



A snapshot of 50 years at Ramsbury Tennis Club

1973 to 2023

From borrowed courts and a dustbin as clubhouse to an award-winning club with seven floodlit courts.

The early years

Ramsbury Tennis Club was founded in 1973 by Harry Lamperd, the head gardener at Eastridge where Major Wills had offered villagers the use of his court for five evenings a week. We started life as the Newtown Tennis Club with Mr Lamperd as chair. Subscriptions were set at £1.50 for adults and 75p for juniors. At the first AGM in 1974 Club funds stood at £12.43!

In the early days we had no court of our own so played at Eastridge, Hilldrop, Membury and of course Ramsbury. When Major Burdett-Fisher agreed to sell the Sports Field to the Recreation Centre it became possible to have our own court and so fundraising began in earnest with coffee mornings, supper parties, cheese and wine parties and a thrift shop amongst the events held.

We changed the name of the club to Ramsbury Tennis Club in 1977, and our first court was built in 1978 at a cost of £3,337. Our first clubhouse was a dustbin in the corner of the court!

In 1979 Roger Henry was elected to the committee and (save for four years whilst posted abroad) he has been on the committee ever since. He qualified as a tennis coach in 1981, has been at the forefront of our coaching setup since then and is still the junior co-ordinator and the liaison between the committee and our coaches. I joined the club in 1978 and the committee in 1981 and am also still there.

By 1982, with an adult membership of 55, we were entering competitive leagues, renting courts at the John O'Gaunt School in Hungerford and playing our early matches there. Our second court was built the following year, so we were able to play home matches in Ramsbury, although we still used outside courts occasionally.

From strength to strength

The expansion continued. A new pavilion came in 1992 (a wooden chalet) and our third court in 1994. We became one of the first clubs around to have floodlights and later set up the winter floodlit league involving other local clubs such as Aldbourne and Pewsey. By 1995 both our Men's A team and Ladies' A teams had reached division 1 of the league which they have both won since. 1998 brought the fourth court and more floodlights and our fifth court was built in 2005.

Since 2018 we have raised and spent over £250,000 to provide an artificial grass court, a new synthetic clay court surface on courts 1 & 2 (the first in the county), the resurfacing of courts 3 & 4, the replacement of some of our floodlights with LEDs and the building of two new floodlit courts. All this without any borrowing. We now have seven floodlit courts!

Cups and awards have featured: we have won Club of the Year for Wiltshire four times (including last year) and the Regional Club of the Year for the Southwest once, going through to the National finals along with four other clubs from England and one from Scotland. Whilst we did not win, this was an amazing achievement and one of which we are rightly very proud!

The people

Of course the club is all about its people.

A major focus has been coaching children and bringing them on and that aspect of the club has grown consistently and is now flourishing under head coaches, Lewis and Catherine, with several of our players representing the county. Catherine and Lewis Fletcher have been recognised by the county for their achievements, both having been awarded County Player of the Year and Lewis County Coach of the Year. Other awards include Ethel Hutchings, with a lifetime award for services to county tennis and Roger Henry a Torch Trust Trophy for a lifetime's work in tennis and at Ramsbury Tennis Club. Amelia Tester and I have both been awarded County Volunteer of the Year.

The club has always been very strong socially, with garden parties, summer sponsored tournaments, winter parties, Burns Nights and so on – all great opportunities for members to mix and in some cases to raise the funds needed for all our improvements. Our club is still very sociable despite its growth and is full of lovely people.

Over the 40 years we have been on the committee, Roger and I have seen the Club grow from very humble beginnings to the thriving club we have now, all while playing the sport we love in the most beautiful surroundings and with facilities which are second to none for a village of our size. Without the input of our president Ethel Hutchings in the early years and Roger throughout his time on the committee we would not be where we are today. It has been a very special journey.

We are planning several events this year to mark our 50th anniversary and we hope to see as many members as possible both old and new to help us celebrate. Here's to the next 50!

Ian Smith

If you are interested in joining the club, please contact membership secretary Austin Lillywhite on austinlillywhite@hotmail.com
