



EDGBASTON  
PRIORY CLUB

# At the Heart of the Game

*The History of Edgbaston Priory Club*



Matt Cole



I am delighted to introduce this notable history of the Edgbaston Priory Club with a few words recording the long association between the Calthorpe Estate and the Club.

The Calthorpe Estate started in Edgbaston when my family first acquired land here in 1717. Since then we have seen the progressive development of the area as a community with some of the best places to work, live and play and in which the Club has been a constant since 1875.

We have supported the evolution of the Club over the years, from its formation soon after the birth of tennis in Edgbaston, through the merger of the Edgbaston and Priory Tennis Clubs, and latterly the site enlargement and development of new facilities.

I am excited by the potential for the Club to raise both its own profile and that of Edgbaston in the top flight of UK sport. My family and all of us who are involved with the Estate wish the Club well for the future.

**Sir Euan Anstruther-Gough-Calthorpe, Bt.**



**EDGBASTON  
PRIORY CLUB**

**The story of Edgbaston Priory Club charts the route from the very invention of lawn tennis, through the development of the game nationally and internationally to the club's place as one of Britain's foremost sporting venues and communities.**

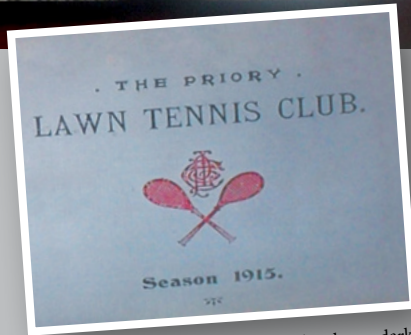
**It represents the combination over time of two clubs and many personalities reflecting the best of both elite achievement and public participation. From its very beginning, Edgbaston Priory has been**

*At the  
Heart  
of the  
Game*

The miniature racket which was the Priory Club tournament trophy from 1887 onwards.



# At the Start of the Game



The 1915 Priory Club card in the club colours, dark green and pink.

Lawn tennis was first devised less than half a mile from Edgbaston Priory Club, when Major Harry Gem, the clerk to Birmingham Magistrates, and Spanish businessman Augurio Perera first marked out Perera's croquet lawn at 'Fairlight' in Ampton Road as a tennis court in 1859. Over the next decade they developed the laws of lawn tennis, which Gem had published by 1874, and soon most of the respectable homes in Edgbaston had their own courts. The first clubs emerged, naturally enough, almost within sight of Perera's house. Amongst these was the Priory Lawn Tennis Club, which first occupied two courts on Pershore Road near Pebble Mill in 1875, and moved less than a mile to its current site in the early 1880s. Nearby on Edgbaston Park Road the Edgbaston Cricket & Lawn Tennis Club was founded in 1878 following a breakaway from another local club which first played the game in 1872.

Edgbaston Cricket and Lawn Tennis Club was in the early decades of the two clubs the more socially prestigious and nationally high-profile, and better resourced. It was set in the grounds of 'The Vale', a large mansion on Edgbaston Park Road owned by engineering magnate Thomas Chatwin; its President was Lord Calthorpe, landlord for all the leases in Edgbaston, and its 1906 'Invitation Tea' was hosted by no fewer than four Peeresses. The membership register was peppered with the names of Birmingham's leading civic and commercial families such as Kenrick, Martineau and Tangye. Amongst Edgbaston's rising tennis stars in the Edwardian era were Arthur and Gordon Lowe, later both ranked in the world top ten, who were the sons of Edgbaston's MP for thirty years, Sir Francis Lowe.

Edgbaston had offices at City Chambers in New Street and enjoyed regular coverage in the national press including *The Times*, *Lawn Tennis* and *The Country Gentleman's Newspaper*. The club took a traditional view on most social questions which extended into the twentieth century: play was prohibited on Sundays, lady members were not allowed into the pavilion tea-room. In 1902 they were obliged to relinquish courts to men.

In 1881 Edgbaston hosted an open competition, held annually thereafter as the Midland Counties Tournament, for which the committee provided a cup worth 25 guineas (about £1,250 today). The finalists in that year's ladies' event, the Watson sisters Maud and Lillian from Solihull, contested the first Wimbledon Ladies' singles final in 1884. Maud won both the Midland and Wimbledon finals. She retained the Wimbledon title in 1885 and brought its trophy back to Birmingham where - as the Maud Watson Trophy - it is now the prize of the Classic held annually at Edgbaston Priory. In 1886 Edgbaston resolved not to play competitive matches against other local clubs because their victories had been too consistently easy in recent games. Edgbaston offered a range of sports, often with professional coaching: a Hockey Club began in 1885 and a Croquet Committee in 1900, but these survived only intermittently, and in 1903 Edgbaston even abandoned cricket whilst tennis flourished.

The focus of the Priory Club was more local but its growth was similarly impressive. Early officers and players tended to reflect the breadth of the appeal of lawn tennis as a new sport, drawing from the younger and more socially mobile classes moving into Edgbaston as it expanded in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Where Edgbaston had its Lords and Ladies, Priory's Secretary at the time of the move to the present site was Randle Lunt, a 25-year-old draper's son living with his parents on Bristol Road. Priory's membership also reflected the opportunity presented by lawn tennis to women, who made up half of the club's modest membership of 110 by the time of the First World War.

With the move to the site at Sir Harry's Road - valued at £22 compared to the £830 raised by Edgbaston's initial subscribers - the Priory Club expanded to four courts, where matches were played against other suburban Birmingham and Black Country clubs. Its first recorded meeting with Edgbaston (a ladies' doubles tie in 1899) was lost 3 matches to 1.

The Priory Club's tournaments and prizes were more restrained than Edgbaston's. From 1887 for men and 1889 for women the prize of a miniature replica racket was awarded to the club's champion; even

after the turn of the century the Priory tournament was played on six courts rather than Edgbaston's twelve. However, the club established a strong role in county tennis. After a match between Warwickshire and Cheshire in 1896 at the Priory, uncertainty about who should pay for the balls led to the formation of the Warwickshire Lawn Tennis Association by Priory Secretary Harry Short. The Priory provided up to five players at a time for the county team from its founding. The part-timbered pavilion building which still survives was in place by the start of the new century, and housed both gentlemen's and ladies' changing rooms and a tea room. In 1902 the Priory established its annual Whitsuntide tournament, which a generation later was to become the platform for international tennis of the highest standard. In 1910 the closure of the neighbouring Moseley Park Tennis Club brought a number of new and influential members to the Priory who were to sponsor its success in the inter-war years.

