

BYFIELD TENNIS - A HISTORY

Grass court tennis in Byfield has a long history and was originally played at least from the 1920s at Beechcroft, now 26 Banbury Lane, Byfield.

The Brightwell Recreation Ground was gifted in 1944 by Thomas Brightwell, whose family had lived in Byfield since the 18th Century, in memory of his son who was lost in the First World War.

When the field was landscaped, earth was moved from the main area of the field to elevate the planned site for two tennis courts and a bowling green. When the work was complete, in 1948 a Tennis Club and Bowling Club were formed.

The retaining wall between the bowls green and courts was built with stone that came from the long wall between the BRG field and footpath to the church.

An old wooden building that had previously been used as a cobbler's shop by Ernest Victor Vine in Smith the Baker's Yard in the High Street, was dug into the bank adjacent to the gate to the tennis courts and became the first tennis pavilion.

The Bowling Club folded in 1958.

However the Tennis Club went from strength to strength and expressed a wish a number of times to build a third court and also a pavilion on the disused Bowling Green. Permission was refused for both as the BPC hoped the Bowling Club might be resurrected.

In 1978 additional land ('William's Field') was purchased from British Rail to enlarge the BRG. These plans included approval for a third tennis court.

Road engineering improvements to Half Crown Corner by Northants County Council enabled 1500 tons of soil to be tipped beside the existing two tennis courts so that a third court could be at the same level as the two existing courts. Soon after, further soil was provided to enable the bowling green to have six rinks and to further develop the site. In excess of 6000 tons of soil was imported with the only cost to the BPC being £300 for the bull dozer.

As the bowling rink was reclaimed, the Tennis Club hut was moved around so instead of facing the courts, it sat at right angles to them.

In about 1984/85, the Tennis Club applied successfully for grant aid of 55% for the additional court towards the £8982 estimated cost. Members of the Tennis Club funded the sponsors' share, some members making covenants through the Brightwell charity status. The third court was built by Fosse contractors of Leicester.

In 1988 Byfield Tennis Club held a Founders Dinner at the Woodhouse Hotel, Princethorpe to celebrate its 40th anniversary.

In 1995 discussions took place about possible provision of a combined Bowling/Tennis club house. Plans were drawn up by Rod Healey and a local builder, Will Montgomery, built the pavilion for a cost of £91,000. There was not enough funding to fully complete the work, the interior of the tennis section remaining unplastered.

Grants for the cost of the pavilion came from Daventry District Council (£15,000) and Lottery Sports Fund Award (£59,000) with the Bowls Club contributing £14,000 and Tennis Club £3000.

The pavilion was officially opened by Russ Mallace, chairman of BRGA, on 25.8.97.

The pavilion is owned by BRGA with the two clubs being given delegated authority to manage the building and pay running and upkeep costs.

Floodlights for the two courts nearest the field was provided in March 1998 at a cost of £14,617, The National Lottery made a grant of £9700 and the Tennis Club provided the remainder of the money.

Planning approval for a third set of floodlights was given by DDC in 2011 and these will be installed in 2012, the cost being met wholly by the Tennis Club.

Resurfacing of the courts is scheduled to take place in September/October 2014.

In 2018 we will celebrate our 70th birthday.