

History of tennis at The Terrace

The Terrace in Boston Spa was originally built as a hotel around 1788 to cater to the growing number of visitors to the spa town, following the discovery of a mineral spring in 1744 and the improvement of the local road network in 1753. However, the hotel was unsuccessful and in 1794 became a boys boarding school for 30 – 40 years before it was converted into private residences. The building is a significant part of Boston Spa's history and known for its surviving Georgian architecture.



Arthur Thomas Holmes, a solicitor by profession, moved into Beechfield on The Terrace in Boston Spa and by 1921 established grass tennis courts on the land that belonged to his property.

Oral tradition has it that he wanted a respectable activity to attract potential suitors for one or more of his four daughters, Margaret, Evelyn, Emily and Ida. The latter two did marry and so he may have achieved half of his expectations! This would be the beginning of Terrace lawn tennis.

The courts were established on a bed of clinker, of which there was plentiful supply in the days of steam locomotives. This provided excellent drainage which remains a feature of the courts today.

In 1921 Arthur Thomas Holmes granted a year to year lease of the courts to 'the Trustees of The Boston Spa Lawn Tennis Club.' The rent was £15 per annum.

The minutes of a Club Committee meeting in 1925 refers to 'The Terrace Tennis Club', the first internal reference I have for that name. An insurance renewal policy dated 27th June 1931 from North British and Mercantile Insurance Company Limited refers to the policy holder as 'Terrace Lawn Tennis Club.' This is the earliest external record I can find which mentions a Terrace Lawn Tennis Club (and as a sobering thought about inflation, the sum assured was £30 and the annual premium was 3 shillings and threepence!) In 1932 a rent receipt provided by Arthur Thomas Holmes refers to 'Terrace Lawn Tennis Club Boston Spa'.

In 1933 a new lease was granted to the Club by Arthur Thomas Holmes, this time for a fixed term of 3 years with an option to renew for up to 3 years thereafter.

So, our Club was formed at the latest in 1921 and was generally known as The Terrace Lawn Tennis Club. Arthur and one of his daughters were certainly members too.

By 1925 there were certainly Club Rules, referred to in minutes of committee meetings, which were amended from time to time and by 1941 were printed as small booklets. Printers Geo. A Jennings Ltd of Leeds supplied 150 of these for the sum of £1/17/6.

Membership fees by 1940 were £1/10 for senior playing members, £3/10 for family membership and £0/10/6 for tea members. There were no separate junior memberships, presumably because they were expected to be accompanied by their parents under the family membership, but by 1949 junior memberships were available (up to 17 year-olds) for an annual subscription of 10s and on reaching the age of 17 they could pay the difference in fees to become a senior member. However, while a junior member they had to play with last season's balls!

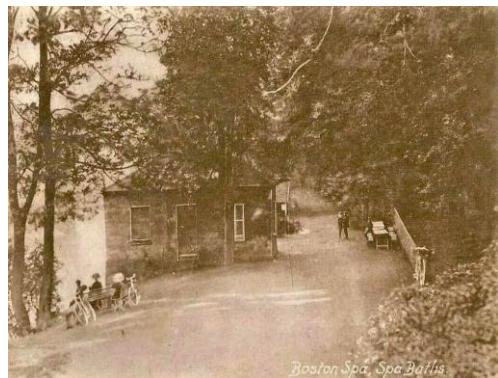
Arthur Thomas Holmes died in 1937 and was buried at the church of St. Mary the Virgin Boston Spa.

Claude Roulston Barran who was a Trustee of the Club and, together with his wife, a member since at least 1935, and Alan Lomas Middleton, who moved into The Terrace, purchased the tennis land from the executors of Arthur Thomas Holmes' Estate, each paying £400.

Following Claude's death in 1942, Alan Lomas Middleton acquired his interest in the land and became the sole freeholder.

It's clear from the subsequent conveyances of the land that a covenant exists to ensure that it can only be used for tennis and other recreational activities. It is likely that this was incorporated in the Deed relating to the sale by Arthur Thomas Holmes' executors to Claude Roulston Barran and Alan Lomas Middleton.

Claude and Alan were active players in the Club and helped to run it as committee members including roles of Chairman and Secretary, also President. Other notable figures were Major Foulds and Major Price, mentioned below, and Robert Francis Tetley (Bob Tetley) who lived in Beechfield on The Terrace and together with his family were active members for many years.



From my conversations with our older members it is clear that teas and refreshments were the second most important feature of playing tennis.

