

EXHIBITION 7

Tennis

Introduction

WHEN ELM PARK GOLF AND SPORTS CLUB OPENED for membership in 1924 on the site of Elm Park House at Merrion, in south Dublin, tennis was one of the sports included from the beginning, with the original tennis courts occupying the site of the present St Vincent's Private Hospital. From the beginning, men and women were of equal standing in the Club and that has continued to be the case. The photographic records are a little scanty and uneven in their representation, but that's life.



1926: Elm Park "At Home"  
Irish Independent report  
Paddy Duffy



Joe Scannell

1920s–2020s

Club Milestones and Events

1925-1926

There were six grass courts in that first active year of 1925 and four hard courts were opened on Easter Monday the following year. The first annual "At Home" Club Championships were held on the new hard courts in August 1926. Members such as Paddy Duffy and Joe Scannell were prominent figures in the early days of the tennis club.



1932 DLTC TRIUMPHS

Two major milestones for Elm Park – one of the men's teams played in class 1 of the Dublin Lawn Tennis Council (DLTC) Summer Leagues for the first time and a ladies' team won the DLTC Class 3 Summer League – the Club's first inter-club honour and first pennant.



Elm Park Ladies 1st Team.  
Winners Class 1 Summer  
League 1980



1936-1938 NUTLEY HOUSE

Elm Park Tennis Club reopened at Nutley House in June 1936 with four cement courts and five grass courts and in 1937 hosted the annual Irish Hardcourt Championships for the first time. The Club continued to provide a home for this event for the next 14 years.



Ladies' Doubles Hardcourt  
Championships 1938



Gerry Fitzpatrick, Irish Hardcourt  
Championships 1948

CYRIL BODEN, THE HARDCOURT CHAMPIONSHIPS  
AND WORLD WAR II

The first Autumn Hardcourt Championship ever held in Dublin took place in Elm Park in 1938. Elm Park member Cyril Boden played a leading role in organising and refereeing the tournaments over the following 15 years or so. They were widely reported in the sports pages of the newspapers. Due to wartime shortages, newspapers were reduced in size, which meant that after essentials such as racing were covered, the sports pages had little space for such courtesies as publishing daily the advance programme for a Tennis Open. Cyril Boden recalled how, after staying up late to compile the following day's programme, he cycled into Elverys sports store on O'Connell Street (the bus service finished at 9.30 p.m.). Elverys then displayed the completed lists in their windows and interested parties could peruse them there.



Cyril Boden 1989





# Tennis

1946-1952: CHANGE OF DIRECTION

Tennis began to languish in Elm Park in the immediate post-war years and the membership witnessed a continuous decline. The Club did not enter the DLTC Summer League in 1951 and this was also the last year that it hosted the Irish Hardcourt Championship. A process of revival and rebuilding was necessary and began in 1952 with advertisements in the national newspapers to try to attract new members. Annual membership was three guineas (£3-3-0). Perhaps a major factor in this revival was the decision to drop the Open events in favour of the major internal Club tournaments that continue to this day - Team Tennis, Grasscourt Championships, Hardcourt Championships, Handicap tournaments, Captains' Day, Charity Day, Captains' Serve-In, Senior-Junior Championships, President's Prize...



A selection of prizes awarded to Tony Reid, mostly for tennis  
Captains' Day Prize  
Captains' Day leaflet 1976



1959-1969: "GOLDEN YEARS"

Five additional grass courts (known as the "back courts") were constructed in 1959 resulting in a total of 14 courts and this attracted more members and led to greatly increased activity in the sixties, seventies and eighties. The Club could now enter more teams in the DLTC leagues and built up an outstanding record. It has been called the "golden age" of Elm Park tennis.

In 1965 the club won the Ladies' Summer League Class 1 and in 1969, a men's team won the DTLC Class 1 League. Between 1961 and 1991 the tennis section accumulated 68 winners' pennants, a truly impressive achievement of which it can be very proud.



