

Tennis in and Around Sheffield, 1874-1914

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Volume two of *The History of the City of Sheffield, 1843-1993* includes a chapter on sport and recreation by Patrick Renshaw, which includes only two references to tennis. After informing us that it can be played in parks, he later tries to redeem himself with: “Finally, any writer on sport who failed to mention such local heroes as Roger Taylor, the tennis player who conquered mighty Rod Laver in his prime at Wimbledon in 1970, ... would deserve to be kicked into touch.” Anyone with an interest in tennis history might expect more of a writer with that surname, but he is only following a long tradition of local historians who have failed to appreciate the rich heritage of tennis in Sheffield. It is unlikely that the area around Sheffield has received better treatment. Before starting to redress the balance it is worth looking at the origins of lawn tennis and its arrival in Sheffield.

Origins of lawn tennis

What was the state of racket games in Britain in the 1870s? Real tennis (as we now call it, but simply called tennis then) was a game difficult to master, restricted to specially built courts mostly at exclusive clubs. Rackets (or racquets) was not much different. There were some expert players and women were very unlikely to take part. Squash rackets was little known at this time. Badminton, although devised earlier from the children’s game of battledore and shuttlecock (a kind of keepie uppie), and developed by army officers in India, was introduced to the public as a new game in 1873 for indoor and outdoor play, and seemed set to become a fashionable pastime. The invention of the lawn mower, which made possible the even surface required for lawn games, has been credited with the development of various sports. Croquet was one and had allowed both sexes to enjoy each other’s company while engaging in a pleasant pastime, but those who were not experts found the game too sedate. The younger members of the upper classes, with plenty of leisure time, were always on the look out for a new distraction.

Inventive Victorians spent much time tinkering with existing games and looking for inspiration to produce new ones. Outdoor versions of games based on or similar to real tennis had been around for centuries but had not achieved wide or lasting appeal. About 1858 Major Harry Gem and Augurio Perera, then living in Birmingham, began to develop a game they called pelota or lawn rackets. In the early 1870s they moved to Leamington Spa, where they established a club and drew up a set of rules. They were far from alone in their quest for a new game, but the first person to bring his game to public notice was Major Walter Clopton Wingfield.

Wingfield’s game, which he called *sphairistikè* or lawn tennis, was developed from badminton with influence from real tennis and was very different from the game we play today. The court was hourglass-shaped (Gem’s was rectangular), the net was five feet high at the posts and the server, who stood in a special crease, had to place the ball beyond the service line. It could be played on any level surface; Wingfield even suggested that players wearing skates could play on ice. He was keen to stress the game’s portability and ease of setting up, and took out a patent on his “portable court”. It was sold by his agents French & Company in London for five guineas, in a boxed set containing the net, posts and triangular side netting, forming a partial court, along with rackets, balls, and a booklet describing the game and how to play it.

Although his simple rules proved to be largely unworkable and the portable net impractical, Wingfield’s boxed set was effectively the seed from which sprang the game of tennis as we know it today. *The Field*, a magazine for country gentlemen, was particularly influential here. Many

correspondents aired their opinions in its pages, suggesting ways of improving the game; some claimed to have been playing similar games for years. For a while the game was in a state of flux, confined largely to the wealthy upper classes as a pleasant amusement for garden parties. However, starting with Prince's Club in London, many existing sports clubs started to try out Wingfield's game, notably archery and cricket clubs. The All England Club, formed for croquet in 1868, took up lawn tennis in April 1875. Wingfield's rules were interpreted liberally and modified on an ad hoc basis. In 1875 at the Marylebone Cricket Club, after various trials, a new set of rules was drawn up, essentially creating the game as we now play it. The hourglass-shaped court was abandoned by the All England Club for their first Championship tournament in 1877.

“To the utmost recesses”

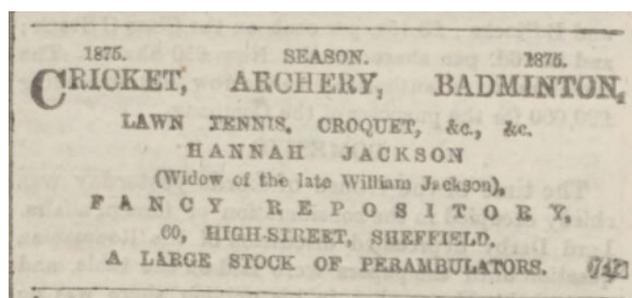
What was remarkable about this new pastime was its rapid spread across the country. Wingfield's game was favourably reviewed in many periodicals by March 1874 (a fact noted by some local newspapers, including the *Whitby Gazette* of 21 March). Press advertising all over the country soon followed. An anonymous writer in the *Morning Post* gave an explanation of what happened in the first season, setting a tone which has haunted British tennis ever since:

The appearance of lawn tennis was welcome for several reasons. In itself a good game, it gave an opening for female skill and grace. It is quiet, interesting, and intelligible to the spectators. It affords enjoyment to many because the duration of a game is just sufficient to give time for rest to the players who last occupied the court. Its surroundings – a fine summer's day, a green lawn, comfortable chairs, tea, claret cup, and gossip – are, one and all agreeable. It gives an outlet for a wholesome rivalry among women, and an opportunity for them to show what they can do in a game in which they have fair chances and no insuperable difficulties. The popularity of lawn tennis therefore, rapidly grew. It made firm its hold upon every house in London where there was a lawn large enough for a court; it was adopted eagerly at Prince's; before the end of the summer it had penetrated to the utmost recesses of Northumberland and Suffolk, Carnarvonshire and Cornwall (27 March 1875).

Possibly the first of Wingfield's sets to arrive in Yorkshire was ordered by Ayscough Fawkes of Farnley Hall near Otley on 25 July 1874. On 13 July 1874 Lord Wharncliffe ordered a set for his London residence in Curzon Street, Mayfair. Later he ordered extra equipment for his country seat, Wortley Hall, about eight miles from Sheffield. Perhaps the London set had been taken to Yorkshire, or a set, for which we have no record, had been ordered earlier.

The first Yorkshire club known to have introduced tennis is the Claro Archery and Croquet Club in Harrogate (1875). As early as July 1876 what may have been the first ever inter-club match was played at Ripon, the two home pairs being beaten by Harrogate in a men's doubles contest. John Hartley, vicar of Burneston in North Yorkshire, won the men's singles title at Wimbledon in 1879 and 1880.

In Sheffield, Wingfield's set was first advertised in the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* of 25 April 1874. By the spring of 1875 manufacturers of various kinds had seen the demand for tennis and responded accordingly. Retailers all over the country were able to offer all the necessary equipment, and complete sets at prices lower than Wingfield's started to become available. Locally, one shop began to advertise from April 1875 (right), so it is reasonable to assume that local industrialists and other wealthy Sheffields, or at least their offspring, were developing an interest in the game.



Skating and tennis

In May 1878 it was announced that lawn tennis would now be available during the summer months at the Sheffield Skating Rink in Glossop Road. This building had been opened as a commercial venture in June 1876 to meet the demand for the new craze of roller skating, also known as rinking. The surface was concrete and part of the rink was covered by a glass roof; there were lights for evening skating, though we don't know whether the tennis was ever illuminated. If the tennis court was in the covered area it would have been Sheffield's first indoor court, though with rather a low roof. Other skating rinks across the country included tennis among their attractions, particularly as skating fever died down. However, in Sheffield, by the summer of 1881 the company was running at a loss and in September an extraordinary meeting of shareholders voted unanimously to close the rink.