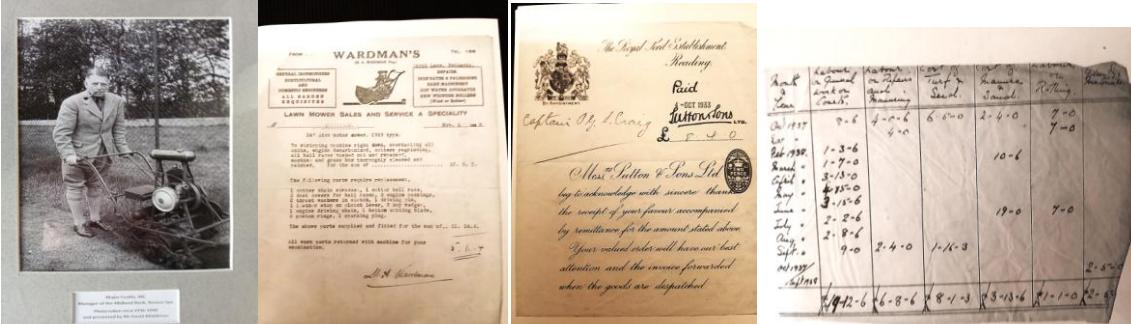
And the tea rooms (known as 'the Appleyards') at the Spa Baths, over the wall and along the riverside path, were the principal provider. A certain Harold Appleyard was the leaseholder of the Spa buildings and clearly was still so after the Gascoigne Estate sold them in 1911. A couple of names of people who at some time ran the tea rooms were a Mrs Murray and a Mr Wayman. Jugs of tea and Chelsea buns were brought up. Mr Wayman used to bring them up and leave them on the riverside wall by the Terrace. In other years players would go down and fetch them.



The Price sisters, Theodora ('Teddy') and Susan, were daughters of Major Theodore Price (for several years a Committee member, Chairman, and then President of the Club) and Ethel Price (for many years a Committee member), and undertook this duty for quite a while. In 1949 it was agreed that the first member arriving for play on Saturday should walk down to the tea rooms and order the tea. A key for the riverside gate to the path to be kept in the pavilion. The cost of providing teas was covered by the income from 'tea members' (as opposed to 'playing members' or 'family members')

Maintenance of the courts since at least 1930 involved local contractors and suppliers for annual treatment, servicing of equipment and the fencing around the courts. One such contractor was J.C. Schneider of Rockfields Nursery Boston Spa, another was M.A. Wardman & Sons in Wetherby who serviced the mower. Seed was purchased from Sutton & Sons. There were no restrictions on killing worms then and an annual treatment of mowrah meal was also applied.

In 1930 we were employing a Mr Johnson to cut the grass. In 1942 we were paying Scheidner's 1s/3p per hour to do this. In 1953 a Mr Tillet was employed at a rate of 2s/6d per hour. In 1962 we employed a Mr Bowman at a rate of 4s per hour. We still pay a groundsman today, but the rate is somewhat higher!



Members always helped out to minimize expense and one of these was Major Foulds, then the Manager at Midland Bank in Boston Spa and for many years Treasurer of the Club, who is proudly pictured at some time between 1936 and 1945 with our 16" Atco petrol cylinder mower purchased in 1933.



In 1953 the wire fencing was replaced on the existing posts and then in 1975 the enclosure was substantially reconstructed using angle-iron posts.

The pavilion was erected at some time after the Club was formed and in 1930 a (new?) shed was added. In 1938/39 a veranda was added to the pavilion. A new pavilion was erected in 2006/7, designed to replicate as far as possible the character and appearance of the original one.

During WWII the courts were still used, as they were only a short walk from anywhere in the village, but the Club, temporarily at least, lost many members who did not live in Boston Spa because of petrol rationing and lack of bus routes and/or were unable to play because of civil (e.g. ARP), or home defence/TA duties. The club was able to obtain petrol vouchers for 1 gallon per month for its lawnmower. The grounds were not requisitioned for growing crops.

Commencing in 1939, during the War and up to 1949 the Club was assessed for income tax at the rate of five shillings in the pound on taxable income.

There was concern that the courts would have to close because of lack of income to cover costs, but this did not happen. In 1941 the committee decided to allow armed force members on leave to play for free. A public air-raid shelter was built in the roadside corner of our grounds in 1940, commissioned by the West Riding County Council. It appears that the building contractor to the Council used 700 gallons of water to mix the cement and which was charged by Wetherby District Water Company to the Club and led to a dispute between all 4 parties. I do not know the outcome.

In 1970 Alan Lomas Middleton died and his estate passed to his wife Averil Mary Middleton, who granted a 4 year lease to the Club.

