

Part II - Tennis is coming Home

Before the 1870's different forms of tennis were played throughout Europe using 'Local Rules.' These 'Local Rules' not only defined how the game was played, but also the shape and size of the court. The court layouts, equipment and rules at this time were far from being standardized.

In an attempt to rationalise the sport, the Englishman, Major Walter Clopton Wingfield patented his revolutionary new 'Lawn Tennis' game, under the name of 'Sphairistrike' in 1874 and invented the pastime and sport that has grown into the game that we play today.

When the All England Croquet Club, formed in 1869, was failing to attract sufficient visitors, they decided in 1875 to offer Lawn Tennis as an added attraction. The new game was an instant success, so much so that in 1877 the name of the club was changed to the All England Croquet and Lawn Tennis Club. On 9th June of this year, a notice was placed in the pages of *The Field* magazine for the world's first ever official lawn tennis tournament, which was to be staged at Worple Road in Wimbledon. However the Wimbledon committee decided to make their mark on the game and change some of Major Wingfield's rules.

Typical tennis courts prior to the first Wimbledon were 'hour-glass' or 'bow-tie' shaped, being narrower at the net than at the base line, as was specified in Major Wingfield's patent.

At this first Wimbledon, the shape of the new fangled tennis court looked mighty odd to most of the spectators. For it was a rectangle measuring some 78 feet by 27 feet, the same as it is today. When asked why this radical change to the shape of the tennis court was made, the Wimbledon committee replied "*We decided that straight lines looked much neater.*"



Centre Court at Worple Road, Wimbledon

However, they decided that the service box would be much larger than it is today. The service line was placed some 26 feet from the net, instead of the 21 feet as it is today.

Passing down the line was a little more difficult in those days. Whereas the height of the net in the middle stood at 3 foot 3 inches, only 3 inches higher than today, the height at the posts were 5 feet compared with the current height of 3 foot 6 inches.

Up to this time only one serve was allowed, but the Wimbledon committee saw fit to introduce a 'second life,' which the spectators found quite novel. Thus, introducing the great tennis institution of, *the double fault*. Meanwhile, 'let' serves were perfectly legitimate. They also decided that serves had to be delivered with just one foot behind the base line, *a bit like club play today!!!*

Also up to 1877 the scoring was similar to that of Badminton, as was Major Wingfield's version, where the first player to 13 points won. Also, as in badminton, a player only scored points if he or she had served the ball. But the Wimbledon committee changed all this and decided that the scoring should be as in Real Tennis, and so it has remained that way up until today.

The 200 people who paid a shilling (5 pence today), on Thursday 19th July 1877 at the first Wimbledon final saw an all British final between Spencer W. Gore and William C. Marshall. Gore won the match 6-1, 6-2, 6-4 to win the 12-Guinea prize and lift the Silver Challenge Cup. In true Wimbledon style, the final was interrupted by rain. Gore felt that this game of Lawn Tennis would

never catch on with the public and so after winning the final it was reported that he said, "It is extremely doubtful if this new fangled game will ever replace either Real Tennis or Rackets."

Next month : Part III - Lawn Tennis catches on.