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Robert J. Lake, Carol A. Osborne

Grass roots

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Joyce Kay
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Lawn tennis can be played and enjoyed by boys and girls, men and women, of all degrees of excellence and of all ages. … [It] flourishes in the clubs, the schools and the public parks and… can be played and enjoyed almost literally from the cradle to the grave. It is a recreational amusement played not too seriously but with just sufficient competitive interest to make it attractive. The great beauty of the game of lawn tennis is that, like cricket, it’s a game for everyone.

This was the opinion of J.C. Smyth (1953), tennis correspondent of the *Sunday Times* from 1946 to 1951. Perhaps these sentiments help to explain why historical research in tennis has focused on the professional, competitive and elite aspects of the sport.

Well-respected general histories of British sport in the twentieth century have continued to emphasise the upper-middle- or middle-class roots of tennis, harking back to the days when it was played on suburban and vicarage lawns (Hargreaves 1994; Hill 2002; Polley 1998). Even when opportunities for mass participation have been acknowledged, the image of posh tennis has lingered on, together with the suggestion that snobbishness within private clubs and the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) have contributed in no small way to Britain’s failure to find “stars” (see: Lake 2008; Walker 1989). However, tennis is essentially for amateurs; like golf, there are very few opportunities for individuals to make a living on a limited professional circuit. More attention is needed on the grass-roots game developed in the mid-twentieth century and the role played by a variety of clubs. As far as tennis is concerned, we are still unclear ‘about the organizations of sport at levels below national bodies’ (Maclean 2008, p.49).

A brief history of grass-roots tennis in the 60 years after 1918 illustrates its fluctuating fortunes. Recovering rapidly from wartime privations, it reached out into new communities during the inter-war years. This was the heyday of two under-researched sports spaces, public parks and workplaces, and ‘tennis for the millions’ was said to be the cry in Britain (Sheffield and District LTA, 1989, p.17). Some clubs suffered during the depression years of the early 1930s, and war ensured that others closed their gates for good. Although the immediate post-war period saw the formation of new clubs, particularly in schools, the sport was undermined from
the mid-1950s by alternative leisure opportunities and increasingly poor facilities, and was over-
whelmed by indifference, escalating costs and vandalism in the 1960s. Some clubs fought to bal-
ance the books by attracting more — and younger — members, and improving both the playing
and the social environment; others were not equal to the task. Local authorities failed to main-
tain their courts, and pleas to increase the development of public parks tennis went unheeded,
while workplace sport, in general, began to decline in a changing industrial landscape. By the
early 1970s there was a danger that the “everyone for tennis” optimism of the inter-war years
would revert to the “anyone for tennis” model of the pre-1914 era (see Lusis 1998).

This chapter aims in part to demonstrate the scale of grass-roots involvement in tennis, but
several challenges exist. These include determining accurate numbers for the membership size
of clubs, given the poor records of these in any official documentation, and the number of clubs
specific to a particular county as well as nationally. This includes clubs that were unaffiliated
to the LTA, which in counties like Nottinghamshire in the 1920s may have been as high as
80% (Lusis 1998). Estimates suggest, nationally, that affiliated clubs numbered between 2,500
and 4,500 during the period under investigation, but these figures may have included clubs
connected with schools (see: Walker 1989). It is clearly impossible to determine the how many
people were playing tennis at any given point or the size of the “average” tennis club but, taking
account of the substantial networks of informal organisations throughout Britain, it would seem
that far more tennis was being played than we have been led to believe.

The key sources for this chapter include a combination of official and “amateur” sources,
notably annual LTA handbooks and county LTA histories. Local historians, club secretaries and
long-standing members have used minutes and other documents, personal recollection, inter-
views and newspapers to produce written accounts of their own associations, often to celebrate
a centenary or important milestone. Using all of these sources together with material from com-
pany archives, this chapter demonstrates that tennis in Britain was not only for the privileged,
and opportunities existed for lower-income families to play in public parks and company sports
grounds in the middle decades of the last century. As these facilities were lost, low-cost options
narrowed. Although the maintenance of social exclusivity may have been of paramount concern
to some private clubs, it is suggested that the struggle for survival was likely to be uppermost
in the thoughts of many more. Given the predominance of work that has focused on tennis in
the South, this chapter will give added attention to the Midlands, the North and Scotland. An
overview of grass-roots tennis in Britain from 1918 to 1978 will outline the development of the
sport and attempt to quantify its changing fortunes.