Mary Middleton died in May 1994, leaving her estate to her sons David Middleton, John Ieuan Middleton and Robert Michael Middleton. David and John both lived in Boston Spa and were playing members. David was Chairman from 1971 to 1985 and remained a steadfast friend and supporter of the Club up to his death in April 2023.

Social events, as now, were a feature of the Club's activities and were organised or hosted by members, such as one party in March 1938 which commanded a contribution of 2s/6d for each of the 56 guests and required them to bring a bottle.

In the '50s and '60s dinner dances were arranged at the Trustees Hall (now the Village Hall) in Boston Spa. Later, venues in Collingham, Clifford and Tadcaster were used. Food was organised and provided by the Committee who also arranged for a local licensee to run the bar and a band to play, one being Albert Honeman and The Encore Players of Wetherby, another Ted Kassell and his Musicians of Harrogate, another the Esso Steel Band. One of the apparent problems with the dances was the occasional lack of sufficient cutlery. In 1963 we asked the Crown Hotel to supply as many spoons as possible to avoid the inconvenience of members having to bring their own! The Crown Hotel in Harrogate hosted our Dances between 1987 and 1989. Alan Bennet was there one year and mentioned us in his broadcast memoirs.

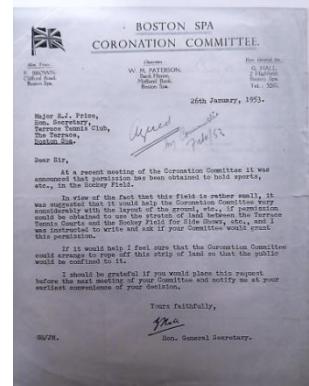
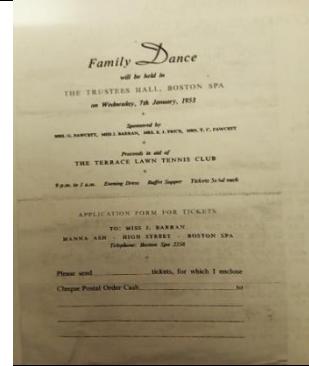
More recently the Club has organized barn dances, jazz evenings, safari suppers, bridge afternoons, quiz nights, monthly Saturday barbecues, Sunday family days and Sunday boules, booze & bbq. We also have a monthly '50's Club Draw'. It may not be coincidental that Anne Wivell, who ran our first Tombola in 1977, is still running our Draw!

The Club has always associated itself with the local community and supporting events. In 1953 the Club made its grounds available for the celebration of the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, and has supported the Boston Spa Festival in recent years.

Visitors wishing to play at the Club have always been welcome. In earlier years the process was a lot more formal and required conformance to Club Rules and agreement by the Committee at a meeting. Also, visitors had to either bring their own balls or purchase them from the Club.

In the 1930s, 40s and 50s the Boston Spa Young Conservatives Association played on our courts for lawn tennis practice which helped them reach the finals of the Barkston Ash Tennis Finals. The 'Junior Imperial League' (under-17 members of the aforesaid) were allowed the use of two courts one evening a week.

Much more recently the Club amended its Rules to make it easier for visitors. The Yorkshire Ladies tennis team have practiced on our courts in preparation for the County tournament at Eastbourne.



In 1995 David, John and Michael Middleton granted a long lease to John Rose, Terence Donovan and Dai Davis, who all lived on the Terrace and who granted a long sub-lease to Robert Wivell and Jane Hedley as Trustees of The Terrace Lawn Tennis Club.

Tennis at the Club has predominantly been social. But competitive events have featured. For example in 1930 matches were arranged with Wetherby, Wetherby Lane, Harrogate and Chapeltown Clubs. An open 'American Tournament' was hosted each year and a Club American Handicap Tournament was also a regular event. A Club Tournament featured in the 50's, 60s 70s and 80s. In later years following Mary Middleton's death a commemorative (open) tournament 'The Mary Middleton' was held each August / September. This photo shows David Middleton presenting the winners' prize.



In 2016 the Club added a boules (petanque) court which was laid out by our Chairman Richard Parkin and his son. In 2019 croquet was introduced. The Club changed its name to The Terrace Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club in 2020. Since then we have a healthy croquet membership and at least one croquet player on the committee.



David Middleton died in 2023. At this point it is worth noting that David Middleton had royal connections following the marriage of Kate Middleton, his second cousin once removed, to Prince William. David attended the wedding ceremony at Westminster Abbey in 2011.

My sincere thanks to all those who have helped me record some sort of history of our Club. In particular I would mention Jane Hedley, who kindly agreed to help me start it all, the late David Middleton who contributed before his death the following year, Robert and Anne Wivell for their support and information, and Pam Fraser for preserving so many records and documents which otherwise would have been lost.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you wish to add information or correct, anything.

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