As the First World War approached, Edgbaston and the Priory had in their distinctive ways established themselves, and lawn tennis, as successful features of local and national sporting life.



The Priory Club first team photographed behind the old pavilion in 1902.





In 1888 the Ordnance Survey map (left) showed Priory's first four courts on the present club site. Below is a photograph of Priory Club members on those courts in 1885.



The Ordnance Survey Map surveyed in 1901 (left) confirms that the old pavilion (below) was in place by the start of the new century.



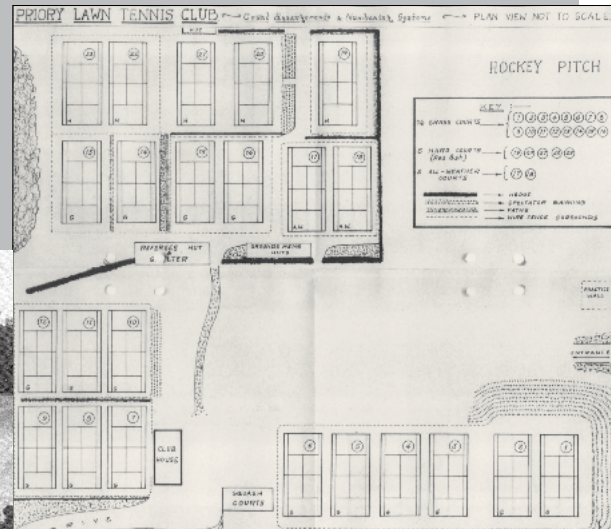
# From four courts to fourteen acres



The clubhouse opened in 1926 (above) and the 1934 squash courts feature on the Ordnance Survey map of 1938 (right). This clubhouse was destroyed by fire in 1963.



The 1964 club plan (right) shows 23 courts and the location of the recently-destroyed 1926 clubhouse. Its replacement (below) opened three years later and stood until 2012.







PRIORY LAWN TENNIS CLUB  
WHITSUNTIDE 1925

H. J. WILKINSON & SONS, LTD.  
11, NEW STREET, BIRMINGHAM  
BY ROYAL WARRANT TO HIS MAJESTY THE KING

The Priory Club tournament photos of 1925 and 1928 suggest that despite growing participation, the event retained a relaxed atmosphere.

# Between Wars<sup>the</sup> Wars

*from county to national to international*

During the First World War both clubs restricted their activity: much of Edgbaston's ground was given over to growing potatoes, and pigs were kept in the pavilion. When play resumed after the war, Edgbaston and Priory Clubs initially stood in the same relationship to each other as before 1914: Edgbaston restarted the Midland Counties Championship, played matches against Oxford Colleges and – with a new centre court seating 3,000 – hosted British Davis Cup victories over Spain in 1924 (for which the British Captain was the legendary Max Woosnam, also England's football Captain) and Germany in 1928. The Club's new lease in 1926 specified its purpose as “a sports club of high social position, as it has been for the past twenty-five years.”

The Priory, by contrast, had only 27 entrants to its first post-war Whitsun men's singles tournament, some of whom had suspicious names such as 'A. Hitter', 'S.M. Iter' and 'N.O. Good'. Over the next two decades, however, the more relaxed and modest climate of the Priory disguised an increasingly impressive standard of play and facilities attracting national attention and international participation.

Between 1920 and 1926 the Priory expanded from eight to 12 to 21 courts – 14 grass and seven hard – with a new centre court, and in 1926 a large wooden clubhouse was built. The Priory began its Junior tournament in 1930, three years before Edgbaston's, and both clubs opened two squash courts for the first time in 1934. Club membership had risen from 110 during the war to 173 by 1931, though this did not yet approach the 394 names then on Edgbaston's register.

*The Birmingham Post* commented in 1921 that the Whitsun tournament attracted “a host of county players, the best of the West Midlands”, but this was relatively little to the claims which could progressively

be made for the type of contestant playing at the Priory in the years which followed, as county notables found themselves competing with national and then international champions.

Keats Lester, for instance, was Warwickshire mixed doubles champion, a Cambridge University inter-iversity champion and in 1932 represented England at Wimbledon. At the Priory, however, he suffered three successive defeats in the men's singles finals at the hands of New Zealand internationals E.D. Andrews and A.C. Stedman, and in 1933 R.J. Ritchie, son of pre-war international Kenneth. In the last of these defeats, played in unusually hot weather, Lester could at least claim the distinction of being one of the first players ever to wear shorts in a British competitive match. Two other New Zealanders, Dennis Coombe and Cam Malfroy, won the men's doubles at the Priory in 1939. Both had been their nation's No 1 player and played in the Davis Cup, of which Coombe went on to write the history. Coombe was to return to Edgbaston Priory 35 years later for the International Lawn Tennis Club Golden Jubilee tournament.



PRIORY LAWN TENNIS CLUB  
WHITSUNTIDE 1928

H. J. WILKINSON & SONS, LTD.  
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BY ROYAL WARRANT TO HIS MAJESTY THE KING



From other national teams came Baron H.L. de Morpurgo in 1935, Italian champion and holder of a Bronze Olympic medal; another Davis Cup player was Kho Sin Kie of China, who won the Priory's men's singles and doubles titles in 1937, returning to take the singles title again two years later. Together with Kho Sin Kie, the last eight players in that year's men's singles tournament included two Romanians and two Indian internationals.