Overview of grass-roots tennis 1918–78

Evidence suggests that tennis was booming throughout Britain in the 1920s. According to
Lusis (1998), existing clubs in Nottinghamshire were ‘bursting at the seams’, and new clubs
opened every year. Of the 270 for which formation dates are known, one-third were started
in the 1920s. Of 51 West of Scotland clubs still in existence in 2004, 14 (27%) were founded
in the 1920s, a higher number than any previous decade (Hunter 2004). Tennis “took off”
in the Colwyn Bay area of North Wales in the early 1920s and the North Wales LTA was
founded in 1925 (Jones 2000, p.10). The number of clubs affiliated to Surrey County LTA
rose from 114 in 1923 to ‘well over 200’ by 1937 (Paish 1996, p.4–5), and in Durham and
Cleveland, affiliated clubs increased from 23 to 71 between 1922 and 1930 (Durham &
Cleveland LTA 1999).

The economic problems of the early 1930s temporarily stalled this expansion. One-off entry
fees at some of the more prestigious clubs were waived, and subscriptions were widely reduced;
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Groundsmen had their hours and wages cut and coaches were let go. A variety of solutions were proposed at different clubs to boost numbers, including Sunday opening, cheaper rates for combined husband/wife or family membership or a broadening of the tennis club to include other sports. Squash courts were built at prestigious venues such as the Priory and Edgbaston clubs in Birmingham and Surbiton in Greater London, while the Hazelwood club in Enfield settled for a putting green and “ping pong” (Edgbaston Priory Club 1975; Hazelwood LTC 2009; Surbiton LT&SC 1981).

The war years brought a host of difficulties. Many clubs suffered financial problems as members were called up to service; some were only kept going by private loans, and others were forced to close. The Hollies club in Nottinghamshire never recovered after a Lancaster bomber came down on its courts (Lusis 1998). Tennis balls were in short supply, many courts became derelict or were ploughed up for use as allotments, and county activities were suspended. Despite these problems, it was not a tale of unmitigated gloom. Land girls helped with ground maintenance at the Radyr LTC near Cardiff (Clark 1989). Clarkston Bowling and Tennis Club in Glasgow kept up morale by hosting dances for servicemen and women on leave, as did Putney LTC in London (Clarkston B&TC 1959; Putney LTC 1979). For others the war brought new members. Padgate Tennis and Bowling Club in Cheshire benefited from overseas military personnel stationed nearby, and the relocation of several government departments to the Colwyn Bay–Llandudno area of North Wales during the war was said to have raised standards in the area clubs (Cheshire LTA 1995; Jones 2000).

A more controversial item was recorded in the history of the Winchester club. Although US service personnel supported fundraising bazaars and dances, the club committee ‘sadly agreed that black officers should not be admitted in order to conform with American custom’ (Mussell, 1994).

The dislocation caused by war left tennis in a run-down state in the 1940s. In Durham and Cleveland, a number of well-known clubs disappeared and it was some time before others could restore their courts to playing condition (Durham & Cleveland LTA 1999). The historian of Surrey LTA, though acknowledging that many clubs had been forced to let their courts become overgrown in wartime, found it ‘amazing’ how quickly they were brought back into use (Paish 1996, p.13).

In Essex, 66 clubs affiliated to the county LTA in 1947 had risen to 144 in 1950; in rural Shropshire, the number of clubs doubled between 1946 and 1948 (Essex LTA 1995). Although some struggled – and some failed – to replace members and repair grounds, new clubs sprung up, mergers were undertaken, and new coaching initiatives were introduced by county LTAs. Those with adequate funds relayed courts instead of trying to repair them, as at Honor Oak in south London and Chapel Allerton in Leeds (Alexander 1965; Chapel Allerton LT&SC 1980). Others, perhaps foreseeing the difficulty of hiring groundsmen in an increasingly competitive job market, replaced their grass with a variety of hard courts requiring less maintenance. Cullercoats LTC was not alone in having to fight with its local authority to get land released from agricultural use back to sport (Angus 1993). In general, however, hopes were high; leagues re-formed and tennis regained its inter-war popularity.

