



A brief history of the

Mosman Tennis Company Ltd

Mosman Tennis Club

Mosman Lawn Tennis Club Ltd

1901-2011

IN THE BEGINNING

When Mosman became a Municipality in 1893 its population was 1600. This had increased to 5690 by 1901, the year the Mosman Recreation Club was formed. At a meeting called by one Bill Anderson, a Syndicate was formed to buy the site of what is now the Mosman Bowling Club in Belmont Road. This land was then leased to the newly established Mosman Recreation Club, which had 70 members. One bowling green, four tennis courts and two quoits pitches were built and officially opened in 1903. The tennis section of the Club soon gained 70 more members. Because of the crowded conditions and with only one bowling green, some bowlers left and helped to form the Warringah Bowling and Tennis Club nearby.

The first President of the Recreation Club was the Hon Dr Cullen MLC who later, as Chief Justice of NSW was also Lieutenant Governor on many occasions. From the outset the overcrowding and the desire of the bowlers for more greens created tension that developed into what became known locally as the 'Tennis War'. Club meetings became so heated, that difficulties often arose in finding a Chairman. The threat of a fistfight after one meeting was an indication of the state of affairs that had developed. The bowling section once tried to 'beat the gun' by starting a meeting early, but the tennis players stormed in before any business could be transacted. One lady proceeded to tell the bowlers what she thought of them; it wasn't much.

A President of the time, Alec Thompson, with constant diplomatic effort, thought the problem would be solved when he obtained Council's agreement to provide courts for the tennis section in the proposed new sports ground, now the Allan Border Oval. But a Ladies' Committee, who had been working to have the sports ground confined to football and cricket, promptly called a Public Meeting, which vetoed Council's agreement. Meanwhile, back at the Recreation Club, rising tempers were the order of the day. It is on record that one exasperated bowler threw two bowls into Belmont Road. As much as some bowlers might like to sympathise with him, this was setting a very bad example indeed; the bowls were his opponents.

In 1914, the best endeavours of concerned members of the Recreation Club paid off. The tennis section accepted the Club's offer of £300 so they could buy the present site in Rosebery Street, which they then proceeded to do for £323. A lot of hard work lay ahead.

THE MOSMAN TENNIS COMPANY LTD

Early in 1915, a group of tennis players formed The Mosman Tennis Co, Ltd, a shareholding company, with an authorised capital of £2000 in 2000 £1 shares. On 28th April 1915, the incorporation date, The Articles of the Company, list seven Directors, who, as shareholders and with others, took out shares to give a paid up capital of £965. The Articles provided that a condition of any lease of courts to a tennis club must be at a minimum annual subscription for men and lady members of three and two guineas respectively. In passing, it might be noted that male members of the club are referred to as 'men', not gentlemen, as one might expect for these times. The first meeting of the Directors of the company took place on the 23rd of June 1915. At the next meeting, held on 1st of July, it was announced that the tennis courts now under construction in Rosebery Street, would be leased to the Mosman Tennis Club, with, it was hoped, play

commencing in October of that year. (Note that the original name of the Club made no mention of 'Lawn'. More on this later.) On the 29th of September 1915, the Committee of the Tennis Club was informed they could open Courts 2, 3 and 6 for play on Sundays and Public Holidays.

Hogan Bros, who built the courts, had been paid in full by October 1915, and at the Directors meeting of the Company on 21st October, it was announced that the courts would be leased to the Mosman Tennis Club for £300 per annum.

THE MOSMAN TENNIS CLUB

Play did commence in October 1915, but the exact date is not known. With a war on, it is not certain that Public Holidays, if any, would have been observed and a Perpetual Calendar for this century shows Sundays fell on 3, 10, 17, 24 and 31 in October 1915. Take your pick. In the years that followed, the Tennis Company had to carry the burden of raising sufficient finance by loan or mortgage to keep afloat. Life was not meant to be easy. In January 1917 the cost of building the clubhouse, an amount of £153.18.4 due to Mr Chapman, Builder, could not be met in full and he generously offered to let some of the amount stand over. In March 1916, the Company accepted an offer of a loan of £1100 from the deceased estate of a John Deery, but in May 1919 when repayment was requested, advertisements were placed in the Mosman Times and the Sydney Morning Herald, seeking offers of another loan.

In this year the rental from the tennis club was set at £400 per annum, a considerable increase on the original of £300 per annum. At the same meeting, it is noted, the Chairman was authorised to arrange for the clubhouse to be connected to the sewer.

However, things did begin to improve and by March 1921, the Company commenced paying a dividend to shareholders, which varied, initially from 6% to 7% per annum. This was a practice that continued for the next 23 years, almost without a break.

In 1927, the Company asked those tennis club members who ceased to remain members, to sell their shares at par to other members in order to keep control of the Mosman Tennis Co Ltd in the hands of members.

In 1930, a Mrs Crombe held a mortgage of £1100 at 7% over the assets of the Company.