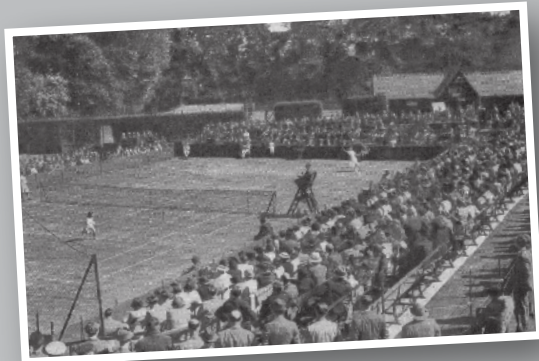
British players responded vigorously to this challenge, and not just from county level: Miss Joan Fry, Ladies' singles champion at the Priory Whitsun tournaments of 1924 and 1925, went on in 1925 to the Wimbledon singles final at the age of 19. Nearly 60 years later she returned the Priory cup to Edgbaston Priory Club to be awarded as its doubles trophy. The Captain of the England Ladies' team in the 1930s Alex McOstrich won the Ladies' Doubles title in 1937; and D.M. Greig, who reached the Mixed Doubles Quarter-final at Wimbledon in 1929, played "at the top of his form" according to *The Times* in taking the singles title at the Priory that year against the unfortunate Keats Lester.

The attention of the national press towards the Priory became more fulsome from the 1920s to the 1930s, with column inches growing alongside the standards of the Whitsuntide tournament. In 1937 *The Times* noted that eleven of the Priory's own members had played at Wimbledon the previous year, and remarked that "it was worth going a long way to watch these two finals at the Priory Club, whose tournament has abounded in good matches" adding: "the game is as strong in the Midlands as anywhere, and no club does more to encourage it than the Priory in its setting of chestnut trees."

1937 saw the extension of The Priory's grounds for the last time before recent developments to nine acres, as Cottesmore Priory, the large house on Priory Road which gave the club its name, was pulled down and its land leased to the club. This also marked the culmination of the interwar development of the club's profile and standards, illustrated most clearly of all by its association with Dorothy Round.

Round was raised in Dudley only ten miles from the Priory and became Women's singles Champion there

for the first of five times at the age of 20 in 1928. That year she made her first appearance at Wimbledon, where she won the singles title in 1934 and 1937, gaining the Australian title in 1935. Just before the last of these Round defeated Chile's Anita Lizana - that year's US Open Champion - to take her last Priory title. The 1939 Priory Ladies' singles semi-final was billed as 'a Wimbledon Final replayed' when Round took on Helen Jacobs of the USA, Wimbledon Champion of 1936 who had been beaten to that title by the player from Dudley two years earlier. This time Jacobs beat Round before winning the last Priory title before war broke out. As this was the last year that Round played competitive tennis, her international career and her participation in the Priory tournament ran in tandem, and the new court on the old Cottesmore Priory grounds came to be known after her.



Wimbledon Champion and Priory player Dorothy Round winning the club trophy against World No 1 Antia Lizana in front of the old pavilion in 1937.

The Priory Club had by the outbreak of the Second World War matched Edgbaston in the standard of its tournament and the scale of its facilities. Future British No 1 Tony Mottram joined as a 17-year-old in 1937 because of his impression that "the Priory was unusual in the sense that it was very much more of a competitive club than a social club: it was a club with a more powerful and competitive atmosphere." The post-war era held out both threats and opportunities for both clubs, and their response is the basis of Edgbaston Priory Club's success today.



Fifty players in the Priory Junior tournament of 1932 outside the old clubhouse.



# 1940-64

champions and challenges

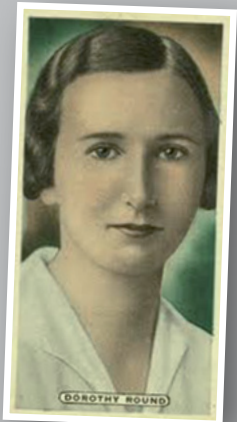
Former Wimbledon Champion Fred Perry and former Davis Cup Coach Dan Maskell (later the BBC's 'voice of tennis') give some tips to Priory juniors on a training day in 1951.

With the outbreak of war in 1939, though most of the Priory grounds were given over to grazing sheep, some members played on even during the Blitz. 66-year-old Elsie Wood (whose husband Charles was a leading Priory member from 1887 to 1954) wrote to her daughter in November 1940 to complain that "while playing tennis at Priory, a bomber had been wandering round. We could hear bombs dropping so I insisted on getting nearer a shelter of some sort, as they are machine gunning us now." A small tournament was held at the Priory in 1944, and Edgbaston Lawn Tennis Club remained open through the war, making its facilities available to service officers in the Birmingham area.

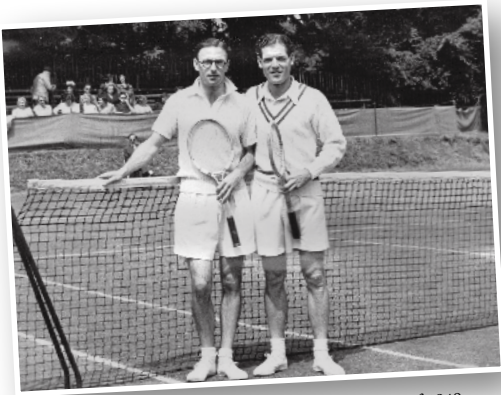
The Priory's membership grew significantly after the War, closing in on Edgbaston's at nearly 700. Both clubs played host to prestigious tournaments: Davis Cup matches against the Netherlands and Italy took place at Edgbaston in 1948 and 1955 - the British 4-1 victory over the Netherlands was completed solely by Tony Mottram and Geoffrey Paish, the former of whom was a loyal Priory member, but was beaten to the Priory's Whitsun title in 1949 by the latter. The Priory was the venue for another British Davis Cup

victory in 1961, this time over South Africa, and that year the Priory staged a 'Stars of Tennis' event featuring Ken Rosewall and Lew Hoad (though these stars were content to stay at a club member's house).

Other internationals to play at the Priory during the 1950s included Wimbledon champion and World No 1 Jaroslav Drobny, Sweden's Sven Davidson and Alex Olmedo of Peru, the 1959 Wimbledon champion for whom the Priory was the venue of his first European competitive match.







The finalists in the Priory men's singles tournament of 1949, Geoffrey Paish and Tony Mottram. They formed the British Davis Cup team which had beaten the Netherlands at the Edgbaston Lawn Tennis Club the previous year.

play in all but two of the following Wimbledon tournaments up to 1964.