The 1950s saw the sport reach its peak in terms of adult participation and for some clubs this was the ‘golden decade’ (Costelloe 1998, p.10). But problems were already on the horizon. The number of affiliated clubs in Britain fell by almost one-fifth in the 10 years 1956–66, and club and county LTA histories also reflect the downturn in grass-roots tennis throughout the country. In North Wales, tennis was said to be ‘in a parlous state’ by 1964 with ten clubs closing in the previous year (Jones 2000, p.28). The East Gloucestershire LTC in Cheltenham suffered a ‘drastic fall in members’ in 1957 and reduced its annual subscriptions in an effort to attract new
recruits. Presumably this failed to improve matters as it was forced to advertise for members in the local papers in 1964, a fate that had befallen the Winchester club as early as 1952 (Rockett 1985, p.13). Bellahouston LTC, a founder club of the West of Scotland LTA, was forced to close in the late 1960s at the time of the M8 roadworks. Hillhead LTC, swallowed up by extensions to the BBC headquarters in Glasgow, and Liberton LTC in Edinburgh, formed in 1883, were driven to extinction after repeated acts of vandalism (Hunter 2004). Throughout Britain, tennis courts disappeared under blocks of flats, car parks and playgrounds. Small private clubs were squeezed out of existence by the rising costs, increases in local authority rating assessment, compulsory land purchase orders and anti-social behaviour. Worse was to follow in the 1970s with competition from leisure centres and large multi-sport facilities but the decline in public park courts was even more significant for the concept of “everyone for tennis”.

Tennis in public parks

Although there are scattered references to tennis in public parks and open spaces, insufficient is known about this aspect of the sport. Dorothea Chambers, seven-time winner of the Wimbledon singles, referred to opportunities for playing in public parks as early as 1910. In larger urban areas, some tennis courts had been constructed under park improvements schemes before the war – Manchester was said to have 46 courts in one venue alone (Walker 1989).

Seaside resorts often boasted a range of leisure facilities before 1914; an advertisement for Scarborough in 1913 listed three golf courses, five bowling greens and 20 tennis courts as well as sailing and fishing. After the war, town councils were encouraged to promote themselves as tourist destinations as a result of the Health Resorts and Watering Places Act of 1921, and ‘any place with a foothold in the tourist business’ embarked on improvements to their amenities which often included tennis courts, putting and bowling greens, bandstands and paddling pools (Anderson & Swinglehurst 1978, p.16). While these were aimed at visitors, they were obviously available to locals as well, and numerous private clubs were formed to take advantage of these public facilities. For those who could afford it, many larger hotels catered for tennis holidays, some boasting their own professional coach in the summer season. Lowe’s Lawn Tennis Annual for 1935 contains 39 pages of advertisements for ‘the large number of fine hotels with facilities for tennis scattered about Britain, both round the coast and inland’ (Lowe 1935, p.iii).

Much like in the US and Australia, municipal provision continued to grow in the inter-war period in Britain. The Sheffield Parks Association, set up in 1921, was responsible for building ‘hundreds of “parks” courts’ and The Star newspaper sponsored a cup competition (Sheffield & District LTA 1989). The Scottish Public Parks LTA was formed in 1932 by delegates from Edinburgh, Dundee and Glasgow, and moves were underway before 1939 to affiliate to the Scottish LTA. In Edinburgh, the local Evening Dispatch trophy was competed for in the Meadows, a large open space near the centre of Edinburgh; hundreds came to watch the finals. Tennis courts in public parks were said to be packed: ‘you had to book well ahead’ (Robertson 1995, p. 173). Costs were also reasonable: an hour’s bowls or tennis was available for 2d an hour at a time when the average wage was around £3 15s. Converted to current prices, a tennis court could be hired for less than 50p (Jones 1986).