Tennis was also available at the skating rink in Chesterfield where, in 1877, the tennis club was granted exclusive use of the rink on Tuesdays and Fridays. This announcement appeared in the *Derbyshire Times* from 10 March to 7 April, so the club either played elsewhere in the summer or was a short-lived initiative at the rink – such notices did not appear again. The first reference to a specific club in Chesterfield was in 1879, when the Scarsdale Lawn Tennis and Archery Club held its first invitation ball at the Stephenson Memorial Hall.

First Sheffield Club?

Sheffield Botanical Gardens were opened in 1836 by the Sheffield Botanical and Horticultural Society. When the society failed through financial difficulties in 1844 it was quickly replaced by another with the same name. Only shareholders and subscribers were allowed in, except on gala days organised by the Temperance Society or the Mechanics' Institute. At the annual meeting of shareholders in June 1878 at the Cutlers' Hall a request to the committee that they sanction the formation of a tennis club among society members was put to a vote and upheld. The club would be allowed one or two courts for tennis and badminton, though the latter was never again mentioned in reports of meetings. Half of the subscriptions or a minimum rent of £12 10s would be paid to the committee. Thus was formed the first known tennis club in Sheffield.

We may never know whether there were any tennis clubs in Sheffield before this one. Perhaps there were some small invitation only clubs based in houses with large gardens. In 1881 the club was allowed to replace the original grass courts with two asphalt courts, at its own expense but with one year's rent waived. In 1884, when Charles F. Bennett was secretary, the club tried unsuccessfully to persuade the shareholders to provide three grass courts. Discontent at the club's exclusive use of the existing courts would cause problems later.

Cricket grounds

In 1854, when the Duke of Norfolk offered some land for a new cricket ground, six local cricket clubs with a desire for a good, permanent ground got together and formed the Sheffield United Cricket Club. The ground, at Bramall Lane, was formally opened in April 1855. One of these clubs was the Shrewsbury CC and at their annual meeting in 1879 they decided to form a tennis club, "in order to make the cricket field more attractive to those members who play but little cricket, and others who may desire a milder form of exercise" (*Sheffield Independent* 1 March 1879). No further reports of this club have been found – perhaps the tennis never rose above the gentle level envisaged by the committee. A report of a cricket match between the Gentlemen of Sheffield and the Garrison informs us that "this grand annual match took place at Bramall Lane yesterday, and was as usual distinguished by the presence of a large gathering of fashionably-dressed ladies, a number of whom played lawn tennis" (*Telegraph* 12 July 1879).

A few years later Bramall Lane would figure more prominently in Sheffield tennis history. During

the football season at this time, the ground was used by Sheffield FC. In August 1879 two players representing the club took part in a tennis tournament at Trent Bridge, Nottingham. This “novel feature” was only one event in the annual athletic sports – revived that year – staged by the Notts Football Club. The Sheffield players, H. Sorby and W.A. Matthews, lost to a Grantham pair in the first round.

Another tournament in 1879 was held in Doncaster, where the Grammar School lent its cricket field for the occasion. This was a mixed doubles event, played in fine weather, with a large gathering of spectators. The Temperance Society provided a van from which tea, coffee, cocoa and other refreshments were served. Four rounds were played and it seems that matches consisted of only one set. In the final Mr Lloyd and Miss B. Philips beat the Rev T.H. Hutchinson and Miss Harper, 6-2.

Rise of the clubs

Many of the larger houses at this time had their own grass court. Notices of properties for sale or lease mentioning tennis were quite common. Some house builders saw that tennis courts could be a selling point: Dalkeith Terrace (Whitham Road, Broomhill), advertised in the *Telegraph* of 29 May 1880, featured a “pleasure ground” with a tennis court for the residents. The larger end house had its own court. However, another ad in the same year signalled the start of things to come: “WANTED to Rent, in the neighbourhood of Endcliffe or Ranmoor, a Piece of GROUND, suitable for a Lawn Tennis Club” (*Telegraph* 26 February). What became of this plea we don’t know, but tennis was clearly on the rise and as the new decade went on tennis clubs proliferated, many newly established solely for the game, as well as existing sports clubs taking the plunge.

Around Sheffield, club activity was growing. Rotherham LTC played a match against the Grasshoppers, another local club, in 1880. Clifton LTC was formed in 1886, with three courts and a pavilion in Clifton Park, Rotherham. The Doncaster Archery and LTC was in existence by 1879 and, at least some of the time, played at the Racecourse. Opportunities for tennis in the town expanded when the Cricket Club started a section in 1881, but dissatisfaction with the cricketers’ control over its management, as well as some hostility toward the tennis players, led to a split and the formation of a separate tennis club after the 1882 season. Mexborough and Penistone had clubs by 1883. The first known (so far) local match which included female players was between Penistone and Shelley in August 1883. Another cricket club to take up tennis was Chesterfield CC who played the game on the Recreation Ground at least from 1883. However, in 1888 the tennis players combined with Scarsdale to form a new Chesterfield LTC on the ground of the former in Hawksley Avenue.

Sheffield LTC was unusual in that it was an indoor club, playing on the wooden floor of the Drill Hall in Edmund Road, which had been built for the local Artillery Volunteers and formally opened in June 1880. The membership seems to have included many of the leading local players, most if not all of whom were also members of other clubs. Many of the matches played from 1882 to the early 1890s were against prominent clubs, including Burton-on-Trent, Chapel Allerton, Doncaster, Huddersfield, Hull and North Ferriby. These matches took place during the summer months. The secretary of the club was John Parker Marsh.

Reports of inter-club matches show that by 1882 the Abbeydale Club was in existence, with its courts at the Abbeydale Hotel (now the Beauchief Hotel), taking on the Botanical Gardens and Dronfield. Brincliffe LTC were playing matches in 1883 – possibly the year the club was founded – at their courts on Grange Crescent which, oddly, is in Sharrow rather than Brincliffe. This ambitious club would soon leave its mark.

Only two Sheffield clubs formed in the 1880s are still in existence today. Rustlings is the oldest, formed in 1883, with courts at Rustlings Farm to the south of Endcliffe Woods. The first record of a

match played by the club is not until July 1885: men's versus Audrey LTC. In 1887 Endcliffe Woods was turned into a park, at first known as Jubilee Park in honour of Queen Victoria. By then Rustlings had been joined as a neighbour by the second oldest club, Hallamshire, but later developments forced them to move. Fortunately, the club secured a piece of land, formerly a market garden, in Collegiate Crescent, Broomhall. At first four grass courts were laid, but they were not ready for play until the 1889 season. In 1888 the club was invited to play its matches on the Brincliffe courts. At this time Rustlings had about 60 members and the secretary was C.G. Booker.

