the Wimbledon Championships between 1961-1965.



In the mid-1960s the courts were resurfaced – 3 hard courts and 3 red shale with an overhead watering system.

The club was flourishing with good membership numbers and some prominent local figures as Vice-Presidents including Sir John Hall OBE, former Wycombe MP, and Lucian B Ercolani, founder of Ercol Furniture. It seems that tennis, and HWLTC in particular, was popular with men in the furniture trade with several furniture manufacturers being members over the years. John Beckley, who was men's captain on several occasions and later one of the club's trustees also owned a furniture factory, as did H & G Simmonds and H Stevens.

In 1969 High Wycombe Lawn Tennis Limited sold the land and tennis courts to The Trustees of High Wycombe Lawn Tennis Club for the grand sum of £6,000. The first Trustees of the club were Harry Mitchell, John Stevens and Graham Smith and the future of the tennis club as a members' club was secured.



In 1971, after more than 30 years as a member, Howard Pountney became President of HWLTC. In 1997 Howard was presented with a lifetime achievement award by the LTA for services to tennis. He was instrumental in setting up tennis leagues at Lloyds of London and arranged all the matches. They were played at the National Tennis Centre and occasionally they were invited to play their matches at Wimbledon. Although no longer playing, he was still organising matches well into his 90s.

In the 1970s the wooden clubhouse was improved and extended and the club even considered installing gas floodlighting on the courts. A new outside toilet block was built in the corner behind court 6, now used as a storage shed, to replace the original very basic facility.

Moving with the times, in 1976 the club agreed non-white clothing would be allowed, as long as it was tennis clothing, and it was even suggested that the men should prepare their own match teas! Until then it was the tradition that the ladies would take turns on a rota to prepare the sandwiches and cakes and serve the tea for the men.



Chris Hearn

In the 1970s another local lad started playing at HWLTC. Chris Hearn lived virtually next door to the club and spent most of his free time playing tennis. He won the county closed (clubs and schools) junior boys singles in 1979 and 1980 and the county closed men's singles in 1984 and was one of the club coaches in the 1980s. Chris really started to make a name for himself in Seniors' tennis, representing the county and winning County titles in singles and doubles. He is one of Bucks County's most successful veterans' players

Chris has also been a multiple national champion at both singles and doubles over a range of age groups and represented GB in international competitions. He has most recently captained the Over 60s GB men's team in the World Seniors Team Championship in Florida.

HWLTC has always been more than a tennis club. In past years there was always a full social calendar including end of season dinner dances, social evenings and fundraising events such as jumble sales and coffee mornings. Members would take their families to the club and they would spend all day there.

Debbie Maskell (formerly Stevens), the daughter of Margaret and John Stevens, remembers in the late 70s and early 80s the teenage members would attend coaching on Friday evenings and Saturday mornings with George Thompson, who was great fun, and in the afternoons they would go swimming, bowling, ice-skating or to the cinema.

The club also ran a table tennis club which was very popular, especially with the juniors. John Stevens and his son, Barry, Bryan Dee and his son Kevin (who later became a coach at the club), were among those who would play league matches against other clubs and HWLTC members would turn up to support them.

The men's and ladies Silver Salvors, presented annually by the men's and ladies captains were introduced in 1989 and are still awarded now every year at the Annual General Meeting.

After a lifetime of devotion to Wycombe Wanderers FC and High Wycombe Lawn Tennis Club, just after his 90th birthday in 1981, Frank Adams passed away. His love of sport had secured the futures of football and tennis in High Wycombe and his legacy lives on.

In the 1980s the clubhouse was refurbished and extended again and indoor toilets installed!

In 1984 Bucks LTA introduced the Bucks Veterans Shield for men aged 45+ and ladies 40+. There were men's, ladies and mixed competitions with a two-pair format. Initially the HWLTC veterans teams were run by John Stevens, who used to write weekly reports about the matches and submit them to the Bucks Free Press. The HWLTC men's team was the first winner of the Shield. After their first win, the men won again four years running from 1986/7 – 1989/90. They last won in 1997/98. HWLTC won the Mixed Veterans Shield five times between 1989 and 1998. The ladies didn't win the Veterans Shield until 2013/14.

By the end of the 1980s the site and facilities were deteriorating. The courts needed resurfacing and there was little money in the bank. Serious consideration was given to selling the land and relocating to a new site to provide indoor and outdoor courts, or remaining on the present site and entering into a joint venture with Wycombe District Council, with the Council providing the money for upgrading and the club sharing the tennis facilities. Neither of these options were popular and there were very few suitable sites available in the town. Loans were secured from the LTA, the Sports Council, Wycombe District Council and the Lottery and, once again, members provided additional top-up loans and the other options were dropped.

In the early 1990s the 'Tennisquick' (a porous concrete) courts were replaced with tarmac and the first floodlights were finally installed in 1997.

A year later the wooden clubhouse was replaced by the current brick-built clubhouse, complete with changing rooms and a licensed bar. This was the result of several years of planning by the committee at the time. In particular, Maggie Tofani (who was the Treasurer) worked hard

to secure loans and Peter Hatch, the Chairman (after whom our bar “Down the Hatch” is named) designed the building and had the plans drawn up. Peter also actively assisted in the construction of the new clubhouse, employing his skills as an experienced builder as well as managing the project and supervising the contractors.

Artificial grass ‘astroturf’ was first laid on courts 4-6 in 2006 (since upgraded) and artificial clay was laid on courts 1-3 in 2012 to replace the three remaining hard courts.

HWLTC continued to thrive with good membership figures and a strong social programme of quizzes, barbecues, tournaments and an annual Christmas party.

In 2008 Bucks LTA introduced two pair leagues in the summer Bucks Shield competition to run alongside the three pair format. This had an immediate effect on the number of clubs/teams playing in the three pair leagues and was particularly popular with the smaller clubs who struggled to field six players for their matches. Now, in 2022, there are only 2 divisions in each of the men’s and ladies three pair leagues and the number of clubs participating reduces every year, whilst the two pair leagues continue to grow.

In 2020 tennis was interrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic and a series of national lockdowns meant no play was possible. Fortunately, when restrictions were eased, tennis was one of the first sports to be given permission to re-start and HWLTC benefitted from a surge in enquiries and in new members. Social tennis boomed but 2021 competitive tennis suffered with Summer Shield, Veterans Shield and internal tournaments being carried over or postponed until 2022.

In 2022, with HWLTC celebrating 75 years as a club owned and run by members, we are looking forward to upgrading our facilities again.

We also have an enthusiastic and talented new Head Coach, Ross Murray, to inspire more children to pick up a tennis racquet and play, and, who knows, maybe we can produce another County Junior Champion or Wimbledon star!

Thanks to:

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Mike Dewey, Bucks Free Press Nostalgia journalist

British Newspaper Archive for articles

Bucks Free Press Archive for articles and images

David Orchard for a wealth of knowledge on Bucks tennis and his book "Ninety Years to the Top".

Margaret Stevens, Debbie Maskell, Jane Crabb and many other members, past and present, for their memories and photographs.