The case of Glasgow is particularly interesting. Glasgow Public Parks LTA, established in 1926, provided ‘a huge amount’ of tennis and had many more courts than the private clubs (Hunter 2004, p.190). It affiliated to the West of Scotland LTA and entered teams in men’s and women’s leagues; it organised six divisions within the parks and played home and away matches. It was said that dozens lined the park courts to watch ordinary folk playing a match and possibly pick up tips, and that youngsters, in particular, learned to play the game this way, by watching.
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With no clubhouse/hospitality facilities, there was no ‘garden party image’ here although the Association did celebrate its silver jubilee in 1951 with a dance at Glasgow City Chambers. But by the early 1970s it had ceased to exist. One reason suggested was that, from the early 1960s, many park players ‘went private’, ‘perhaps because it was cheaper’ (Hunter 2004, 191–2). This was certainly a period in which some local authorities were raising their charges. An article from The Scotsman (23 November 1960) calculated that costs for municipal bowls and golf were now comparable with private clubs ‘where facilities were infinitely superior’. There is no reason to believe that tennis was any different. In 1972 (20 July), the Edinburgh Evening News claimed that the number of players on public bowling greens had more than halved in ten years and that ‘the drift from public greens to private clubs has been going on for years’. For whatever reason, public tennis also became less popular and descriptions of people queuing to play on a park court became distant memories. The Leeds Parks Association, in which ‘many people had their introduction to tennis’, folded in the 1960s during a general decline in tennis, and the courts fell into poor condition (Chapel Allerton LT&SC 1980). Holt and Mason (2000) found that the numbers playing municipal tennis in Birmingham fell by 55% from 1956 to 1964 and although they thought this primarily reflected a lack of coaching facilities it is possible that cost was another factor.

An important link in the above examples is that they all refer to northern areas of Britain. Although the south-east of England is supposed to be the natural heartland of tennis, no references to public parks tennis have been discovered in county histories for Bedfordshire, Surrey and Essex. Lusis (1998) found that Nottingham had no public courts until 1922 when over 60 were built, with many sub-let to small clubs. After the war the sports ground became an industrial estate. The Nottingham Parks LTA was formed at an alternative site in 1950, decades later than those further north, but appears to have closed at a later date in the 1950s. Lake and Lusis (2017) uncovered only a handful of well-supported park associations further south, including the Birmingham Parks LTA, London Parks & Clubs LTA and Brighton & Hove Parks LTA, but there is little evidence of any more. With evidence from the public parks, thus, it is increasingly difficult to reconcile statements such as Holt’s (1996, p.160), that ‘tennis was a suburban, Southern sport not much followed in the North outside of the leafy suburbs of the big cities’.

Tennis in the workplace

Interestingly, detailed research drawn from LTA Official Handbooks during the post-war period, when LTA affiliation was at its highest, shows that approximately 30% of private clubs, nearly 1000 in 1956, operated within the workplace. In one area – Derbyshire – this reached 58%; half of all 36 English counties recorded above average numbers of works tennis clubs in that year. Ten years later, at a time when municipal tennis was in decline, figures for workplace clubs remained steady. Given that affiliation necessitated at least 20 members, a bare minimum of 20,000 were playing tennis on company courts during this period. This figure could be considerably higher when smaller tennis sections of works sports clubs and other non-unaffiliated groups are included.

The great boom in company tennis probably occurred during the inter-war period but a few firms had introduced it earlier. Munting (2003) identified several firms in the Norwich area that offered tennis before 1914, and, according to company archives, Lever Bros. Port Sunlight works in Cheshire as well as Cadbury’s Bournville factory had constructed tennis courts as early as 1897 and 1904, respectively. At Bournville, in 1926, 36 all-male and all-female tennis teams played 233 competitive matches, not counting the numerous casual tennis games. By the 1930s, Bournville was affiliated to the Warwickshire LTA and, boasting 60 tennis courts, also took part
in the Birmingham Tennis League. Far from the preserve of the rich, the Bournville archive also suggested a fairly even spread of tennis interest among the various ranks of employees.

