

CLUB HISTORY

Little Clacton Tennis Club was formed in 1948 when the staff of Whitegates Nursery in London Road, Clacton started playing on two grass courts located on the land next door owned by Graham and Stanley Horsfall.

Employees of the Nursery had been using the Clacton Recreation Ground courts playing with workers from the Clacton Post Office but when Mr Everett, the nursery owner and tenant of the Horsfall land, offered the players space for their own courts a formal club was created.

Located on land now occupied by Morrisons Supermarket on Centenary Way access was then from Everett's Corner, where for many years Sweet Peas had been a feature (aka Sweet Pea Corner). Entry, which was always difficult due to the blind bend, was down a single track access and into a large grass field. The entrance gate can still be seen but the track has now been removed.

The club was called 'Whitegates Tennis Club' (until 1982 when 'Lawn' was added) and then became 'Little Clacton Tennis Club' in 2016. The first full playing season was 1949 and the subscription then was ten shillings (50 pence) although this increased to fifteen shillings two years later.

The fifteen founder members were:

Bill Burwood (Secretary / Treasurer)

Mary May

Mary Reed

Claudette Reed

Pearl Forrester

Helen Burwood

Jean Thacker

Grace Stock

L. J. Everitt (Chairman)

Bill Page

Gordon Catchpole

Stanley Horsfall

Graham Horsfall

Sidney Woods

Donald Woods

Members were required to assist with the upkeep of the two courts and in 1962 a third one was added.



Club members 1958

Rear left to right: Bill Burwood, Pat Holder, Pearl Forrester, Ivor Bareham, Bill Page, Bill Pallot, Brian Rowland, Mike Foster, Dave Waller, Jill Covill, Paul Covill, Liz Cavender (then Frazer)

Middle: Mollie Frazer, Mrs Ellis (neighbour)

Front: Nita Austen, Mair Robson, Michael Pallot, Eileen Long and Rita Pallot

The formation of the Clacton Tennis League took place in 1950 and the Club were founder members and instigators along with St. James Tennis Club and Clacton Tennis Club. Internal Mixed Doubles, Men's Singles and Ladies Singles competitions were also introduced that year with Men's and Ladies Doubles plus an American Tournament being added in 1951.

In 1971 Clacton Tennis Club announced that their club would be folding and contacted Whitegates TC to ask if several of their members could join. Clacton TC had played for many years on the courts of the Oulton Hall Hotel in Church Road but were evicted when the hotel closed and the land converted to flats.



Club members – American Tournament 1986

Rear (left to right) John Russel, Doug Kerridge, Bill Ford (crouching), Sid Law, Derek Caley, Anna Manning (now Smith), Keith Smith (still Smith), Paul Cavender, Mollie Frazer, Bernard Kerridge, Martin Picker, Ron Kerridge, John Blows, Gerry Borley & June Ratford.

Front (left to right) Kim Borley, Rosalind Tovell, Joan Ereaut, Jackie Wells, Julie Whiting, Judy Kent, Val Kerridge, Andrew Snell, Kim O'Mahoney, Sue Hollock & Liz Cavender

The original Clubhouse was a converted chicken shed with no internal WC. This particular 'facility' was located about 50m away in a clump of trees and consisted of a wooden hut with a seat and bucket that required emptying periodically.

In 1976 the Club acquired a second-hand prefabricated house that was still use until 2017. It was purchased from a reclamation company at Thetford and had been originally erected somewhere in Suffolk in 1948 to house families whose homes had been bomb-damaged in WW2. The infamous outside "toilet in the trees" was sadly condemned and replaced by indoor facilities!



Club members – American Tournament 1988

Left to right: Mick Stickland, Doug Kerridge, Joan Ereaud (rear), Carol Farrow (kneeling), Sid Law, Val Kerridge, Paul Cavender (rear), Derek Caley (kneeling), Sue Hollock, Ken Gladwell, Joyce Wayland, Mollie Frazer (President), David Wenden, Liz Cavender, Bernard Kerridge, Judy Kent, Ron Kerridge, John Russel, Christine Stickland, John Blows, Dot Kerridge & Tony Kent

Everett's Nursery had ceased trading in the 1970's and their land became part of the Highfields Holiday Camp. The Club had survived thereafter on the goodwill of the land owners with no formal right of tenure but this was brought to a head in 1979 when the owners expressed their desire to regain control of the land with a view to selling it. This had placed the Club in a position of having to find a new site but, by the signing of a lease, gave us the time to locate an alternative home, raise the money and move. Under the guidance of Chairman Bill Ford a lease for ten years was signed which gave us security until 1989.

Whitegates look to the future with new home



● Whitegates Tennis Club chairman Bill Ford (centre) and secretary John Russel are seen receiving the land deeds from Firs Caravan Park director, Ivor Buxton (right), at the site of their new headquarters in Little Clacton.