1965: Ladies' Summer League Class 1 Winners

1979: THE BANBRIDGE CONNECTION

In 1979, Elm Park hosted Banbridge Tennis Club in an inaugural cross-border event. This was during the height of the Troubles and cross-border initiatives were few and far between at the time. The event was so popular that Elm Park has played Banbridge annually during the summer, alternating home and away fixtures, ever since.



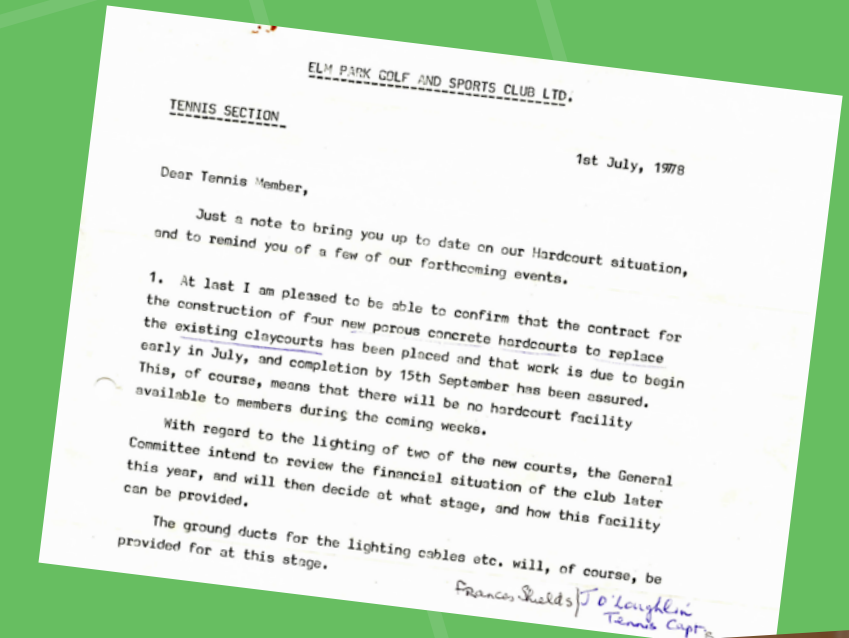
Group at annual Banbridge event  
Banbridge Trophy



1980: VETERANS' LEAGUE AND INVITATIONAL TOURNAMENT

Michael Wogan took over the participation of Elm Park in the Veterans' League in 1980 and during his tenure our teams were in 12 finals in 15 years, winning 11 of them. He and Mary Briscoe managed the very popular Elm Park-initiated Veterans' Invitational Tournament from 1991 until 2008.

Michael Wogan and Mary Briscoe, annual Veterans' Team Invitational Tournament presentation, 2001



1985 Stella Nolan Prize



1985-1993: COURT NO. 1, STELLA NOLAN TROPHY

At the Tennis AGM in 1985, golf captain Joe Treacy officially opened the new hard court (now court 1) with floodlighting. This was a major milestone for the Club as it was the first new ground broken for tennis courts since the back grass courts were developed in 1960. The Club now had five hard courts and 10 grass courts. The Stella Nolan Trophy was inaugurated also in 1985.



**1993: MORE COURTS**

Two new hard courts (now courts 6 and 7) with floodlighting were officially opened in 1993, replacing two of the existing grass courts.

🕒 Official opening of “The Dome” in 2012



🕒 Peter Lowther, centre, watching the Hardcourt Championships 2012 with Killian McCrea and Greg Murray



🕒 Myles Cassidy and Mary Briscoe with John Kenny and Anne-Marie Ryan 2002

**2002: PRESENTATION OF BLAZERS TO TENNIS CAPTAINS**

In 2002, Captains Myles Cassidy and Mary Briscoe became the first Tennis Captains to be presented with their Captains’ blazers at the Tennis Club AGM. There had been a longstanding Elm Park tradition for the Golf Captains to receive their blazers at Golf Club AGMs and the addition of the same for the Tennis Captains has added a uniqueness to Elm Park Tennis Club.