Other examples of employers providing opportunities to play tennis, both for leisure and competition, included Clark’s Thread Mills in Linwood, near Glasgow. It ran the Anchor Recreation Club for employees from 1923 until the firm closed in 1983, and in the 1920s two female employees won the Scottish Welfare Tennis Association open tournament (Hunter 2004). The John Lewis Partnership took part in the West End LTA leagues, battling opponents from firms such as Harrods, Lyons and Nestlé. According to the John Lewis Partnership Gazette (1 July 2000), Miss E Haldane, a clerical worker at their Peter Jones department store in London, competed at Wimbledon in 1923, having won the retailers’ ladies’ singles for the fourth successive year. In Hull, an association of 52 firms representing 30,000 employees organised sections for tennis, angling, billiards, ladies’ golf and cricket (Jones 1986).

From Lusis’s (1998) research, works clubs of every description can be found in Nottinghamshire: at hospitals and colleges of education, police forces and RAF stations, co-operative societies and political organisations and a wide range of factories including everything from heavy engineering and machine tool plants to rope works and hosiery companies. Figures calculated from LTA handbooks show that Nottinghamshire averaged 46 affiliated clubs over the period 1936–76, nearly 40% of which were works clubs. Many more operated outside the official system, organising their own leagues and tournaments, and foremost amongst these were the regional colliery and miners’ welfare clubs. The Mining Industry Act of 1920 had created a Welfare Fund ‘to be applied for purposes connected with the social wellbeing, recreation and conditions of living of workers in and about coal mines’ and many areas chose to support sports facilities (Jones 1986, p.73). The Collieries Alliance League in Nottinghamshire ran mixed-sex and men-only tennis leagues and knock-out tournaments from the early 1920s to 1969. Twelve different colliery or welfare clubs won these competitions over 45 years, but a further 24 were known to exist. Most had two or three courts and closed in the 1960s; a few lasted into the 1980s. (Lusis 1998). It is unlikely that Nottinghamshire was alone among the mining counties in organising colliery leagues but further research in areas such as Durham, Yorkshire or Central Scotland would be useful for comparison. The LTA handbook for 1956 indicates that there were at least 75 affiliated working men’s club and miner’s welfare tennis groups throughout the North but 30 years later, with large-scale colliery closures and alternative leisure options, there were only seven.

Workplace tennis was also a feature of the South. There may have been more clubs in banking, retail and public service and a smaller percentage of company sports clubs overall, but in only a handful of areas did the figure fall below 20% of the total. While the Midlands were strongly represented with works clubs, as befits the industrial heartland of England, even in the leafy Home Counties – Berkshire, Hertfordshire and Middlesex – nearly a quarter of tennis clubs were workplace-based. The multiple motivations behind company provision of sports facilities – the improvement of health and physical fitness to increase productivity, the attraction and retention of staff, or, in the opinion of one Sheffield steel magnate, ‘the best antidote to revolution and revolutionary ideas’, have been discussed elsewhere (see: Long 2011; Munting 2003).

Government and employers in the inter-war years were certainly of the opinion that the provision of sports facilities promoted class collaboration rather than confrontation and, by this period, classic Victorian notions of rational recreation, middle-class philanthropy and paternalism had faded. Company sports clubs were, in any case, a mixture of white- and blue-collar personnel, as seen at Bournville. As in the public parks, the costs of playing works sport were often ridiculously cheap with equipment usually provided free or for a nominal sum. Annual membership of the Bournville Athletic Club remained at 6s, or £5 in current prices, from 1926
to the post-war era. A 1938 survey in *Industrial Welfare* noted that, for about 3d a week usually deducted from the wage packet at source, many employees had access to a wealth of facilities, including tennis courts (Jones 1986). The John Lewis Partnership, employing around 30,000 staff by 1970, had its own ‘country clubs’ offering a wide range of outdoor activities such as cricket, football, hockey and tennis. According to its *Chronicle* from 23 February 1962, full annual membership cost one day’s pay up to a limit of 8 guineas (c.£115), and 12 guineas for a family membership.

