



History of Cassiobury Tennis Club

The origins of the club are shrouded in mystery. However, it is known that tennis and croquet were played in the grounds of Cassiobury House as far back as the 1880s. The 1882 entry in Kelly's Directory of Hertfordshire indicated the existence of a Thomas Turner, a timber merchant and "general wood turner and manufacturer of the Cassiobury games of croquet, garden tennis, etc." It would seem that these grounds were sold off in the 1920s. An area roughly the size of three courts was purchased by a Mrs. Schreiber in 1924 to form a club originally known as St. Michael's, and presumably linked in some way to St. Michael's church in West Watford.

The first wooden pavilion was erected around 1925-1926. Mrs. Schreiber would not allow play to take place on a Sunday and this limitation led to the sale of the club to a Mrs. Johnson and her heirs. One of the heirs was a Miss Betty Brown, who was the owner of the club right through to the late 1970s, and still lives in Watford. The name of this club became Essex House.

At roughly the same time – i.e. the 1920s – land was purchased either by one of the clearing banks for its employees, or by a fund designed for use for employee benefits alongside the other three courts.

This club in time offered membership to the general public and became The Gardens Tennis Club.

From the 1920s to the 1970s, the two clubs pursued an uneasy co-existence, other than meeting competitively in the Watford and District League virtually no fraternisation took place. Each of the two clubs had three shale courts, a delight to play on when weather allowed, but reduced to a squelchy muddy consistency when the first frosts came, usually in November. The Gardens prided itself in having (or thinking it had) the better tennis players and therefore felt an innate sense of superiority over its neighbours. Essex House prided itself in having the more attractive members of the fair sex and therefore had the better social tennis.

This situation continued right through the Second World War until the 1970s. Then, by coincidence, many of the more prominent players in the Gardens Club either suffered injury or had left the Watford area and its total membership, almost overnight, fell to just over 30, a totally inadequate number to support a viable club which aspired to be a prominent feature of the Watford and District tennis scene. Coincidentally a committee had been formed with a number of new faces and a new manager who would only take the position if he were allowed to open negotiations with Essex House with a view to merging the two entities. This proposition was accepted and viewed sympathetically by the membership of both clubs as being the only realistic way to carry on and around 1979 the two clubs merged to form Cassiobury Tennis Club.

Since then a combination of unremitting hard work, together with financial support from both the Sports Council and the Lawn Tennis Association and fundraising by members, enabled the club initially to resurface the shale courts with macadam, construct a modern brick pavilion, floodlight four of its six courts and to renew yet again the surface of three of its courts with artificial grass. It has since renewed the other three courts with a new "Kushioncourt" porous acrylic surface.

Immediately following the merger, the combined club purchased the freehold of the old Essex House site. As The Gardens club already owned the freehold of its land, it meant that Cassiobury Tennis Club now owned the freehold of the entire site.

The club has always participated to the full in local and county tennis leagues. It currently has 6 adult mid-week teams in the local league and teams in the Herts County Vets and Singles Leagues, as well as Junior teams at several age groups from mini-tennis right up to U16.

The club seeks to maximise its tennis playing potential competitively but it is well aware that the foundation for this is a well-motivated membership with a strong emphasis on family values.