**2008: APPOINTMENT OF DIRECTOR OF TENNIS**

In 2008, Peter Lowther, former Davis Cup player and manager of Irish international teams, was appointed the Club’s first Director of Tennis. He was succeeded in 2024 by Matt Jessop and Martin Golab.



**2012: “THE DOME”**

Our covered courts (“The Dome”) opened in December 2012, the biggest capital-expenditure project for the Tennis Club since its foundation. Mark Sobczyk was a driving force behind the project’s realisation.

➡ Mark Sobczyk



- 🕒 Artificial clay courts opened in 2024
- 🕒 Padel Courts under construction in 2025

**2024**

Hard courts 6 and 7 and two grass courts were replaced by Tiger Advantage artificial-clay courts, which came into use in May 2024.

**2025**

Hard Courts 2 and 3 were replaced by three Padel Courts and an additional tennis court.





# Tennis

## Inclusion

Elm Park participates in “Enjoy Tennis” - Tennis Ireland’s dedicated programme for players with a disability. It was established in 2015 and aims to provide fun, safe and supportive environments to learn and play tennis. Our first wheelchair member, Gareth Greene, was welcomed to Elm Park in 2022.

Volunteers from the membership work to provide an accessible and inclusive environment for people of all abilities to play tennis.



Gareth Greene



## Junior Tennis

The long tradition of social and family tennis for juniors has been supported through Supervised Tennis, Tennis Camps, Junior Team Tennis, the Senior/Junior Tennis Tournament, Hallowe’en Fancy Dress, Junior Captains’ Day and many other events. During school holidays, Junior Tennis members improve their skills in a fun and safe way playing various formats. Junior members participate in Junior League and Leinster inter-club competitions and more recently in the friendly “Stars and Stripes” competitions.

Junior Captains’ Day in late summer is similar to the adult event – a tournament followed by a Junior Captains’ Dinner where the events of the year and the Captains are celebrated. Elm Park has boasted a number of junior internationals, including Michelle Buckley, Jenny Claffey, Ken Fitzgibbon, and Gerry Fitzpatrick. Brendan Browne, a native of Cavan, played for the province of Ulster in Junior Tennis.







## Some Elm Park International Players

**Mary Fitzgibbon (née Nicholls)**, Elm Park Grasscourt Champion 1945, 1946, 1947; Ireland No. 1, 1950; winner of Irish Under-18 Girls three years in a row and Irish Open at Fitzwilliam at age 19; Wimbledon Ladies' Doubles quarter-finalist.



▲ Mary Fitzgibbon, 2nd from left, with husband JJ, Maeve Brennan and Joe McHale

**Joe McHale**, Irish Davis Cup player 1947-1950; played Wimbledon in 1948; an Irish squash champion and represented Ireland at bridge. JJ Fitzgibbon and his wife Mary (née Nichols) represented Ireland at tennis many times during 1950s.

**Helen Lennon**, Ireland's No. 1 player in the 1970s; played Federation Cup and later acted as captain and non-playing captain; also excelled at squash, badminton and golf; played against Billy Jean King, Evonne Goolagong, Virginia Wade and Martina Navratilova.



▲ Helen Lennon



▲ Breeda Claffey



▲ Robin Gibney, Grass Court Singles' winner 1991, with John Kenny

**Niall "Tucker" O'Riordan** played internationally in France, New York, California, Philadelphia, Argentina, Chile, Australia, Monaco, Turkey and New Zealand, in a combination of full internationals and the International Lawn Tennis Club of Ireland. With Willie Browne he won Elm Park Men's Doubles Grass Court Championship 12 times 1960s and 1970s; Willie Browne won Men's Singles Grass Courts 11 times and Mixed Doubles 10 times; played soccer for Bohemians and Ireland.



