

Foundation of Sydenham Croquet

(Reproduced, in part, from an article in "Sydenham Society News")

Sydenham Croquet Club was established in 1899 as part of Sydenham Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club, as follows...

Over 120 years ago, in 1899, play began at Sydenham Lawn Tennis Club on the site it has occupied ever since. Records show that the Sydenham and Norwood LTC was notified in October 1898 by the Manager of the Crystal Palace Company that it was very probable that the ground they used would be required to help further "the New Cricket Club Scheme". This was apparently at the insistence of Dr W G Grace who was leading the newly-formed London County Cricket Club based at Crystal Palace. As he approached the age of fifty-one and the end of his long England career, Grace had moved to Sydenham in 1899 where he continued his profession as a doctor, setting up his surgery at St Andrews, 7 Lawrie Park Road. The Manager said "the Palace Company would be sorry to lose the Club after so many years" and suggested that other ground might be found but it was felt these alternatives "would be far too public and that ladies could hardly be expected to play with pleasure". As a consequence and as several gentlemen had long wanted to see a Sydenham club started, at a meeting held in November 1898, chaired by Mr Fred H Carter of Burnage, Lawrie Park Avenue, it was proposed and carried unanimously "that a new Club to be called The Sydenham Lawn Tennis Club should be formed...." Arrangements were made to lease from the Whythes Estate, at a rental of £25 per annum, the ground known as the Triangular Ground in Lawrie Park Road ("containing 2 acres 2 rods and 12 perches or thereabouts") which Mr F R Palmer of Summerfield, Sydenham Avenue, was willing to relinquish.

The First General Meeting was held on 15 March 1899 at Sydenham Public Hall attended by 36 members. With seven tennis courts and a **croquet lawn** laid out, the Club was declared open by Mrs Palmer on Saturday 20 May 1899 but, owing to the unfavourable weather, play was impossible. For the first season there were 119 playing members with many more wishing to join. There was clearly considerable interest in the new club. Annual subscriptions were £2 2/- for Gents and £1 1/- for Ladies plus a £1 1/- entrance fee, with a smaller fee for croquet.

In 1914 a telephone was installed as "a great convenience to members especially those in town". In 1922 a proposal for Sunday play was rejected but a licensed bar was opened for the first time. Women were first admitted to the managing committee in 1925. A major milestone was the purchase of the freehold in 1929. During the Second World War the grounds were used as a barrage balloon site and the pavilion was destroyed by fire. Play resumed in 1947 following considerable effort and work needed to restore the courts to playable condition. Part of a large Victorian house at 53 Lawrie Park Road – directly across the road from the Club on the site now occupied by St Christopher's Hospice – owned by a member, Miss A M Bennett, MBE, served as a temporary pavilion complete with bar.

A considerable expansion to the activities of the Club took place when two squash courts were built in 1974. Over the years the membership has reflected the profile of the population of the area, changing from the fairly wealthy gentlemen who founded the club (early members included barristers, judges, clerics, military officers, MPs and nearly all

the local doctors, with the exception of the cricketer Grace, and their families, generally living in large residences) to members coming from the diverse community of today.

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