The best-known Edgbaston Priory player of this period is Ann Haydon-Jones. Born in King's Heath, Jones was brought to the Priory with the encouragement of Harry Payne, a successful local timber merchant and one of the Club's most important organisers and benefactors who had joined with the closure of Moseley Park Club in 1910. Payne's generosity had made possible developments in club facilities and support for many young players: before the war, Tony Mottram had noticed that "he was a regular attendee at events and very supportive, especially to the juniors."

Jones became British Junior Singles Champion in 1954 and '55, and 1956 Wimbledon Girls' Singles Champion. As her career took her to the final of the US Open in 1961, to victory in the French Championships of 1961 and 1966, and finally to the Wimbledon singles title of 1969, Jones retained her strong association with Edgbaston Priory, where she went on to play for the club team, referee tournaments, mentor new players and liaise with the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) in the decades which followed. Jones brought the ladies' pre-Wimbledon tournament now known as the Classic to Edgbaston Priory in 1982. She says "Billie Jean King and I decided that Edgbaston Priory Club should be the venue for this major Ladies' event and winners like Martina Navratilova and Maria Sharapova have followed their victories here at Wimbledon."

In the early 1960s the Edgbaston and Priory Clubs looked in many respects in good health: new housing and a growing population in their district of Birmingham gave the Priory confidence to build an

extension to its clubhouse, whilst Edgbaston was considering plans for a wholesale site redevelopment. But long-term change and sudden accident were to combine to sweep away that impression within a few years; only by the decency of club members and courage of their officers would they survive and prosper.

Each club had its own challenges. The Priory found difficulty maintaining the status of its Whitsuntide tournament: 2,000 spectators were turned away from one year's final following torrential rain (despite the grounds staff's attempts to dry the courts using a flame-thrower); in 1955 the tournament was limited to local players because of a clash with the French Championship; and after 1957 when the Whitsun date was lost to another event, the tournament ended.

At the same time Edgbaston lost the Midland Counties event for two years following censure by the LTA for professionalism: an Australian international boasted that he had been paid generous 'expenses' to play at the club - a practice common in many clubs before the open era, but the authorities could not permit it to be acknowledged openly. By the early 1960s Edgbaston also found its neighbour, the University of Birmingham, on the verge of a huge expansion and looking for new land, a situation of which leaseholders Calthorpe Estates were keen to take advantage.

The answer to these advancing problems arose from an isolated and unwanted drama. On May 15th 1963 at 7.00 in the morning, the clubhouse at the Priory burned down leaving nothing but the old pavilion, the squash courts and the beginnings of the new extension. Immediately arrangements were made to keep the club business as close to 'usual' as possible: the next day a squash court was pressed into service as the bar room; the neighbouring Martineau Teachers' Club made rooms available for changing facilities; and the Edgbaston Lawn Tennis Club opened its doors to its rivals of nearly nine decades. As a result, the Priory was able to stage its full summer schedule of 50 matches as well as its Junior tournament, and a joint committee was formed to consider the merger of Edgbaston and the Priory.

The contrast between Edgbaston's traditional social cachet and the Priory's relative openness and modernity could have been an obstacle to the merger, as even today long-standing members recall. One from the Priory remembers that Edgbaston's members never referred to it by name, only saying 'I'm going to the club'; another who had played at Edgbaston since childhood agreed that "it was always 'us' and 'them', or", noting their relative social positions, "'them' and 'us'." In their unfortunate circumstances Priory

members had little choice but to swallow their pride, but a minority of Edgbaston members fought the merger. After two stormy meetings at the Chamber of Commerce in the city centre, a fifth of those present voted against joining with the Priory, and even threatened legal action over the move.

There had always been leading players associated with both clubs, and it had been agreed before the fire that Edgbaston and the Priory would share the honour of hosting the Midland Counties tournament; but it is testimony to the foresight of most members of both clubs and the shrewd and determined leadership of their officers that a potentially bitter division was turned into a great opportunity. By the end of 1964 legal formalities had been concluded, the new club on the site of the Priory had received the blessing of Calthorpe Estates (who gave a start-up gift of £10,000 to add to the proceeds of the surrender of Edgbaston's lease and the insurance claim of the Priory); and its name - after consideration of several alternatives - was agreed. The Edgbaston Priory Club was established on 1st January 1965 with the Phoenix emerging from the flames as its symbol.



Priory Club members Roy and Cathy Dixon outside the clubhouse in 1957. A former Junior Wimbledon singles finalist, Roy went on to compete at Wimbledon throughout the 1960s.

Another World No 1 Pancho Gonzales had a hit with Priory's top junior Roy Dixon when he visited the Priory in the 1950s. Americans Louise Brough and Margaret du Pont (who shared five Wimbledon singles titles between them) and Betty Hilton (a Birmingham player who reached the world top ten) all competed in the 1949 Priory tournament.

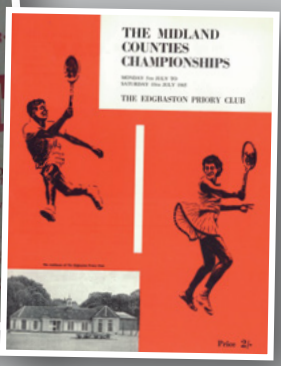
The Priory continued to be associated with the development of home talent such as Tony Mottram. Mottram first appeared at the Whitsuntide tournament in 1938 as a teenager, and the following year *The Times* reported from the Priory that "the young Warwickshire player, who shows great promise, led Ghaus Mohamed of the Indian Davis Cup team by 5-3 in the final set, but lost through inexperience. Mottram has all the shots and a strong service." Mottram fulfilled his promise, winning the Priory tournament in 1946 and playing at every Wimbledon tournament from then until 1955 as well as at Roland Garros and the US Open whilst writing a popular tennis coaching book.

The line of Priory members competing at Wimbledon was continued by Ralph Oliver, who played in five tournaments between 1953 and 1959 and Roy Dixon, Junior Wimbledon singles finalist of 1954 who appeared in the senior tournament six times between 1959 and 1968. Amongst the Priory Ladies' team, Hazel Cheadle reached the fourth round of the singles in 1953 and went on to



Priory Club Chairman Harry Payne welcoming international players Louise Brough, Margaret du Pont and Betty Hilton to the clubhouse for the 1949 club tournament.