Other prominent clubs in the mid-eighties were Audrey (Cherry Tree Road), Broomfield (formed 1885, Beech Hill Road, Broomhall) and Sharrow (between Rundle Road & Kenwood Park Road). The latter, formed in 1885 with grass courts, converted them to gravel the following year. Pitsmoor LTC (Norwood Road) was formed in 1887 and formally opened by its president Sir Henry Watson, in June, when the club already had fifty members, though only two courts. Nether Hallam, a club for residents of Hillborough, was started in 1888 in a picturesque setting off Bradfield Road (on the site of the present Regent Court). The club had two grass and two gravel courts, and about 80 members.

Gardens threatened

In 1886 the existence of the Botanical Gardens Club was threatened when shareholders raised objections to its exclusive use of part of the grounds. Supporters of tennis argued that, with the rising popularity of the game, the courts would attract more subscribers to the Gardens if they were more widely accessible. Those in favour of the status quo held that a better standard of play was being fostered by club than by casual play. But to no avail: the club was given notice to quit at end of year. In 1887 the courts were opened to all Gardens subscribers at 5s a year or 3d a day. The club members played some away matches. A move to add grass courts was voted out after an acrimonious meeting in September. In February 1888 a new committee was elected and with it came a change of heart. They were encouraged by the success of the new system, which had raised about £30 but, as the *Telegraph* explained:

Unfortunately the play itself was not so successful, or the manner in which it was indulged in so agreeable to the shareholders of the Gardens, as the result of the more sordid question of pounds, shillings and pence. Many of the young pleasure seekers seemed to take it as an incontrovertible fact that the proper costume for play was a suit of solemn black, and the greater the noise and shouting the more excellent the pastime. To obviate in some measure these inevitable and disagreeable results of cheap tennis a Tennis Committee has been created (10 May 1888).

The committee drew up regulations for the proper use of the courts and re-introduced tennis subscriptions, effectively restoring the club. Day tickets were still available but would cost 6d.

Teachers at play

An interesting and perhaps unique feature of the Sheffield tennis scene was the existence of several clubs attached to local board schools. The Elementary Education Act 1870 was, in part, the result of pressure from industrialists for a better educated workforce, and brought into being school boards empowered to build schools where they were needed. Of the many schools established by the Sheffield School Board at least seven had tennis clubs for teachers between 1885 and 1893. In 1884 Sheffield Teachers played a men's match against Meersbrook Bowling Green. One of the teachers, Thomas W. Quine, became a prominent figure in school tennis (and also a member of Audrey LTC). The following year he was captain of the Duchess Road team that beat a team selected from other board school clubs. So, by 1885 there were already several of these clubs in existence. The known clubs were: Brightside, Burgoyne Road, Duchess Road, Grimesthorpe, Owler Lane, Sharrow Lane and Springfield. They regularly played matches mostly against each other but also against other

clubs. But where did they play? There seems to be no evidence that the school buildings had tennis courts attached (or that the pupils were introduced to tennis). Reports of teachers' tournaments in the grounds of the Girls' Orphanage at Firs Hill, Pitsmoor, from 1888 to 1890 suggest one possible location.

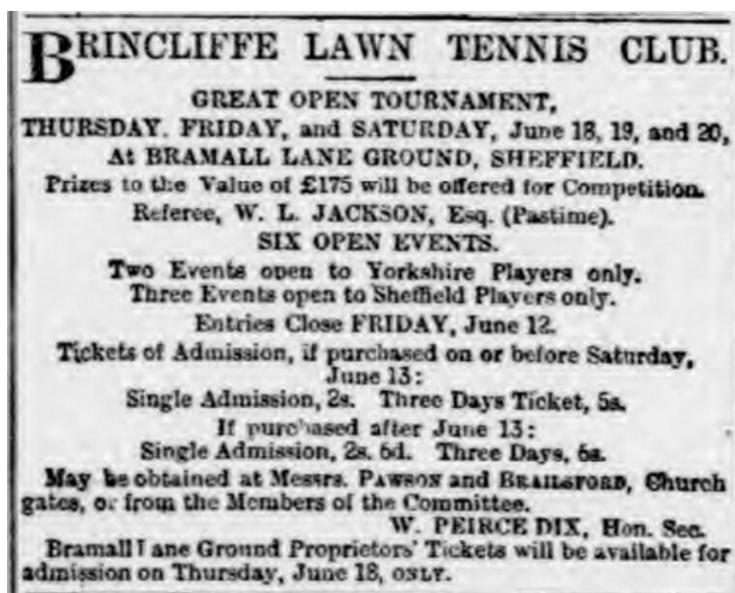
The Yorkshire Association

In 1884, four years before the formation of the national Lawn Tennis Association, Yorkshire became the first county to set up what was originally called the County Club, but soon became the Yorkshire Lawn Tennis Association and County Club. There were no representatives from Sheffield at the inaugural meeting at York in June, but Mr S. Shirley Blackburne of Doncaster was present. As well as drafting the rules of the Association, at a later meeting he steered the committee away from requiring a subscription to the Association of five or ten shillings from individual club members, in favour of a single payment from each club. This move, he felt, would make clubs more likely to join. Brincliffe must have been an early member as their secretary, W. Peirce Dix, was on the committee early in 1885. At the annual meeting in October, he was succeeded by John Parker Marsh.

The main business of the Association in its first year was to inaugurate an annual county tournament. It was held in August at Scarborough Cricket Club and two or three Sheffield players took part. John Parker Marsh was beaten in the first round of the championship singles by W.H. Mahon (Doncaster and Badsworth Hunt), who, along with Wilfred F. Rodgers got as far as the quarter-finals. H.A. Brundell and J. Coulman of Doncaster reached the second round. Marsh and Rodgers played together in the Gentlemen's Doubles, open to pairs from the same club, and reached the semi-final. In the mixed doubles, another first round defeat, Rodgers was accompanied by Miss Rodgers.

Brincliffe's tournament

The Scarborough meeting, in addition to the county events, also included open events (for amateurs). Some Yorkshire clubs had already begun to hold open tournaments: Beverley, Hull and Wakefield all started in 1883. An annual tournament started in Buxton in 1884 soon became one of the high points of the tennis and social calendars. By the summer of 1885 Yorkshire had an open tournament nearly every week. That year Sheffield joined the fray thanks to the Brincliffe Club and the efforts of W. Peirce Dix, who secured the County Cricket Ground, Bramall Lane for this three-day event. With an ambitious programme, including open events, some handicapped, three open to Yorkshire players and two for Sheffield residents, the tournament attracted a number of leading players, or "cracks" as they were usually called. Notable among them was Ernest Renshaw, runner-up to brother William in the Wimbledon Championship singles in 1882 and 1883 (he would go on to be champion in 1888). Also present was James Dwight, American doubles champion 1882 to 1884 (later winning in 1886 and 1887).



Seven courts were marked out on the Bramall Lane ground. N.L. Jackson, editor of *Pastime*, a national magazine specialising in tennis, had been invited to act as referee. Some of the events had

only a small entry: there were eight players in the men's open singles. In the final, played to the best of five sets, Dwight beat Arthur J. Stanley of the London Athletic Club. Renshaw played only in the handicap singles and the open doubles but, disappointingly for the spectators, didn't pass the first round in either. In the singles, carrying a severe handicap, he was beaten by a Sheffield player, W.T. Bradbury, inspired by the occasion to raise his game. Only four pairs entered the open doubles; the play of Renshaw and Charles Lacey Sweet (Clifton LTC, Bristol) being described in the *Telegraph* as "most casual" after they lost to Stanley and Gilbert Mahon (who would win that year's Yorkshire Championship and later join Hallamshire). The band of the York and Lancaster Regiment was in attendance every day to entertain the onlookers, though perhaps not the players.