Other firms negotiated playing facilities for their staff at local clubs. IBM arranged for 70 of its employees to receive a 25% discount on fees at the Winchester Tennis and Squash Club in 1965; this was reduced to 20% in 1974 (Mussell 1994). Access to works clubs was sometimes open to non-employees as well, opening up opportunities for the wider community. Weir Recreation, the sports club of Weir Pumps Limited in the West of Scotland, offered associate membership for 12s 6d in 1948 (less than £15) (Hunter 2004).

It is important not to overlook how important company sport provision could have been for a sizeable section of the population, and how many opportunities it offered lower-income households to take part in activities perhaps previously beyond their means. Not all employers, however, were as enthusiastic as John Spedan Lewis, son of the original founder John Lewis, who was intimately connected with the business from the first decade of the twentieth century until his retirement in 1955. Strongly influenced by the Cadbury family, he was motivated by ‘a desire to give his father’s employees the chance to do things their station in life and lack of money wouldn’t ordinarily allow them’. Fifty years after his death, the John Lewis Partnership ‘is now alone in the scale and range of subsidised facilities for its employees’ (Cox 2010, p.278).

**Tennis in the clubs**

Grass-roots tennis is most closely associated with the private neighbourhood club, with its “garden party” ambience, its ‘important function in the marriage market’ and its afternoon teas (Hill 2002, p.144). Indeed, in their published histories, both Hazelwood LTC and Bromley Wendover LTC mentioned numerous marriages between club members, and at Finchley Manor (north London), summer teas with the Vicar halted play for half an hour in the 1950s (Finchley Manor LTC, 1981). At Bramhall Lane (Cheshire) the importance of teas only tailed off in the late 1960s to be replaced by cocktail parties at which the ladies committee, as was typical, provided the food (Gare 2000). Others abandoned their ‘duties’ much earlier. At Braid Tennis Club in Edinburgh, outside caterers were appointed in 1938 as it had been such a struggle to find volunteers (Borthwick 1990); but at Radyr the question of ‘should the ladies make the cakes for Saturday tea or should the club buy them’ was still being debated in the 1980s (Clark 1989, p.6). Catering was an ever-present problem for many clubs.

Clubs could be, and usually were, affected by general economic conditions: a tennis club subscription is likely to have been an early casualty in any period of financial stringency. Improvements, deterioration or other physical changes to facilities could result in growth or decline in members. Poor grass maintenance at Hale LTC in the early 1960s led to a fall in adult membership, ‘a similar decline in bar takings and social events’ and a consequent rise in subscription rates (Nelson 2004). The changing demographics of local communities sometimes had an impact: Aughton LTC benefited from its rise as a dormitory suburb of Liverpool and St Helens after 1945 (Hargreaves 1992), but in the early 1970s, Birkenhead LTC was ‘being run on a shoestring’ and only a fear of resignations prevented a rise in subscriptions ‘in a district that was declining in affluence’ (Cook 1992, p.27). Mergers with other local clubs raised numbers rapidly.
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and ensured survival, as experienced by both Chapel Allerton (Leeds) and Busby (Glasgow) in the 1940s (Chapel Allerton LTC 1980; Hunter 2004).

The age profile of a club was also an important consideration. When Bearsden LTC introduced a waiting list for seniors in the early 1920s with no automatic transfer rights for juniors, a new local club poached many of its younger members (Bearsden LTC 1987). There are some examples of junior players saving clubs from extinction in the 1930s, but there is also evidence suggesting that under-18s were disadvantaged and discriminated against in their access to court time, and were tolerated rather than encouraged by adults (Lake 2008; Lusis 1998). By the 1960s, some clubs had well over 40% of their membership as juniors. Bearsden LTC had 116 juniors in 1964 from a total of 286 (40%); 102 members at Cullercoats LTC in Whitley Bay included 40 juniors in 1962; Blundellsands LTC in the Liverpool suburb of Crosby had 88 juniors in 1945 but only 48 seniors which suggests that the youngsters were playing an important role in keeping the club afloat during the war (Angus 1993; Bearsden LTC 1987; Blundellsands LTC 1980; Cullercoats LTC 1993). However, the Cardonald club, in Glasgow, had a thriving junior membership at this time but closed because it had too few seniors, and conversely, Rutherglen, in another suburb of Glasgow, went into decline in the early 1970s when many team members retired or took up golf – there was no veterans’ tennis then. (Hunter 2004).