The Priory Whitsun Tournament  
 From 1902 to 1957 the Priory Lawn Tennis Club's Whitsun tournament rose from being a county players' testing ground to be the platform of Wimbledon champions such as Helen Jacobs, Dorothy Round, Louise Brough, Margaret du Pont, Jaroslav Drobný, Alex Olmedo and Sven Davidson.

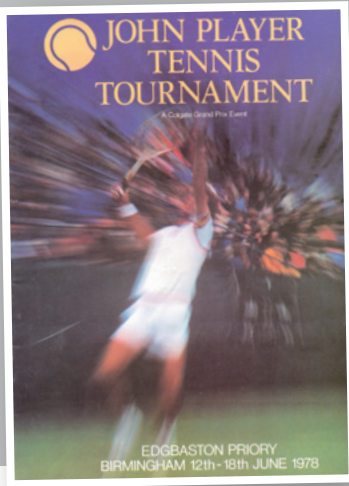
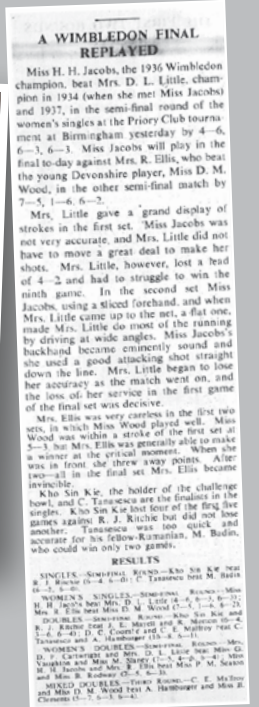
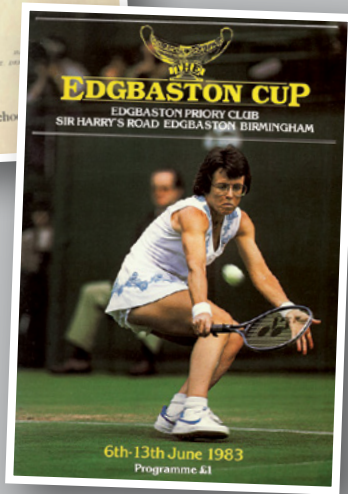
The Midland Counties Tournament  
 One of the world's earliest lawn tennis tournaments was held at Edgbaston, Priory and then Edgbaston Priory Club from 1882 to the 1970s. Throughout nearly a century the event attracted international talent whilst nurturing British stars from Maud Watson (left) to Virginia Wade.



# Tournaments & Players

The Davis Cup  
 Ties in the premier men's international team tennis competition were held at Edgbaston, the Priory and Edgbaston Priory between 1924 and 1969. Visiting teams from the Netherlands, Spain, South Africa and Germany (twice) were all defeated.

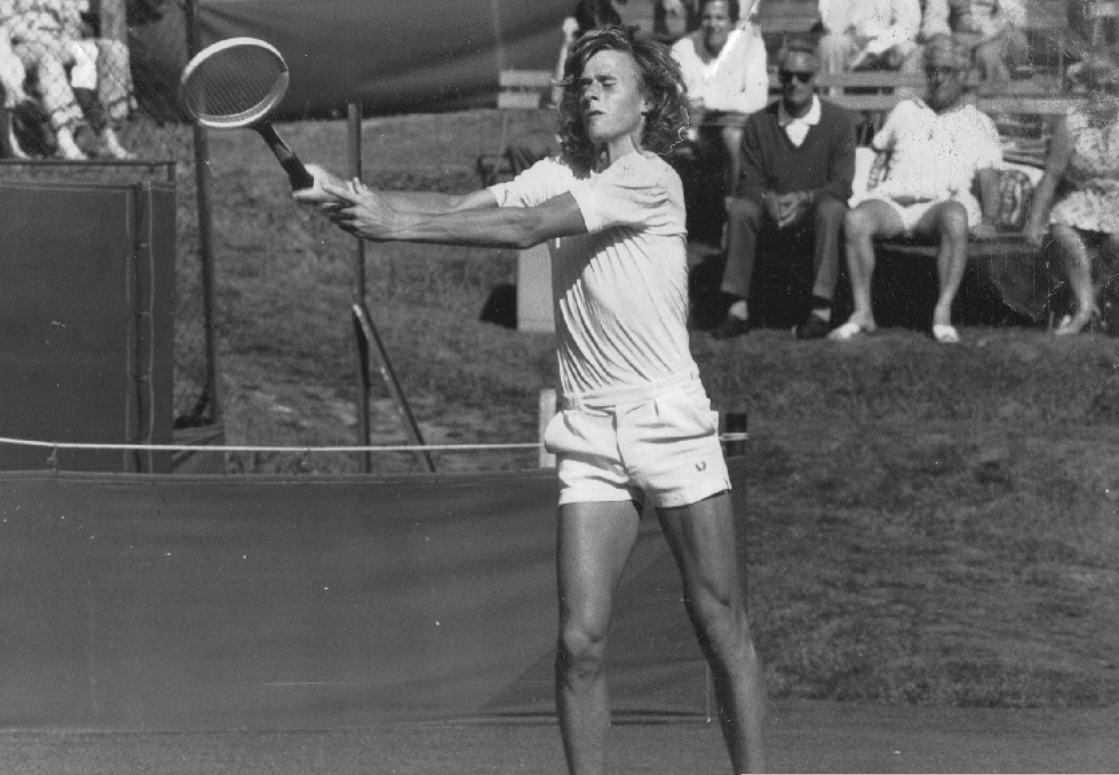
The Classic  
 Edgbaston Priory Club's latest showcase for world-class talent has been the Classic, the pre-Wimbledon Ladies' lawn tennis tournament held at the club since 1982 in association with the LTA. Won by Billie Jean King, Martina Navratilova and Maria Sharapova, the tournament was upgraded to Premier 600 status by the WTA in 2013.



...and occasional visitors  
 The British Squash Open, the John Player Tennis Championship and the Jubilee of the International Lawn Tennis Club saw Edgbaston Priory host stars such as Jonah Barrington, Jimmy Connors and Bjorn Borg in the 1970s.

'The Times', 1st June 1939





# 1965-81

The towering figure of 1970s tennis Bjorn Borg showing his potential to Edgbaston Priory Club members as a 17-year-old competitor in the International Lawn Tennis Club of Great Britain Golden Jubilee tournament of 1974.