There was much coverage of the tournament in the Sheffield and other Yorkshire newspapers. Following the first day's play, the tennis reporter of the *Telegraph* felt moved to criticise an article published in his own paper. In "At the Lawn Tennis Tournament" by "Our Own Novice" (19 June 1885), the writer proudly displayed his ignorance of a game where "all the hard work seems to be done by the little boys who pick up the balls" and his inability to grasp what is going on. He concluded by suggesting that tennis would never be a game to attract a great following. The reporter pointed out that tennis was already so popular that tournaments such as those at Wimbledon, Cheltenham, Bath, Exmouth, Scarborough, Buxton and others drew crowds of thousands for each day's play.

Many tournaments were not large-scale affairs, most were restricted to a particular club. Others were held to raise money for charitable causes and might be found at fêtes or flower shows. Some were quite ambitious, like the two-day event at the Red House, Rotherham, which accompanied a sale of work and fête. It was described as the first in the town and the four events attracted many players from Sheffield and further afield. A one-day tournament held on Barnsley Cricket Ground in 1885, offered men's singles and two mixed doubles events, one open and one for residents. Junior competitions were rare, but there was a mixed doubles tournament for boys and girls on hard courts at Buxton in August 1887. Fourteen pairs took part, the winners being Miss Marriott and B Hall.

Hallamshire

Although the Brincliffe meeting attracted much attention and produced some good tennis it was not a financial success. The club had been too ambitious in offering a large number events with high value prizes which attracted only a small number of entrants. There would not be another open tournament in Sheffield until 1888. A bigger club was needed to put Sheffield tennis on the map. In November 1885, the Sheffield & Hallamshire Lawn Tennis Club Limited was formed, with the purpose of buying a piece of land at the junction of Brocco Bank Road and Eccleshall Road (Hunter's Bar) at a cost of £1,285. To help raise the necessary capital, it was specified that, with minor exceptions, only holders of ordinary shares could become subscribers and play on the club ground. The club would be sure to join the ranks of the county's elite. Unfortunately, plans to get the ground ready for the 1886 season were thwarted by severe winter weather. By the time of the first general meeting in March 1886, though, over 300 shares had been taken up. The first secretary was W F Smith. A board of directors was appointed and Sir Henry Watson, prominent solicitor and local dignitary, was made club president. By mid-June a pavilion had been erected and by early August the courts were nearly ready. But there would be no play until the next year. The club's articles of association stipulated a subscription of two guineas (one guinea for ladies) for the first year and the directors felt it would be unreasonable to charge such an amount when so little of the season was left.

At this time Sheffield was suffering from a depression in trade and unemployment was rife, but the Hallamshire Club held out hope for one family:

It is intended to engage a ground man, whose duty it will be to keep the courts in perfect

order. He will be a married man, and his wife will be expected to get afternoon teas ready for members. The post will be a rather snug one, I fancy. Although small, there are four living rooms to be devoted to the use of the ground man, and the work will be of a pleasant, light kind. In these bad times there is likely to be considerable competition for the office (*Independent* 29 July 1886).

In March 1887 the club's three gravel courts were made available to subscribers who had paid their fees. Ten grass courts would be available later. There was pessimism in the morning of the official opening on 7 May as dark clouds bearing the grime of industry drifted over the ground from the north-east, followed by a short spell of heavy rain in the afternoon. But by 3:30 a warm west wind had brought clear blue skies. While members took part in a handicap tournament, the Hallamshire Band played an extensive selection of classical and popular pieces for the delectation of about 150 spectators. Players serving near the big drum might not have been so appreciative.

Where did the members of this new elite club come from? Club tennis was flourishing in the mid-1880s and new clubs were regularly coming into being. Before the Sheffield and Hallamshire Club was started, and before it found its feet, the premier club in Sheffield was Brincliffe, whose ambition had manifested itself in the staging of the town's first open tournament. So, not surprisingly, many Brincliffe players were among the subscribers, if not the instigators, of the new club. However, it was not unusual at this time, for the more enthusiastic players to join more than one club. Four men who became directors of the Hallamshire Club: John Parker Marsh, Wilfred F. Rodgers, George F. Lockwood and Thomas Gould were all members of Brincliffe and the indoor Sheffield LTC. They, and others who had been attracted to the new club, kept up their Brincliffe memberships for a while but, inevitably, the club felt the effect of this talent drain and had to settle for a place among the second tier of local clubs. Nevertheless, tennis was becoming so popular at this time that at its 1888 annual meeting the Brincliffe Club was judged to be flourishing.

David Davy

One player who moved to Hallamshire from a different club was David Davy of Abbeydale, and though largely forgotten until now, made his mark not only in Sheffield but on the wider Yorkshire tennis scene. He was a grandson of David Davy, principal founder of engineering firm Davy Brothers. Aided by unnecessarily generous handicapping, he first showed his potential in Hallamshire's singles handicap tournament in September 1887, when he beat John Parker Marsh 6-2, 6-4 in the final. In July 1888 he won the open singles at Burton-on-Trent, beating Henry Nadin, one of the best players in the north of England, in five sets.

Davy also enjoyed success in the Taylor Challenge Cup. This was a one-day men's singles tournament, started in 1885 and organised by Headingley LTC in Leeds, for a 25-guinea trophy donated by Tom Taylor, iron and steel manufacturer (Clarence Works, Leeds). At first the contest was open only to five local clubs but, in 1888, it was opened to all clubs affiliated to the Yorkshire LTA. There were normally 10 to 15 entrants. The first trophy had been won outright by Ernest Fletcher – twice Yorkshire singles champion – with successive victories from 1885 to 1887. Davy first entered in 1889 and beat Fletcher in the final. In 1890 he won again, beating fellow Hallamshire member, Fred Bradbury. The following year he beat Charles W. Wade of Saltaire to become the second player to take possession of the trophy, after which the competition was discontinued.

Wade would go on to be Yorkshire singles champion three times, but not before Davy had claimed four titles. His first was at the Ilkley tournament in July 1889 and was followed by success in 1890, 1891 and 1893, beating Wade twice more along the way. Wade finally turned the tables in 1894 when he beat the Sheffield player in the final. The 1891 Championships, held at Headingley, were particularly successful for Hallamshire. Before taking the singles titles, Davy had won the doubles

with John Parker Marsh. Mrs A.E. Thompson won the Ladies' Championship, beating Miss Wood, the Badsworth Hunt player who had been champion the previous four years.

John Parker Marsh and the Hallamshire tournament

Davy's regular partner at Hallamshire was John Parker Marsh, a strong player who enjoyed some success in various Yorkshire tournaments. In the Brincliffe tournament he won the men's doubles for Sheffield players with George Lockwood. He played in the short-lived West Riding team in 1886, and from 1889 often found a place in the Yorkshire county team. However, his greatest contribution was probably as an organiser. He was instrumental in organising Hallamshire's first annual open tournament in 1888 and served as secretary until 1893. The *Independent* called him: "the life and soul of the meeting" (8 August 1892). He also served on the Yorkshire LTA committee. Incidentally, his older brother Harry Parker Marsh was also a good player and Hallamshire director. He became a Conservative councillor, a Justice of the Peace and eventually Lord Mayor of Sheffield (1907/8). The *Independent* said he was "too good to be a Tory" (3 November 1887).