A number of suitable alternative locations had been identified but one, in Holland Road, Little Clacton that had been part of the proposed Eastern route of the Little Clacton By-Pass became available for purchase and, after submitting a joint bid with the adjacent Firs Caravan Park who wished to have part of the holding as an extension to the camp, the Club took possession of 1.3 acres in September 1986.



The site being prepared for tennis courts in 1987

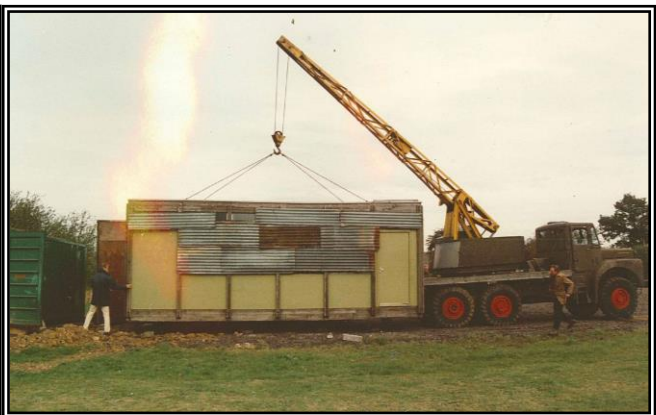


Members helping to level the grass court area prior to seeding in 1987



Taking a tea break during the construction of the access road
(from left) Paul Cavender, Liz Cavender, Bill Ford, Bernard Kerridge, Tim Marsh and Ken Gladwell

For two years the Club continued to raise money and invest it into the new courts including erecting new boundary fencing at a cost of over £1000 which, in October 1987, was destroyed by the infamous 'hurricane' that struck the east coast.



The damage caused by the hurricane in 1986 and the Club House arriving in March 1989



Marking the courts for the first day's play
(from left) Anna & Keith Smith, Liz Cavender, John Russel, Chairman Bill Ford and Sid Law

In all over £20,000 was raised to buy the land and prepare it for use. Works included the sewer connection, land drainage, electricity supply and moving the Clubhouse from the old site. In April 1989 play commenced at the new site on four grass courts.



The members on the official opening day in May 1989

Front (left to right) Louise Unger, Anna Smith, Liz Cavender, Julie Whiting, Judy Kent, and Val Kerridge.

Rear (left to right) John Russel, Tony Kent, Keith Smith, Andrew Snell, Roy Keightley, Mike Stickland, Peter Gibbs, Bernard Kerridge, Ron Kerridge, Bill Ford, Ken Gladwell, John Blows (rear), Doug Kerridge, Sid Law and Gerry Borley.



The President Stanley Horsfall formally opening the new site

(Left to right) Mike Stickland, Ron Kerridge, Sid Law, Judy Kent, Doug Kerridge, Tony Kent, Val Kerridge, Louise Unger, Julie Whiting, Peter Gibbs, Liz Cavender, Ken Gladwell, Bill Ford, Bernard Kerridge, President Stanley Horsfall, Keith Smith, Anna Smith, Gerry Borley & Liz Cavender

Whitegates on the move

THE new £24,000 Whitegates Lawn Tennis Club was officially opened at the weekend.

The opening ceremony at the new site in Holland Road, Little Clacton was conducted by club president Stanley Horsfall, pictured.

Facilities at the new site include four grass courts, a club house and car parking and there are plans for two hard courts.

Ten years of planning and fund-raising have gone in to the new club facilities and virtually all the loans have now been paid. The club were also indebted to various

grants including £2,000 from Tendring District Council.

The club paid £12,000 for the new land in 1985 and has spent a similar amount providing land drainage, moving the club house from their former site at Everitts Corner, providing a water supply, fencing off the boundary and courts and other works.

An appeal has been launched to boost the 80-strong membership. Anyone wanting to join is asked to contact John Russel on Clacton 831408 or phone Bill Ford, Clacton 860306.

In 1991 two hard courts were constructed and, in 1998, the garden of the property next door (to the left) was purchased with the intention of constructing a third hard court.



The hard courts under construction and completed in 1991



Ariel photo showing the four grass and two hard courts taken in 2000

Redevelopment

In 2005 declining membership plus the improving facilities of the other Clubs in the area meant that, in order to attract new members, the Club needed to provide at least three all-weather floodlit courts. Although we had the space for the third court the prohibitive costs and probable planning restrictions due to the close proximity of the nearby houses meant that rebuilding and floodlighting the existing hard courts was unlikely to be achieved.

With no means to raise sufficient money to convert the grass courts to all-weather the Club decided to relocate again.

In order to facilitate this development the existing site would need to be sold and the income invested into a brand new site. The existing land was large enough for up to 15+ houses and any sale would generate sufficient revenue to allow the construction of several all-weather outside and three permanently covered courts. This facility would then have been available, not only for all-year-round Tennis but also for indoor Bowls, Cricket, Archery etc., all at no cost to the public purse.