Three distinct types of private tennis club deserve a brief mention. Village clubs played an important part in the growth of tennis during the inter-war years; church clubs and leagues also popularised the sport in the mid-twentieth century; and school tennis clubs became increasingly visible from the 1950s. In Nottinghamshire, it was said that all but the smallest villages boasted a tennis club (Lusis 1998). Bridge of Weir in Scotland started out in 1930 with one court on the terrace of the local hotel and even at its height had only 40 adult members; nearby Elderslie, formed in 1926 with assistance from a local landowner, was ‘very much a community club’ that gave residents priority membership; Stepps ran into financial difficulty in 1913 but was re-constituted with a membership of 50 after the war when representatives of the other village clubs – cricket, golf and bowls – gathered to celebrate the opening (Hunter 2004). The popularity of village clubs at this time probably reflects the lack of leisure opportunities; not all survived the war and the advent of mass car ownership and alternative attractions in the 1950s.

Church tennis clubs were also prominent, but many remained small, unaffiliated and under-recorded. In Nottinghamshire, a churches league operated in Retford from 1926-40. The small community of Hucknall, seven miles from Nottingham, boasted five church clubs: Baptist, Methodist, Congregational and two of indeterminate faith; overall, 12% of Nottinghamshire’s clubs were attached to churches (Lusis 1998). Jack Williams’ (1996) study of church-based sport in northern England towns, relying heavily on local newspapers, found that only one of his sample, Bolton, had a tennis league specifically for church clubs. He thought it likely that many church clubs were too small or informal to play in competitions and were therefore overlooked by the press. Nevertheless, over 100 were large enough to be mentioned in the 1956 LTA handbook. By 1966, that number had halved. Some may have followed the route taken by the Alderley LTC, founded at Hoylake (Cheshire) in 1922 by a few members of the Presbyterian Church of Wales, for the exclusive use of church members. Before the war, friends were allowed to play occasionally as guests but after 1945 the non-church contingent grew to the point at which they were in the majority; the club finally severed any link with its founding body (Cheshire LTA 1995). The church’s role in supporting tennis and other sports across Britain, particularly in the mid-twentieth century, deserves to be studied more fully.

The part played by school tennis clubs in introducing the game to youngsters is another aspect that has been virtually ignored, perhaps because it has been assumed that only the private sector offered this opportunity. It is certainly true that the cups presented by Lord Aberdare
and C.R. Glanvill in the mid-1940s ‘to promote team spirit and improve the standard of play’ in girls’ and boys’ schools were won on numerous occasions by Millfield and a raft of grammar schools and girls’ colleges until 1982, when the first comprehensive school winner was recorded. However, the LTA handbooks show that affiliations rose from only 93 schools in 1936 to 734 in 1956 and 1836 in 1976, and that in the post-war period the number of girls’ schools has remained constant while boys’ schools and especially co-educational schools have increased dramatically.

**Conclusion**

Although evidence from club histories has been used to trace the development of tennis in the mid-twentieth century, this chapter has been more concerned with aspects that have been largely overlooked. It has also concentrated on areas of Britain outside of London and the South-east: what is typical there may not be replicated further north. This may be illustrated with reference to Suzanne Lenglen’s famous bandeau, which was ‘de rigueur for chic women on and off the court’ in the 1920s Wimbledon and other wealthy southern suburbs (Brasher 1986, p.202), but in Scotland, it is singularly absent from photographs of cup-winning ladies’ teams in the mid-1920s (although the lady herself played an exhibition at Hampden Park in 1927 in front of 8000 spectators), nor amongst the female members of the colliery leagues (Robertson 1995). We need more visual evidence of tennis for the masses from the inter-war period.

**Note**

1 Various sections of this chapter have been reproduced previously, in: Kay J. (2012). Grass Roots: The Development of Tennis in Britain, 1918–1978. *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 29(18), 2532–50. The author would like to thank the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland for financial help towards research costs and Cadburys Bournville, the John Lewis Partnership and Lever Bros Port Sunlight for archival access and assistance.

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