By starting on 31 August 1888, the Sheffield and Hallamshire tournament missed what had been a generally rainy season. There were six events, four of them handicaps and a large number of competitors. The *Independent* was impressed with the arrangements:

The executive of the Hallamshire Club is to be congratulated on the great success which has rewarded its efforts. Special mention must be made of Mr. J. Parker Marsh, upon whose shoulders the principal responsibility for the countless details inseparable from an undertaking of this kind has rested. Nothing has been forgotten. Umpire's chairs, stop netting, ball boys, programmes, score sheets and pencils—all are there. A marquee has been erected on the new piece of land lately acquired by the club, and therein are retailed refreshments.

During the afternoon there was a large attendance of fashionably-dressed spectators, whose enjoyment of the picturesque appearance of the nine excellent courts constantly in use was heightened by the music of a capital string band, under the leadership of Mr. Peck, bandmaster of the Hallamshire Rifles. This ground was, considering the quantity of rain that has fallen this week, in good condition, though in places the turf kicked up a little. No blame, however, for this attaches to the groundkeeper, Johnson, who has certainly done his best (1 September 1888).

In the level events (i.e. no handicapping), the men's singles was won by G E Lowe of Burton-on-Trent and the ladies' singles by Miss L.C. Clark, described as "the celebrated Doncaster player". Miss Clark, playing with David Davy, won the mixed handicap. Mabel Bradbury of Hallamshire won the ladies' handicap singles. The club must have been gratified by the favourable press coverage: the tournament "will be remembered as one of the most successful and enjoyable gatherings of its kind" (*Independent* 6 September 1888). Hope that the tournament would become an annual event was realised and, from 1890, its duration was increased from three to four days.

National damp squib

In 1889 the LTA started a national inter-club knock-out competition for men's doubles teams, with the prize of a 50-guinea challenge cup offered by Slazengers. The first stage was organised geographically in eight divisions, most of which attracted very few entrants. In fact, the competition was not a great success, with many matches being defaulted, and only lasted until 1893. Most of the clubs that took part were in Greater London and later Yorkshire.

Only 25 clubs entered in the first year. Hallamshire's entry was not greeted with universal approval. The code of amateurism was strong and organised club competition was seen as opening the door to professionalism, where winning is the main motivation and gentlemanly behaviour is likely to fall

away as clubs are corrupted by the lure of gate money. The *Independent's* tennis correspondent, who signed himself "Referee", showed a disapproval that was more common in the south of England than the north, arguing that such competition had been detrimental to football and cricket. He concluded: "I don't consider it at all a matter for congratulation that our leading Sheffield club has allowed itself to be drawn into the ring" (13 June 1889). Nevertheless, Hallamshire beat Hull, the only other Yorkshire club, in the first round. In the second they easily overcame Sharples LTC (Bolton), the only Lancashire club to enter the competition. This victory entitled the club to take its place among the last eight at Queen's Club but, unable to raise a team, captain John Parker Marsh had to scratch – not the only one to do so. The All England Club was the eventual winner.

Even fewer clubs entered in 1890, half of them from Middlesex. Hallamshire and Sharples were the only clubs from the north of England, the former again reaching the last eight and again scratching. To prevent the competition from failing completely, in 1891 the LTA made some rule changes. Affiliated clubs could now take part without paying the 10s entrance fee, and the structure of the divisions was amended. Thanks to the efforts of A. Copson Peake, the Yorkshire LTA secretary, the county now had control of its own sub-division. Of the 34 clubs that entered twelve were from Yorkshire. In the first round Hallamshire walked over flu-affected Bradford, then went on to beat Huddersfield, Headingley, and Hull in the final. They could now consider themselves the champion club of Yorkshire. Unfortunately, in the next round, the semi-final of the North of England Division, several of the Hallamshire players could not spare enough time to make the round-trip to play Shipcote in Gateshead, so the Sheffield team scratched. That, as far as Sheffield and indeed the whole competition were concerned, was the high water mark. In the next two years the number of entries fell back to pre-1891 levels and Hallamshire were twice beaten by Hull.

Clubs galore

Although Hallamshire embraced the LTA Challenge Cup competition, being one of only three clubs to enter every year, they were the only Sheffield club to enter at all. This was not a reflection of any lack of interest in inter-club matches, or of any lack of clubs. Most clubs shied away from the national competition because of the strength of the opposition and perhaps the long travel distances. Tennis was still very popular and by the late 1880s and into the '90s there had been a considerable increase in the number of local clubs. There is little information about most of the clubs not already mentioned, so here are two lists. First, all known clubs in Sheffield:

Abbeydale	Carbrook (Church?)	Rustlings
All Saints' Church	Chapelton	Sharrow
Attercliffe Parish Church	Dam House	Sharrow Lane Board School
Attercliffe Wesleyan	Darnall Bowling & LTC	Sheffield LTC
Audrey	Duchess Road Board School	Sheffield & Hallamshire
Birkendale	Ecclesfield	Sheffield High School
Botanical Gardens	Emmanuel (Church?) (Attercliffe?)	Sheffield Law Students
Bradfield	Grimesthorpe Board School	Sheffield Teachers
Brightside Board School	Lyndhurst	Sheffield Press Club
Brincliffe	Meersbrook	Springfield Board School
Brookhill	Moorhead	Thorncliffe
Broomfield	Nether Hallam	Tinsley Cricket & LTC
Burgoyne Road	Owler Lane Board School	Victoria (Attercliffe)
Burncross	Pitsmoor	Woodhouse

There is less information about the area around Sheffield. The list below probably should include more village clubs.

Barnsley	Carlton (Barnsley)	Conisbrough Cricket & LTC
Barnsley & District Conservative Club	Cavendish (Chesterfield)	Doncaster
Beighton	Chesterfield	Doncaster & Barnsdale Archery & LTC
Buxton	Clifton (Rotherham)	

Doncaster Cricket & LTC	Old Whittington	Royston
Doncaster YMCA	Oldcotes	Staveley
Dronfield	Penistone	Swinton
Grasshoppers (Rotherham)	Pickwick (Whittington)	Tideswell
Greasbrough	Rawmarsh & Parkgate	Wath Athletic
Grimethorpe	Renishaw Hall Bowling & LTC	Workshop (club name unknown)
Hoyland (& District?)	Rotherham	
Mexborough	Rotherham College	

Most of these clubs played matches, the smaller ones usually choosing opponents not far from home. Only the stronger clubs would venture further afield. The standard arrangement for inter-club contests was teams of three pairs (men, women or mixed) who would play the best of three sets against each opposing pair. Smaller clubs, with fewer than three courts, might play with only two pairs, though the Botanical Gardens, with their two hard courts, normally played with three pairs. In one home match they had four pairs, though each one played only two opposing pairs.