▲ Niall O'Riordan and Willie Browne with Brendan Browne, Bobby Keogh, Dara O'Sullivan and Ken Fitzgibbon

**Ken Fitzgibbon** represented Ireland in Davis Cup and King's Cup early 1980s; Men's Singles Grass Court champion 11 times 1976-1997; Men's Singles Hard Court champion 11 times

**Breeda Claffey**, member of Irish Federation Cup Squad 1978-1980; selector for Davis Cup Squads 1995-1998; tennis coach for over 40 years.

**Robin Gibney** represented Ireland in Davis Cup and King's Cup early 1980s; Men's Singles Grass Court champion eight times 1982-2007; Men's Singles Hard Court champion nine times.



▲ Jenny Claffey

**Jenny Claffey**, Irish No. 1 in both doubles and singles; represented Ireland in Federation Cup in 2009, 2012, 2013; won three international titles in 2015; awarded Maunsel Cup (a trophy awarded to the player of the year) in 2016; now works as a tennis coach.



▲ Robbie Dolan is third from right

**Robbie Dolan** is Elm Park's most capped Davis Cup player to date.

The dozen men senior or veteran members who have represented Ireland internationally include **Michael Wogan**, capped in 1994 in California, who went on to play in Australia, Croatia, Turkey, Hungary, and in Britain and Ireland and also **Peter Ledbetter**, **John Horn**, **Jimmy Casey**, **Maurice Fives**, **John Mulvey**, **Gerry O'Shaughnessy**, **Der O'Sullivan**, **Conor Sparks**, **Joe Cummiskey Jnr** and **Rob Cherry**



▲ Gerry Fitzpatrick and John Horn, Wimbledon 1950



▲ John Mulvey and Gerry O'Shaughnessy, 2nd and 3rd from left standing, part of DLTC Senior League, class 1 doubles 1984





# Tennis

## Elm Park's Contribution to DLTC And Tennis Ireland



Dublin Lawn Tennis Council  
*Serving over a Century of League Tennis*



John Fitzpatrick



Pat Lynch



Margaret Towers



John Ryan as president of Tennis Ireland



Frances Shields attending Elm Park Art Exhibition 1997



Mary Briscoe receives Muriel Bolton Award from Yvonne Redmond 2013

Dublin Lawn Tennis Council (DLTC), set up in 1902, organises inter-club competitions for the greater Dublin area. Elm Park has contributed hugely to the success of the council down through the years:

- Alf H Walsh**, president 1947-1980
- John A Fitzpatrick**, president 1981-1985
- Charles J Brennan**, president 1986-1987
- John A Fitzpatrick**, honorary treasurer 1961-1980
- John A Kenny**, honorary treasurer 2002-2012, 2016-present
- Pat Lynch**, honorary secretary 1990-1994, 1997-1998.

Ordinary council members: **Niall O’Riordan, Paddy Duffy, Brendan Browne, Jim O’Loughlin, Margaret Towers, Breda Claffey, Frank Dennehy.**

**Michael Wogan**, Leinster Branch of Tennis Ireland for nine years, president of the branch for two years. Club member **John Ryan** was recently president of Tennis Ireland.

**Frances Shields** was a member of various tennis bodies including Public Parks Tennis, becoming its first Honorary Secretary; also a member of ILTA (now Tennis Ireland), Leinster Council and later served on the Irish Council as PRO for many years.

**Mary Briscoe** was presented with Muriel Bolton Award 2013, an award made annually to a lady member of any DLTC-affiliated club who, in the opinion of the Council, has made a significant contribution as a player or administrator of the Dublin leagues.

And finally ...

A message from 2025 Tennis Captain Virginia Costello:

"At the start of the next 100 years of tennis at Elm Park, my wish is that the 2025 Tennis Committee and all Tennis Committees into the future continue to do what has been done so well so far, to provide a warm welcome to all who love the game of tennis or wish to learn to love it and a safe and social space in which to do so."