The Edgbaston Priory Club benefited from the blend of its forebears' prestige and success in staging major events and nurturing major talent, together with a largely blank canvas for clubhouse facilities. The tradition of world class events, and the club's facilities and membership, went from strength to strength.

The merged Edgbaston Priory firstly needed a new clubhouse, which was built at a cost of £100,000 (equivalent to over one-and-a-half million pounds now) whilst members persevered in temporary accommodation including tents. With no precedent for rebuilding a clubhouse in such circumstances, the architects were able to experiment with features such as a roof pyramid and four new squash courts incorporating the latest in interior design technology such as elastic walls, and in 1972 one of the first glass-backed courts in England with seating for 250 spectators. To provide an extra footpath at the rear,

even the Vatican had to be asked for permission to encroach upon the neighbouring convent's land. The clubhouse was opened with a swimming party around the outdoor pool in 1967 and remained the nucleus of the club buildings until 2012.

A new indoor court funded by the LTA was built in 1969 on the site of one of the club's earliest ones and at its opening, promising juniors were treated to an exhibition match and some training from Ken Rosewall and Rod Laver. Over the next 25 years a further four squash courts were added, making ten in

all, and five new tennis courts, indoor and outdoor, grass, hard and artificial, partly funded by the LTA, were opened so that by 2009 Edgbaston Priory Club boasted in total 29 courts. The result of all this was a rise in the numbers joining Edgbaston Priory. From two clubs with a joint membership of 1,500 the club's membership had grown to 2,000 by 1982.

National success for individual club members and club teams continued after the merger: Ann Jones was in the British Wightman Cup team of 1975 and played doubles at Wimbledon two years later; Alex Soady (later Cowie) and Janice Wainwright (nee Townsend) competed in Wimbledon singles between 1970 and 1972. Philip Siviter, who trained at the Priory as a boy in the 1960s, played at Wimbledon in 1973. Siviter, whose name appeared in the Guinness Book of World Records for his 22-year stint as Worcestershire Men's Singles Champion, rejoined Edgbaston Priory to become Club Men's singles champion twice in the 1990s, as well as captaining the Great Britain Veterans team for eight years and capturing the world Father and Son doubles title with his son Mark, also an Edgbaston Priory Champion.

In the 1970s the Edgbaston Priory Ladies' team regularly won the Premier Women's division of the Birmingham League, and a club team twice won the men's division title. Edgbaston Priory teams also won

the women's national club competition for the Derrick Robins Trophy. Meanwhile 17 Edgbaston Priory squash players represented the county, and six the country.

As well as playing tennis and squash, the public were coming to Edgbaston Priory Club to watch the world's best competitors at work. In 1969 Edgbaston Priory hosted a Davis Cup semi-final in which a Great Britain team featuring British No 1 Mark Cox defeated West Germany after a doubles rubber of no fewer than 95 games (with the added incentive of a £100 victory bonus from sponsors Rothmans cigarettes).

For Cox this represented something of a homecoming, because he had played at the Priory as a junior in the 1950s, and was spotted, aged 12, by Dan Maskell at a 'Talent ID' day at Edgbaston. Cox, who clinched the tie with a final, five-set singles match, remembers benefitting from "a great atmosphere and the intimacy of the end court, with its proximity to the crowd giving me their feedback. It was a good match to win." The tennis correspondent of *The Times*, Rex Bellamy, compared the court to that at Hamburg where the German championships were played, and enjoyed the military band arranged to mark the occasion. "Hot sunshine complemented a golden scene" wrote Bellamy, "embellished by some fine tennis. It was a day to remember."



The Edgbaston Priory Ladies' team at the finals of the national club championship with event sponsor Derrick Robins in 1973. The team's three Wimbledon competitors included the 1969 Wimbledon singles Champion Ann Jones (far right).



Other leading names of tennis in the 1970s to play at Edgbaston Priory Club included Bjorn Borg and Jimmy Connors. Five-times Wimbledon winner Borg took part as a 17-year-old in the International Lawn Tennis Club Golden Jubilee celebrations at Edgbaston Priory in 1974 playing doubles as part of the Swedish team. In all, teams from fourteen countries competed in the event, including Britain's Graham Stillwell, Spaniard Andres Gimeno (winner of the 1972 French Open) and 75-year-old Jean Borotra of France, the holder of 14 Grand Slam titles.

Edgbaston Priory had since the Second World War developed a key role in the International Lawn Tennis Club, hosting tournaments, arranging overseas tours and maintaining contact with the LTA, for whom the club has organised a regular pre-Wimbledon ball with guests from amongst the veteran internationals of every continent. The Club's relationship with the International Lawn Tennis Club, maintained by Peter Mockridge, remains strong today, and was marked by their gift of a bench to Edgbaston Priory in 2009.

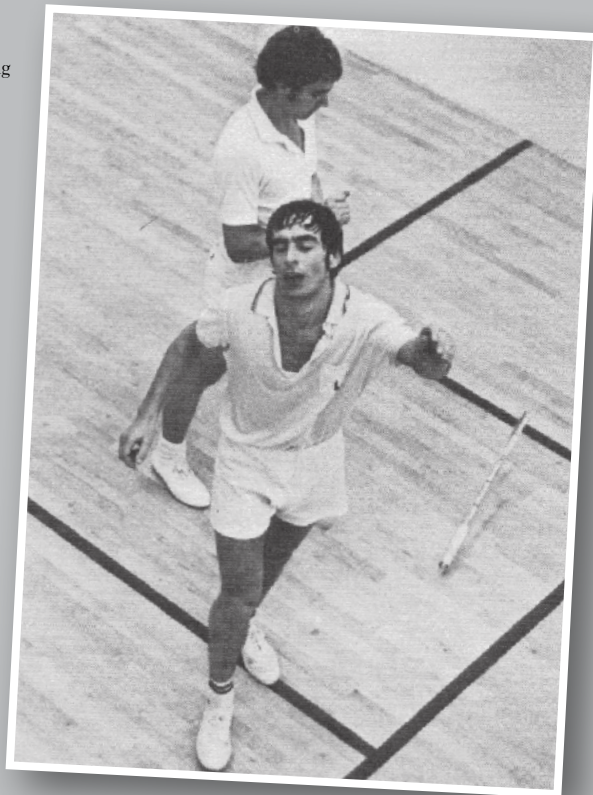
Borg's rival Jimmy Connors was the winner of the last John Player Tournament, held at Edgbaston Priory Club in 1978. Connors competed with Ilie Nastase, Roscoe Tanner, Arthur Ashe, Stan Smith and a host of other stars in the tournament.