The “fair sex”

Women were devotees of lawn tennis since its very early days and yet they do not appear very often in this account. In the early years most women who excelled at tennis did so despite being restricted by unsuitable clothing. Thanks to the efforts of the Rational Dress Society (founded in 1881), many began to wear looser garments which allowed them to move more freely. But while the “fair sex” – as they were frequently called by men – might be keen players or active tea makers, they were not often involved with the organisation of the game. That, as with the running of pretty much everything else, was seen by Victorian men as their natural role. Most tennis club committees were therefore all-male. There were some exceptions: Pitsmoor, for example, had two female committee members in the mid-1880s.

More often than not tennis was seen as a good healthy pastime for girls and young women, but not all were able to enjoy its benefits. “Captain Cuttle”, the *Independent’s* new tennis correspondent, took an enlightened view:

It cannot be denied that a great improvement has already been wrought in the physique of ladies whose circumstances enable them to indulge freely in the game. Unfortunately the class of young women who most need it have few facilities for its indulgence. A game at tennis two or three times a week would do much to counteract the baneful influence – as regards health – of the work, and the conditions under which their work is performed, of thousands of females in Sheffield who follow sedentary occupations in shops, workrooms and factories. To a very considerable extent lawn tennis is a game for the well-to-do, and the philanthropically disposed might, with immense advantage to the English race, make an effort to place facilities for its indulgence within the reach of every class. I am so strongly convinced of the hygienic value of the game that I should like to see its advantages and pleasures enjoyed alike by rich and poor. Will employers of female labour take the hint?
(*Independent* 12 May 1892)

He didn’t suggest that clubs should be more welcoming or that public courts be provided. Later, the Captain reported a favourable response from philanthropists, noting that many employers with a large female workforce agreed that tennis would be beneficial. However, it seems that at this time few companies would buy land to use as sports grounds, and those who had gone to great expense to construct the necessary facilities were in constant fear of displacement. Security of tenure was lacking, with speculative builders constantly wooing landowners (a problem faced by many tennis clubs). What progress was made is not clear, but the department store Cole Brothers had set up the Star Athletic Association, with a tennis section, by 1903.

A local association and league

Match play among clubs had been flourishing for nearly ten years, when a significant step was taken. On Friday 6 March 1891, at the Clarence Hotel, High Street, delegates of six prominent clubs decided to establish the Sheffield Lawn Tennis Association. Two representatives of each club formed the committee: Charles F. Bennett, now with Rustlings, was elected chairman, Sydney G. Edwards (Pitsmoor) was appointed secretary and treasurer. The other clubs were: Abbeydale, Audrey, Brincliffe and Nether Hallam. The main purpose of the meeting was to inaugurate a league competition for the member clubs. As far as we know, this was the first ever inter-club tennis league. Although not mentioned in the report of the SLTA's formation, which listed the men's fixtures, a ladies' league was also formed – probably the first ever organised inter-club tennis competition for women – comprising three of the clubs. Sir Henry Watson, already president of Hallamshire and Pitsmoor, scored a hat-trick of tennis presidencies when the Association invited him to take on the same role.

Hallamshire, however, were not invited to join the Association: a special resolution passed by the committee explained that this was because the club did not play against local teams and they were so strong that other clubs would not have a chance against them. "Captain Cuttle" took a dim view: "It is like having a race from which all good runners are excluded" (*Independent* 7 May 1891). He also predicted that Rustlings would win the league. Brincliffe and Nether Hallam, he suggested would be weakened by players with dual memberships playing for other clubs. Even though home and away matches were to be played, the member clubs continued to play some friendly matches.

The format of league matches differed from that normally played in inter-club matches. Teams still consisted of six players but each of the three couples played doubles only against one opposing pair, and there was also a round of six singles matches, both being the best of three sets. Men's and ladies' matches followed this format (which was often used in inter-county matches). Not all the ladies' matches were played and it is unclear what the arrangement was – possibly home and away twice. Rustlings, as predicted, turned out to be the strongest club, finishing as champions of both leagues, the men winning every match.

Men's League					Ladies' League				
	Pld	Won	Lost	Pts		Pld	Won	Lost	Pts
Rustlings	10	10	0	10	Rustlings	5	4	1	4
Abbeydale	10	6	4	6	Brincliffe	5	3	2	3
Pitsmoor	10	6	4	6	Pitsmoor	4	0	4	0
Audrey	10	5	5	5					
Brincliffe	10	2	8	2					
Nether Hallam	10	1	9	1					

During the season a men's team representing the Association played a match against Hallamshire at Hunter's Bar. The SLTA team included three players from Rustlings and one each from Abbeydale, Brincliffe and Pitsmoor. Perhaps Hallamshire were not offended by their their exclusion from the Association but they did put out a very strong team, which easily beat the visitors without dropping a set, in front of a large gathering of spectators. Such matches, of men's and women's teams, continued until about 1901, with matches against Hull LTC and Leeds Athletic, as well as Hallamshire.

Some significant changes took place in 1893. The committee decided to allow clubs within a twelve-mile radius of Sheffield to join and to change the name of the organisation to the Sheffield and District Lawn Tennis Association. It was decided to reduce the number of matches played by abandoning the home and away system in the men's league. The Botanical Gardens Club was admitted to membership. In the ladies' league matches were nearly always played home and away as there were rarely more than three or four teams. In 1895 Hallamshire were accepted and entered their reserve team in the league. John Parker Marsh became a vice president in 1896.

Ernest Black

When the Association was formed it was hoped that league competition would help to raise the general standard of play. At the annual meetings it was felt that this was happening. One player, who would even go on to eclipse the achievements of David Davy, started his career at Brincliffe. Ernest Black helped the club to their only men's league championship in 1894. He also played his part in the Association teams that turned the tables on Hallamshire in their annual match. After losing the first two contests, the league players notched up successive victories from 1893 to 1895. However, by 1896, Black was a county player and to be eligible had to be a member of the only local club affiliated to the Yorkshire LTA: Hallamshire. In that year's annual SDLTA versus Hallamshire match he helped the latter to re-assert their dominance. He was a regular county player for about ten years from 1895.

Black was a keen tournament player and frequently distinguished himself. His outstanding local achievement was to win the Yorkshire singles championship seven times from 1897 to 1905, a run interrupted twice by his great rival Ernest Watson of Chapel Allerton, though Black was runner-up in 1904. In 1899 he beat David Davy in the final. His last victory, in 1905, perhaps fittingly, was at the Hallamshire tournament. Black also won the men's doubles on three occasions and was runner-up several times. Beyond the local scene, he took part in many important tournaments, including Wimbledon. He was Scottish singles champion in 1899, coming second in 1897, 1898 and 1901. At Scarborough he won the North of England championship in 1899 and 1902. By 1900 he had established himself as one of the top six British players and was set for an international honour.

After his Harvard University tennis team had completed a successful American tour, Dwight F. Davis put up a trophy for international competition. James Dwight (the Brincliffe tournament winner), then president of the United States Lawn Tennis Association sent out a challenge which the LTA accepted. With the strongest players, particularly the Doherty brothers unavailable, Ernest Black, was selected for the British Isles team, along with Arthur W. Gore and Herbert Roper Barrett. The first International Lawn Tennis Challenge (as the Davis Cup was originally called) took place in August 1900 at the Longwood Cricket Club, Boston, Massachusetts. As today, the format of the contest was four singles and one doubles. The first match, in which Black played Davis, started promisingly, with the Sheffield man taking the first set. But the American had it all his own way after that and Black lost the next three sets. Gore lost the second singles match, then Black and Barrett went down in straight sets in the doubles. The Britons, it seems, were bamboozled by the "American twist" service, and though Barrett complained of the heat, the net and the condition of the grass, critics suggested that the team had come expecting an easy victory.