DEPRESSION AND WAR

In February 1931 the Club's rent was reduced due to loss of membership, caused by the Great Depression, which, by 1932 had led the Company to reduce its dividend to 5%. At the end of 1934, the Company had been unable to meet a request by Mrs Crombe, that her mortgage be paid out, and as a result, it claimed protection under the Moratorium Act. As a result of all this, the Directors notified the tennis club that, in future, a condition in their lease of the courts would be a payment of £25 per annum into a trust fund, to assist in reducing the mortgage.

The years rolled on with the Great Depression being only a memory for some. In 1942, the drop in membership due to enlistments in the Armed Forces engaged in World War II, forced the tennis

club to draw on its cash reserves and the Company reduced the rent to £140 per annum. In 1943, the Company, for the first time failed to pay a dividend but later, one of 4% was paid, in 1945, and one of 9% in 1946. This was the last paid, thus ending a dividend era which had lasted 25 years.

LICENCED CLUBS

In 1950, the Government bowed to community pressure and liberalised the liquor laws to allow sporting clubs to have liquor licences. Prior to this reform, small clubs like the Mosman Tennis Club had 'booze lockers' in which members kept a personal supply of refreshments, suitably labelled in conformity with the Liquor Act. However, in order to obtain a licence, the Club had to bring its ablution and change facilities up to a prescribed standard.

This required extensive alterations and additions to the premises. The Club House was enlarged by removal of the original verandah (the outline of which can still be seen in the pattern of the floor boards), improved toilet facilities were added, a bar installed, and a new block in brick and concrete added to provide change rooms and showers. The cost of all this, £2000, was met with an interest free loan of £1000 from members, and one of £1000 from the Bank of New South Wales.

MOSMAN LAWN TENNIS CLUB

By 1950, the tennis club had acquired all the shares of the Mosman Tennis Co Ltd, but, when, in 1972 Government legislation required that henceforth, a licenced club had to be a Company, limited by guarantee, not by shareholding, a new company had to be formed. The Mosman Lawn Tennis Co Ltd, incorporated on 31 October 1972. As considered fitting by the Committee, under President Sid Green, the word 'lawn' first appeared in the Club's title.

LIFE WAS NOT MEANT TO BE EASY

Dedicated hard working Presidents, Committees and Ladies Social Committees, have always been a feature in the history of the club, which was never free for long of some problem requiring time, effort and money for its solution. The depreciation and replacement of assets of 1915 vintage – timber fences, court under drains, court re-making and re-levelling, club house maintenance – was a problem from 1965 onward. Handling these problems became financially difficult with inflation. This necessitated the start of indexing Club fees in line with the CPI from 1976 onward. Due to a shortage of funds, it had been necessary, at times, in the early 1970's, for working bees of members to carry out court repairs, following the October close down. Necessary improvements were also made as funds permitted.

However, by the end of the 70's the membership had reached 149 of which 114 were Full members (71 men and 43 women). With the pressure of numbers on 6 grass courts and more than usual rain, a group in the Club started to push for conversion of two of the grass courts to artificial grass. A member offered to do this, and also offered a loan to the Club of \$10 000, at bank interest, and it was agreed to lay carpet on a stabilised loam base. This work started in October 1980, and it was decided that the loan would be financed from court hire at \$6 per hour which began the following

January. From this time until 2009, a volunteer member has handled the hiring of the Courts, often a very time consuming job, but essential to the Club's income stream.

THE HALCYON DAYS OF THE EIGHTIES

By the middle of the eighties, the Club was thriving. The minutes mention a record profit in 1983, and a motion that the Full memberships should be limited to 85 men and 55 women was passed. Later this year these limits were reached. (Mid Week Lady memberships, with a couple of exceptional low years, have largely remained stable throughout the decades). The number of Badge Pennants won by the Club indicates a strong interest in Competition. Three pennants were won in 1982, three in 1984 and two in 1985! In 1985, there were 7 men's and 3 women's badge teams for Saturday Badge, and 2 teams playing Sunday mixed badge!

In 1985, because of continual problems with poor drainage it was decided to re-do the mod grass courts with an asphalt base, thought to be a bit softer underfoot than concrete, and a loan for \$38,495 over 7 years, was taken out to do this work. Having two courts with an all weather surface has enabled the members to play all year round, and has provided a much-needed income for the Club to support the retention of the four grass courts. At the time of this writing, the carpet has been replaced twice... in 1994 and 2009.

Some other spending of note occurred in 1984 after a groundsman reported receiving an electric shock from one of the rollers! The Club was offered the loan of a 2.5ton road roller with an option to purchase it for \$1500, which it duly did. This roller (which was essential to the good maintenance of the grass courts) and the challenge of keeping it operating, is mentioned in the minutes from 1987 for the next 24 years!

Over these years, automatic-watering systems for all courts were installed, the run-back behinds courts 1 and 2 increased by removing the sloping bank and installing a retaining wall. During the eighties a capital works program was put in place, and progressed successfully, with the replacement of fences, building of retaining walls, and the grass courts were laser levelled and re-turfed in 1988. There were also plans to rebuild the clubhouse, but this was never achieved.