In squash, too, Edgbaston Priory nurtured and showcased world class talent: a British Squash Championship final of record length was seen at Edgbaston Priory in 1969 when Jonah Barrington secured the title from Geoff Hunt in a marathon match of two hours 13 minutes. The Championship was played at Edgbaston Priory for the next two years, and the Women's Championship in 1975, when it was won by Edgbaston Priory member Sue Cogswell. Cogswell, trained by club coach Nasrullah Khan, went on to win the British title a further four times in the next five years, and was runner-up in the World Open Championship of 1979. Edgbaston Priory also produced the men's British squash champion of the previous year, Peter Verow. Verow remembers benefiting from "admiring and then playing squash with professionals such as Nasrullah Khan, Mo Asran, Jonah Barrington and Aman Khan" at the club.

The club's role as the crucible of controversy about the development of squash was confirmed with the walk-out of professional players from the 1974 Prodorite Invitation tournament at Edgbaston Priory, at which

Barrington led the formation of the International Squash Players' Association objecting to the granting of prize money vouchers worth £50 to amateur players in early rounds. Undaunted, the club reorganised the tournament as an all-amateur event and produced a final between Aly Aziz and Mike Corby which *The Squash Player International* described as "the sort of show which promoters dream about." Most of the professionals returned the next year, and Edgbaston Priory hosted the Prodorite into the 1980s.

From a union of two clubs under threat of demise, Edgbaston Priory rose during its first two decades as a merged club combining its predecessors' strengths and re-establishing their place in the national sporting landscape.



Jonah Barrington and Geoff Hunt exhausted at the end of the British Squash Open final at Edgbaston Priory in 1969. At two hours and 13 minutes, the match had lasted a record length at the time.

A helicopter sets down on the courts bringing former Wimbledon Champion Kitty Godfree for the presentation of the Maud Watson trophy at the end of the 1985 Classic tournament.



# 1982-2010

**Recent years have seen the continued improvement of Edgbaston Priory Club's facilities, national and international club team success, and the development of another tournament attracting world class players to the club.**

Membership of Edgbaston Priory took another upward step change after 1982. A small but active and experienced group of recruits joined from the Tally Ho Club and the Rotton Park Squash Club. Tally Ho's tennis members – and groundsman of 25 years – were warmly welcomed after the club's eight decades of offering tennis of a high standard amongst members and from touring players came to an end in 1988.

Most of the growth, however, came after 1992 when Edgbaston Priory undertook another bold expansion with the decision to open leisure facilities including an indoor pool with sauna, steam room and a gym. During this period the bar was extended to overlook the outdoor pool and the clubhouse gained a new reception block at a cost of £120,000 in 1995. This all responded to the expectations of competitive players for state-of-the-art training facilities as well as the increasing demand for exercise and leisure amongst the public

which had been spreading from the United States over the preceding decade.

Some were concerned at the cost – an investment of well over half a million pounds – and others wondered about the weakening of the character of Edgbaston Priory as a tennis and squash club if leisure became its dominant theme. However, though membership did swell to over 3,000 by 1997, most were still tennis and squash members, and tennis membership had more than trebled since 1982. New hard courts partly funded by the LTA were laid on the grounds of the neighbouring school in 1995.

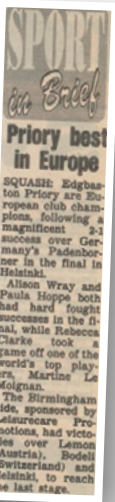
Hugh Jamieson of the *Daily Mirror* acknowledged in 1990 that Edgbaston Priory "has a famous name in national and county tennis" and the club has continued to develop playing talent, and to compete successfully at both levels since.





Press reports and the finals programme of the European Club Squash Championships of 1995, won by Edgbaston Priory.

In 1984 Edgbaston Priory recruited 16-year-old Katie Rickett who like Ann Jones a generation before her came from King's Heath "for the chance to have a hit with better players like Roy Dixon, Ralph Oliver, Hazel Cheadle and Ann Jones." Mentored partly by Jones, Rickett played on the professional circuit until 1992 and became one of Britain's top dozen players. She played Junior Wimbledon, represented Great Britain at Under-18, Under-21 and (as Captain) over-35 levels and in tournaments from Scandinavia to South America including the Australian Open singles and doubles of 1988. Later as Katie Shaw she captained Warwickshire Ladies for 15 years and Edgbaston Priory for 20,



during which time Edgbaston Priory Ladies won the Women's National Club League title six times between 1995 and 2005.

In the twenty-first century Edgbaston Priory first achieved LTA Accredited Performance Status before becoming an LTA High Performance Centre. In this role the club works with talented players from as young as six years of age providing world class coaching and outstanding medical, physical and psychological support to prepare these athletes for the demands of today's professional game. Edgbaston Priory remains one of the strongest tennis clubs in the country, recently holding numerous titles including the Under-18 national girls' title and supporting dozens of players competing at national and international level.

Edgbaston Priory Club also extended its appeal to new, especially young, recruits through the appointment of a Community Tennis Coach and the establishment of the Lordwood Community Tennis Club. The philosophy of Racketts Manager



Leyla Ogan towards these programmes, social tennis and coaching reflects those of the club through its history: "the key to a great club is its service to all ages and levels of ability, from beginners to elite, and from the youngest to the oldest. That's what we're able to offer."