Decline

By the mid-1890s the first great wave of enthusiasm for tennis had passed its peak and those who were not devoted to the game or let themselves be carried by the winds of fashion, found other interests, notably cycling and golf. There was even a revival of croquet. Pat-ball, garden party tennis was losing popularity. Keen players carried on as before and kept the higher levels of the game on a fairly steady course, but clubs with rent to pay and courts to maintain could not sustain themselves with only a small band of enthusiastic members. Of the 40 or so tennis clubs that had been established in Sheffield it seems that many had closed by the end of the century. The picture is unclear, however, as coverage of tennis in the local newspapers declined, with dedicated columns being dropped after 1893.

Today we have an abundance of coaches, children have many opportunities to learn to play tennis and compete at different levels, there are many public facilities, and associations strive to popularise the game. In the Victorian era professional coaches were practically unheard of, children of wealthy families might have had access to private courts, and some, mostly girls, had opportunities to play at the more exclusive schools. While municipal courts were gradually appearing in some parts of

the country, there was little hope of finding one in late Victorian Sheffield. The Yorkshire LTA looked after the interests of the serious player: the county tournament, inter-county matches, its annual southern tour. In 1900 there were 17 affiliated clubs. Had anyone mentioned “grass roots development”, it would be assumed they were talking about care of the tennis lawn. But things would change.

In the Sheffield Association, the hope that the number of clubs would increase was not realised. Abbeydale, after winning the men’s league in 1892, continued for one more year before dropping out. The Botanical Gardens team played in the league for only two years and closed when the Gardens were brought into public ownership in 1898. A further setback came after the 1900 season when the Brincliffe Club closed. A premature report of the demise of Nether Hallam at the Association’s annual meeting in 1901 was quickly denied by the club’s secretary, W. Eadon. The club dropped out of the league in 1901 – leaving only four men’s teams – but returned in 1902, not long before its eventual demise.

Hallamshire crisis

The Sheffield and Hallamshire Club had to face a number of problems, including a threat to its existence. As an omen of things to come, in December 1894 the wall on the eastern side of the ground was blown down during a storm, forcing the club to raise money for repairs. Although this did not break the bank, in the following years the club was running at an annual deficit. Membership was declining as the original shareholders faded away. A meeting was called in April 1898 to tackle the problem. Thomas Gould said that the first subscribers had either been keen players or had enough interest to buy shares to support the club. Part of the reason for the club’s decline in popularity, he argued, was the attraction of cycling and golf. Another was that young men were reluctant to lay out £7 before being able to play. He proposed that new members should be admitted on payment of an annual subscription, without the obligation of holding ordinary shares. But Harry Parker Marsh said that the real reason for the falling membership was the tendency of men to play in cliques. This airing of an unpalatable truth met with general agreement and the motion was passed. The change was made at an extraordinary general meeting in March 1899, along with a measure to allow any properly introduced visitors (formerly called “strangers”) to play, not only those who lived within a ten-mile radius of Sheffield Parish Church.

At this time the club had expanded its activities to help the finances. There was a ball at Endcliffe Hall associated with the annual tournament. In the winter the ground was used for hockey, and there were regular gymkhanas, including a children’s bicycle gymkhana. Despite all this, another extraordinary general meeting was held “to consider the advisability of winding up the club, and of taking steps to sell the club”. There was a strong desire to keep the club going and several schemes to improve the finances were discussed. Finally a resolution was adopted: “That steps be taken to wind up the club, unless, within three months from the present date a feasible scheme for carrying it on be formulated” (*Independent* 8 November 1899).

In January 1900 the club issued a proposal to Audrey, Brincliffe and Rustlings that they should form a joint committee, along with the home club, which would lease the Hallamshire ground. However, at Hallamshire’s annual (ordinary and extraordinary) meeting in February, the replies from the other clubs proved to be discouraging. All of them objected to a clause in the proposed agreement which would give existing Hallamshire shareholders and their families privileges the newcomers would be denied. The scheme was dropped. Overall the accounts showed a surplus for the year, but it was considered unsatisfactory that the ordinary activities of the club were not sufficiently lucrative. However, when Mr Longden suggested various economies and the reduction of the men’s subscription, it was decided to keep the club running for another year.

Turning points

Although things were looking bad for club tennis, some developments had bucked the prevailing trend: the Moorgate Club in Rotherham was founded in 1896, at the height of the cycling craze. However, in 1901 the *Telegraph* suggested that: "There is ... every prospect of things brightening up again, and much of the old interest being revived during the coming season" (3 April 1901). And so it proved, with Hallamshire receiving an influx of new members. The open tournament had, for reasons unknown, lapsed the previous year. But with the help of the other SDLTA clubs, the 1901 meeting turned out to be a great success. Financially, Hallamshire was suddenly on a much firmer footing and all talk of winding up was put aside.

Following the death of Sir Henry Watson in 1901, John Parker Marsh became president of the Hallamshire Club. Charles F. Bennett, leading light of the Rustlings Club, was appointed SDLTA president.

Some readers will know that the SDLTA's league ceased for some years and may believe that the Association went into hibernation. The first is certainly true, the second probably is not. The SDLTA survived the decline of the mid- to late 1890s but, as we have seen, the number of league teams was falling and perhaps interest in league play was waning. At the annual meeting in 1903 it was decided to abandon the league in favour of a tournament. It was held during the second half of June at the Pitsmoor ground and included seven events, all but one handicapped. C.A. Bartlett, the current secretary of the Association, won the "open" (i.e. level) singles. Things seemed to be looking up after the following year's tournament. "Looker-on", the *Telegraph's* sports columnist, reported: "It has been a distinct success and in many of the events play has reached a capital standard. Those who follow the game closely tell me that lawn tennis is looking up in the district, and that the Hallamshire Club has recently secured quite a number of new and ardent members." (13 June 1904). So Hallamshire were still on the rise, and the same year the membership of Audrey LTC was still up to the limit of 60. At the Rustlings annual meeting in 1905, the club was described as flourishing, 25 new members having been elected. Matches between the SDLTA clubs were still being played, though not as many as in the mid-1880s to early 1890s. And, by the time of the 1904 tournament, there were only five clubs in the SDLTA: Audrey, Hallamshire, Pitsmoor, Rustlings and a newcomer: Millhouses (formed 1900, renamed Grove in 1935). The Association tournaments continued at least to 1907 and probably till 1909, the year before the league was re-started.

County Championships in Sheffield

As the new century went on, although the Hallamshire club continued to flourish the annual open tournament (as in 1900) again lapsed in 1902, for reasons that remain unclear. At the 1903 annual meeting it was said to be "the Coronation and other causes" (*Telegraph* 10 February 1903). Nevertheless, the tournament also flourished and in 1905 the club was given the honour of hosting the Yorkshire championships. The *Yorkshire Post* (20 June 1905) noted the excellent condition of the twelve grass courts, despite the long drought of that summer. Comparing the venue with the attractions of "fashionable health resorts", Scarborough and Harrogate, where the event had previously been held, Hallamshire was "on the outskirts of one of the smokiest towns of the county". But "the ground is pleasantly sheltered by the Endcliffe Woods", and "it is claimed that the Sheffield enclosure is the best in Yorkshire for a big event like the present" – at least from a player's point of view.