A number of alternative sites were considered and several landowners offered land. After taking advice from Planning and Development Consultants the agricultural land next door, owned by Jarvis & McBain and accessed from further along Holland Road, was chosen as the most suitable and a price was agreed. This site allowed for up to six outside courts, an indoor playing area plus clubhouse and car parking etc.

Unfortunately the local Planners or Parish Council did not approach the project with the same enthusiasm and Planning Permissions for the redevelopment of the club's land for housing plus the alternative site for sports use were not forthcoming. Although the local residents objected to having sports facilities located behind their houses the proposed site has now been purchased by The Firs Caravan Park as an extension to the camp.

For a few years the project was put aside while the club raised money to resurface the hard courts which were now over 25 years old. Unfortunately the repair costs were greater than the money the club could raise so, in the light of planning policy changes, the members decided that the best way forward was to regenerate the redevelopment project but this time by selling only part of the site and reinvesting the money into all-weather courts to replace the four grass courts and a new clubhouse.

The first step was to appoint an experienced Planning Consultant to act on behalf of the club and Peter le Grys, of Robinson Hall Land Agents, was engaged. Paul Newbould was commissioned to prepare the layout drawings and, on the 11th November 2014, two Planning Applications, the first for 4 dwellings on the old hard courts and the second for four floodlit all-weather courts, were determined by the Tendring District Council Planning Committee.

Clearly the two proposals were un-welcome to a number of people. Many of the local residents objected plus, as usual, the Parish Council who had made every effort to stop the project. However over 30 people, many of them non-members, supported the application with written submissions.

Those members who attended the Planning Committee will remember it forever. The two applications dominated the whole meeting, took nearly two hours and had many public

speakers both for and against. Eventually the Chairman took a vote on the housing application and the result was 6-6. The Chairman had the casting vote and chose to approve.

The new courts application was less tense and was approved by a 9-3 vote.

We had, at last, got what we wanted.

In October 2015 the club received approval for a revised layout, this time for six bungalows, and closed a deal to sell the land to developer Roman Homes. After protracted legal issues the sale was completed in February 2017 and the court construction works commenced.

The club had received a number of tenders for both the hard courts and the floodlighting and chose to appoint ETC Sports Surfaces and Luminance Pro to carry out the work.

Work had commenced in January 2017 but, due to wet weather, was suspended for three months. Restarting in April the courts were ready for use by June although the colour coat finish was not applied until September.



The new courts being laid and finished & colour-coated



Opening Day – Saturday 17th June 2017

(Left to right) Gerry Borley, John Russel, Jon Mansfield, Roger Payne (Chairman), Tony Fulcher, Sarah Fulcher, Mary Milner, Kim Cade, John Ratcliffe, Kay Mansfield, Liz Cavender, Paul Davies, June Ratford, Val Elliott, Shifty Sid Stinson, Richard Cross & Nick Faithfull.

The next job was a new clubhouse and this commenced in April 2018 with the temporary relocation of the old clubhouse.



In early May construction started on the new structure.





The building came into use in September 2018 & the car park was finished in January 2019



This project, which started with the first unsuccessful Planning Application in 2006, was concluded in June 2021 more than 15 years later. In that time the club has had numerous setbacks including Planning refusals and a lost Appeal. The project ended up costing over £500k but the club now offers some of the best small-club facilities in the area and has sufficient capital in reserve to cover the full cost of court reconstruction in the future. Membership trebled in the first four years after completion.

In the 1970's the club was in serious danger of closing as many clubs have in the past. To own your own land and have security of tenure is essential but even then no guarantee of survival.

Many people have played their part in the club's recent progress and expansion, both professional and unpaid, and this goes right back to the beginning when the club first decided to move. The fund-raising work required to initially buy the land, every jumble sale, whist drive, raffle, coffee morning and dozens of other events, all helped create what we have today. It's a shame many of those who worked so hard are no longer with us now and therefore unable to see what they have helped to achieve.



Clubhouse Opening Day – Saturday 4th May 2019

(Left to right) Andrew Cartwright, Val Elliott, June Ratford, Barry Partridge, Paul Davis, Roger Payne (Chairman), Judy Kent (seated), Dario Motti, Liz Cavender (seated), Louise Thomas-Unger, Julie Whiting, Steve Constant, Emily Watson (seated), John Russel, John Amey, Kim Cade, Colin Lawrence, Natalie Cowie, Jon Mansfield, Kay Mansfield & Debbie Lawrence at the front Christian Thomas-Unger & Isla Cowie



Finished

Gone but thanked for their contribution: Bill Ford, Mollie Frazer, Bill Page, Bill Burwood, Peter Gibbs, Tony Kent, Stanley & Graham Horsfall, ?? Everett, Doug, Ron & Bernard Kerridge, Sid Law, Betty Manning, Howard Moseley, Ruth & Derek Caley and many others