Following persistent and heavy rainfall in 1988, Mosman Council gave the Club notice, that, in order to prevent an excessive rate of stormwater run-off from the courts, these had to be converted into effective stormwater retention basins with a controlled rate of discharge into Council's stormwater drain in the adjoining land. The 8' width of the Club's land, made unusable by the sloping bank on the lane side was reclaimed with a brick retaining wall 420' long built in stages as funds permitted.

All improvements were possible because of the funds generated by a large Full membership.

THE NINETIES AND NOUGHTIES

In 1989, with membership at 151, and after another exceptionally wet start to the year, the Committee was approached by members petitioning for an Extraordinary General Meeting to be held, to vote on a motion to convert the remaining courts to synthetic. After considerable debate

and drama, over two EGMs, this motion was eventually defeated. This became a turning point for the Club.

Membership slowly declined as the nineties progressed and it is evident that this was due to many factors, not the least being the change in people's lives, and the decline in interest in tennis in general. Tennis Clubs all over Sydney were struggling to keep their memberships up and consequently had difficulty raising the necessary finances to continue to maintain and improve their facilities. This was particularly difficult for MLTC with the extra expense of managing grass courts. Drought played a part, and members rallied with rosters being formed to hand water the grass courts, and more and more was asked of members in terms of their time and labour to attend working bees, and to run and attend fund raising events.

2001 saw the celebration of 100 years for the club, 87 at the present site.

TENNIS AS IT IS PLAYED

As the Honour Boards attest, the Club over the years has produced many top class players. Early in 1964 a Mr Gil Alexander and his family; wife, daughter and son joined the Club. Daughter Sue and son, John joined as juniors. The following year Sue, in the Ladies Singles at the Manly Seaside Tournament, went within one point of defeating a NSW top seeded player for the title. She won the Club Championship in 1964.

John Alexander became Club Champion the following year, and at 17, represented Australia in the Davis Cup. From 1968 to 1982, he reached World Ranking, in the top 10, won the Australian Mens' Doubles in 1975 and 1982, the NSW Open in 1982 and was runner-up in the 1977 Mens' Doubles at Wimbledon.

In 1980 John was invited to be Patron of MLTC.

WHERE TO FROM HERE

Dedicated committees and sub committees, both full and mid week, have continued to work hard to generate interest and funds. The desire among a core majority of members to maintain MLTC as a Lawn Tennis Club has seen the need to make changes that require more flexibility in membership categories, and the introduction of a Sunday membership in 2005, has proved to be very popular. Always the challenge has been to grow the membership and many events and Open days have been held with this purpose in mind.

In 2010 the Club took a major step when the Committee made the decision to lease the two mod grass courts all times outside nominated Club play times, to a resident coach, and an agreement was struck with Sarah Atkins, the principal of Select Sports Coaching. This has resulted in a guaranteed income, more younger members, and better exposure for the Club at a local level. It has been a positive move. In 2011 a designated office space was built within the men's change rooms for the Coach's rooms.

Because of the challenge to keep the Club turning a profit, let alone be able to undertake major expenditure, members were surveyed once again in 2010, about their desires for the future direction of the Club, particularly the retention of the grass courts. Once again, a majority of members expressed a desire to continue as is. With MLTC now being the only Club with natural grass courts in the lower north shore (the closest being Hunters Hill) the challenge remains for the Committee to maintain our unique status, without running the Club into debt.

In June 2011 a 'new' eleven-year-old Wacker RD11 roller was purchased for a little over \$11000, with the hope that with a solid grounds management plan in place, support from members, a little bit of luck, and more sunshine, we can continue to manage and improve the grass courts, and maintain Mosman Lawn Tennis Club as a unique location in Sydney.

In relation to what makes a small tennis club a success, those of the present owe a debt of gratitude to our predecessors, from 1915 onwards. Over the past 86 years, many committed individuals have volunteered thousands of hours, and given freely of their own resources, energy and enthusiasm, to make it possible for us all to continue to enjoy the game of Tennis in these beautiful surrounds.

One old timer wisely said: 'You might find that a little knowledge of the Club's past will better your understanding of the present and help you pass on something worthwhile for the future.'

MLTC 110th Anniversary Celebrations

3rd July 2011

Presidents

Kevin ALKER - 2011

Peter ROBERTS

Howard JONES

Peter CORRIE

Judy ALEXANDER

David STREVEN

Peter CORRIE

Annabelle PEARCE

Peter WARD

Ruth ELMER

Tony HARDACRE

Neville KILDEY

Chris PAPANICOLAOU

Neville KILDEY

John MILLER

Alan BEATTIE
Ross HORTON
Cynthia MURRAY
Norman DUNCAN
Keith WILLIAMS
Tony KEOGH
Sid GREEN
Peter WICKENS
Dennis O'CONNOR
B GILBERT
John MOLONEY – 1915

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The No 1 Minute Book of the Mosman Tennis Co Ltd.

Messrs Joe Fiddey, Peter Wickens, Peter Leech, Sid Green, Dennis Fogarty, Margaret Draper, Ian Taylor.

Minute Books from past to present

COMPILATION

John McGlynn

Up dated 2011 - Di Shirling