There were at this time only three Yorkshire championship events (which ran alongside the normal tournament events): the men's singles, as previously mentioned, was won by Sheffield's Davis Cup man, Ernest Black. Two other Sheffield players, C.A. Bartlett and Reg Webster, reached the final of the men's doubles. The Ladies' singles was won by Miss B.M. Holder of Hull, the first in a run of six victories. In 1909 and 1910 she beat Katie May Clegg of Sheffield in the final, the latter also finishing second in the two following years. To accommodate men who could not play until after

office hours the club introduced the Five O'clock Handicap in 1910.

By 1909 roller skating had once more gripped the public imagination and the Hallamshire Club was approached by a syndicate looking to lease part of the ground to build a skating rink. The building would in time become the property of the club and it was proposed that it could be used for indoor courts at certain times. The side next to the grass courts would be partly removable to form a grandstand and verandah. A special meeting of shareholders was almost unanimous in declining the proposal. Already in existence, a court for the game of fives was little used, so at the annual meeting of 1910 it was decided to demolish it.

Public courts

Tennis was becoming less exclusive and all over the country councils were responding to the demand for public courts. Sheffield was perhaps a little slow to follow this trend but courts started to appear from about 1905, with those at Crookes Valley Recreation Ground and Weston Park being among the earliest. H.E. Bridgewater, a resident of Hillsborough, bemoaned the loss of the existing court when it was used for flower beds after the park was acquired by the city. In calling for the court to be restored, he wrote: "Hillsbro' rarely asks for anything, usually being well content with the crumbs that fall from the Corporation's table. I wonder whether they would drop us this crumb for next summer?" (*Independent* 28 July 1906). Hillsborough Park did get courts a while later, though probably not on the flower beds. In Rotherham there were public courts in Clifton Park and Boston Park by 1907.

Progress was made and more courts gradually appeared. There was no shortage of players, but there were some hazards: "The turf is kept in good condition, and the only condition likely to mar the joy of the player is the number of urchins, after school hours, who hang around the nets on the look out for an opportunity to purloin a stray ball. Despite this, the enthusiasts have a good time, and, on a fine afternoon, the courts are seldom vacant" (*Independent* 7 July 1909).

By 1913 there were also courts at Firth Park and Whiteley Woods. Grass and gravel courts were provided, but there were complaints about their maintenance. Rackets and tennis shoes could be hired, but players were unhappy at their condition, as well as that of the nets. The Parks Committee blamed the players for not taking care of the equipment. Nevertheless, as people became aware of the health benefits of exercise, there was a clamour for more sports facilities of all kinds. In tennis it was recognised that Sheffield was lagging behind other towns. But things would improve after the war, with more courts and the formation of parks clubs (though it is likely that clubs had been formed in Firth Park and Hillsborough Park by 1914).

A new wave of clubs

Although many of the clubs from the first wave of enthusiasm for tennis had fallen by the wayside, the renewed interest which came in the new century brought many new ones to replace them. In Sheffield, of the clubs still in existence today, Dore and Totley (then in Derbyshire) had been formed by 1904, Brentwood was formed in 1907, Fulwood in 1910, and Ecclesall was probably formed in 1914. There was a new or revitalised Abbeydale Club by 1909. Beechill probably used the courts previously used by Broomfield, before moving to the site of the old Nether Hallam Club. Nether Edge (formed 1911) would rise to prominence after the war. Some others were: Atlas and Norfolk Works, Crookes Church, Darnall Church Institute (formed 1909), Ecclesall Hall, Handsworth, Heeley Bank, Mount Pleasant (Chapelton), Norfolk (formed 1906), Norton, Oughtibridge, Pyebank Teachers and St Cuthbert's (Shiregreen).

To the north-west were: Cudworth, Dodworth, Hoyland Common Wesley Guild, Stocksbridge and Wombwell Main. In 1910 there was a Yorkshire YMCA League in which Barnsley and Hoyland Common took part. To the south: Bamford and Bradwell (both formed 1905); Creswell, New

Whittington (formed 1909), Speetley (Barlborough) and Welbeck Abbey. To the east: Balby, Denaby, Kimberworth, Mexborough (a new club formed in 1913), Rotherham YMCA, Silverwood, Swinton and Thrybergh. In Doncaster: Danum, Plant Works and Priory Place.

League revival

W.J. Furnival of Audrey and Hallamshire, as secretary of the SDLTA, was given much of the credit for reviving the Men's League in 1910. The match format was changed to the standard three pairs playing the best of three sets against each opposing pair. Eight clubs took part, finishing in this order: Rustlings, Hallamshire Reserves, Audrey, Dore & Totley, Pitsmoor, Millhouses, Norfolk, Bechill.

Ernest Hampson played at Millhouses, then helped Rustlings to win the league championship three times, before moving to Hallamshire and receiving county honours. He became secretary of the SDLTA in 1911 and from then on the Association grew steadily. With more clubs joining, a second men's division was introduced in 1912, followed by a third in 1914. The Ladies' League was restored in 1912, Hallamshire Reserves becoming the first winners. Clubs from outside Sheffield, such as Mexborough, Moorgate, Rotherham (Masbrough) and Worksop, became members. By 1921 there were 22 clubs in the Association, with three men's and two ladies' divisions in the league. At a concert in 1922, in recognition of his efforts, Hampson received a gold watch, a grandfather clock and a rocking chair.

The Great War, whatever its consequences for society at large, for tennis it was a break in the revival which continued with ever more vigour when hostilities ceased. More clubs were formed, including many on sports grounds provided by the larger companies. Councils bowed to public demand, providing more courts in parks and recreation grounds. New associations came into being: Mexborough and District (1920), Sheffield Parks (1920), Elsecar and District (1921), Doncaster and District (about 1924), Sheffield Works (1924), with leagues and annual tournaments. An annual local tournament started in Chesterfield in 1921. Doncaster LTC started its own open tournament in 1922, as did a new Brincliffe Club in 1926. Hallamshire joined the newly formed Yorkshire League in 1921 and continued to hold its open tournament till 1939.

Postscript: Timeshift

In 1922, at the concert referred to above, Ernest Hampson mentioned that the SDLTA had been formed in 1891. Some vagueness had set in when he wrote an article about tennis leagues for the 1925 Yorkshire LTA *Handbook*, stating that the formation was "over thirty-five years ago". Hampson was still going strong in 1939, even proposing a toast at the dinner when the Association celebrated its golden jubilee – two years too early. By 1989, when the centenary was celebrated and a history published, the Brincliffe tournament had moved from 1885 to 1889. Memories fade, minute books are lost, but newspaper reports remain.

Acknowledgements and sources

John Andrews first suggested a history of tennis in Victorian Sheffield. Bob Lamb thought that it would be better to go up to 1914 and expand the area covered to reflect the current catchment area of the SDLTA. Inspired by my research, John produced a number of spin-off articles which appear on the SDLTA website. This history has been enhanced by John's genealogical research and field trips to explore some of Sheffield's tennis "archaeology".

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