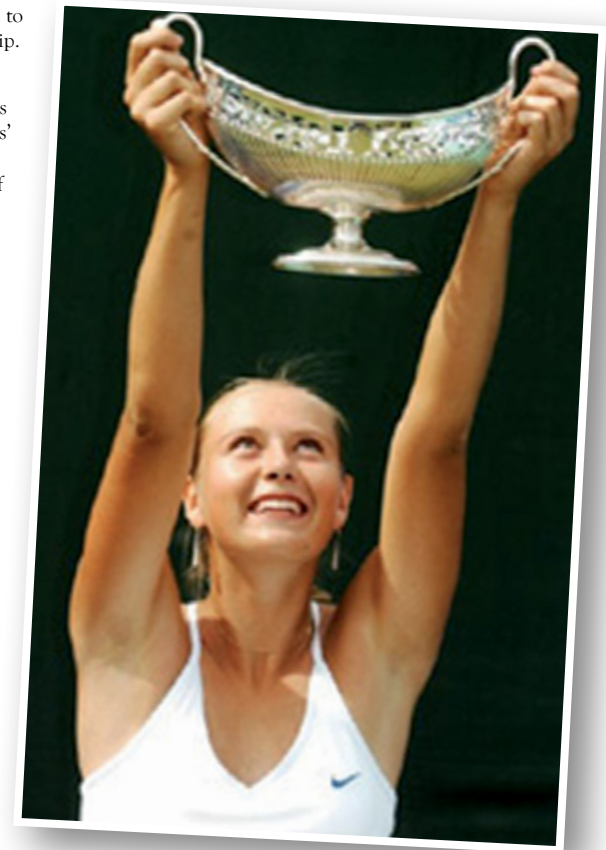
In squash, Edgbaston Priory continued to achieve the highest accolades: the club team won the European Championships at Helsinki in 1995 after taking the national title the previous year before overcoming opponents from Austria, Finland, Switzerland and Germany. Edgbaston Priory hosted the following year's national finals and in 2000 won the National League again. Amongst Edgbaston Priory's players in the twenty-first century was world No 1 and five times World Open Champion Sarah Fitz-Gerald. In 2011 Edgbaston Priory held the national team squash men's and ladies' titles and men's national racketball title. In 2012 the club's new courts were used to play the World Masters Squash Championship.

The most consistent national attention for the Edgbaston Priory Club has arisen from its role as the home of the pre-Wimbledon ladies' tournament, the Classic. Known initially as the Edgbaston Cup and later by the names of its sponsors Dow, DFS and Aegon, it began with the encouragement of the LTA in 1982, and from the outset featured the brightest stars of the day. Tournament winners with Wimbledon titles from Billie-Jean King (1982 and '83) to Pam Shriver (1984-87), Martina Navratilova (1989 and '91) and Zina Garrison-Jackson (1990 and '95) came back to the Edgbaston Priory to compete and to praise the club. "This is the perfect place to play tennis" said Navratilova: "the people could not have done more to make me feel welcome."

Tournaments always raise questions about their effects upon the running of their host clubs, but the Classic was another chance for Edgbaston Priory members to engage actively and to involve the wider public in a great tennis event: Birmingham City Council gave its support, ball boys and girls were drawn from local schools, and thousands from around the country came to watch the tennis. Many Edgbaston Priory Club members provided accommodation for international stars such as Navratilova and Tracey Austin, drove them around Birmingham's testing street map and mixed with players and their guests.

Maria Sharapova, who barely qualified for her first Edgbaston tournament as a 17-year-old in 2004, even had a trip to the cinema organised. She went on to win at Edgbaston Priory and at Wimbledon the following month. Returning for her eighth Edgbaston tournament in nine years in 2011 Sharapova told the press: "I'm excited to be playing at the Aegon Classic once again. It's one of my favourite pre-slam tournaments and I can't wait to get back out on the grass courts at the Priory Club. I always get such a warm welcome in Birmingham at the event and from the people in the city so I always enjoy going back."

2013 brought the news that the tournament would be upgraded to WTA Premier 600 status, raising its prize money and bringing even more world-class players to Edgbaston Priory Club.



17-year-old Maria Sharapova holds the Maud Watson trophy aloft after winning the 2004 Classic tournament at Edgbaston Priory.





# New Developments

Edgbaston Priory Club's Committee recently invested in modernising its facilities to ensure stability for the Club in a period of turbulence outside. With – as in previous generations – the support of Calthorpe Estates, the club underwent its most comprehensive transformation since the merger of the Edgbaston and Priory clubs 50 years ago. Conceived in 2008, agreed in 2010 and begun the following year, the £12 million building programme supported by £5 million from the LTA confirmed Edgbaston Priory Club's place as one of the country's leading sports facilities as well as a members' club with a proud heritage.

The developments begun in 2011 involved the wholesale rebuilding of the clubhouse to provide an expanded gym and exercise area commanding spectacular views of the grounds the club has occupied for 130 years; a new four-court squash block and refurbishment of the existing courts supported by England Squash and Racketball; and – emphasising that Edgbaston Priory is, as always, more than a sports and leisure facility – a modernised and extended bar,

new restaurant and terrace areas as well as spaces for functions, conferences and a dedicated treatment room. In total, the new clubhouse offers twice the usable space of its predecessor.

Beyond the clubhouse existing outdoor courts were refurbished, a new Centre Court with permanent seating for 1,000 and capable of seating 4,000 spectators was built, named after former Wimbledon singles champion and Edgbaston Priory Life Member

Ann Jones; and following the first phase in the project, a brand new six-court Indoor Tennis Centre was opened by Daniela Hantuchova in June 2012. In its first year the Centre hosted the Aegon British Tour event – won by Edgbaston Priory High Performance player Emily Smith (pictured right) – and the Aegon GB Pro-series. A finalist in the previous year's Aegon Classic, Hantuchova said "it is an honour to be asked to open the new courts here at Edgbaston Priory Club and I'm looking forward to playing on them. The courts and the centre look fantastic. I love coming back to Birmingham and I have got good memories of playing here."

The Edgbaston Priory Club symbol of the phoenix is more apt than its designers half a century ago could have anticipated: for the club has not only risen from the fire which the phoenix originally marked, but has survived the challenge of other changes – social, economic and sporting; local, national and international – which other clubs could not withstand, but from which Edgbaston Priory has emerged stronger each time. The opening of the new facilities at Edgbaston Priory is only the most recent example of the progress that has come from its courageous leadership and loyal membership keeping the club at the heart of the game.







Dr Matt Cole is the Edgbaston Priory Club historian.  
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