

Chapter 8: Croquet falls, lawn tennis rises and an indoor venue is built

1876 – Cheltenham LTC is born and the Winter Garden project launched

By May 1876 a Cheltenham lawn tennis club had been established and it evidently blossomed during the summer months as the Looker-on was to report in late August that the members of the archery and lawn tennis clubs had been the chief supporters of Montpellier Gardens during the past season, with no reference to croquet, suggesting a radical transfer of allegiance¹. Late in April there was mention of a tennis competition to be held as part of the entertainments for the County and Military Fete to be held in Montpellier Gardens on 11th May, and the Looker-on named the organiser as Arthur Lillie, “than whom it would be difficult to find a more competent authority to whom to appeal on points of doubt in the conduct of the game”². The journal paraded its ignorance of the latest racket sports by referring to “the new and fashionable game of *Badminton or Lawn Tennis*”, which a year earlier would have caused Wingfield cardiac arrest, but then the fête advertisements used the same phrase. Twelve men signed up for the competition but the Looker-on failed to report the outcome³.

On 3rd June Lillie advertised Cheltenham’s croquet and lawn tennis club tournaments as one event - as in 1875 - signing himself as honorary secretary⁴, but later in the month the tournaments were reported in the media as separate events organised by separate clubs and Cheltenham Lawn Tennis Club had been launched⁵. The tennis tournament appears to have been run in two parts with a handicap doubles event first and a singles competition afterwards. Some twenty-six competitors played in the doubles and in the final round Dr Bell & Mr Maltby defeated Col. Scott & Tindal Porter over the best of five games⁶. Few names were mentioned in the Looker-on’s account and none were female. In the singles, history recounts that Henry Porter “easily” defeated Mr E. Irving and Dr Bell in the early rounds before asserting seniority over his brother Tindal and winning the final match. No comment was offered on the rules applied but it can reasonably be assumed that with Lillie in charge of planning, the MCC rules of May 1875 were followed as they had been drawn up through consultation between John Hale, Walter Wingfield and John Heathcote and adopted by the All England Club⁷. If so then a “game” was played to fifteen points, as in rackets, with the possibility of playing advantage at fourteen-all, and a match of five games was not as short as it might sound⁸.

While the tennis tournament was showing healthy growth, the croquet tournament was suffering further shrinkage. Where in 1875 there were nine female entrants for singles and doubles together, there were now six, and the total male entry fell from six to five, with Arthur

¹Looker-on 26/8/1876 p.552

²Looker-on 6/5/1876 p.297, & see advertisement 29/4/1876 p.274

³Looker-on 13/5/1876 p.312

⁴Looker-on 3/6/1876 p.1

⁵Looker-on 24/6/1876 p.410

⁶Looker-on 1/7/1876 p.424

⁷ See Chapter 7, page 59 above. AECC adoption: Todd 1979 p.87. The MCC was both the senior English cricket club and the national regulating body for cricket. Its facilities included a real tennis court and it numbered amongst its members some of the best real tennis players in the land. The national amateur champion, John Moyer Heathcote, was an enthusiast for lawn tennis and a leading advocate for the new game amongst the MCC members together with Sir William Hart Dyke and Julian Marshal (Badminton Library 1903 p.139 & p.103, Todd 1979 p.71 to 74). In 1875 the MCC Tennis Committee developed a revised code of rules for lawn tennis in consultation with the main “inventors” Walter Wingfield and John Hale, but while the code was “cordially” accepted by Wingfield (it preserved his hour-glass shape of court) it failed to win general acceptance and was widely ignored despite subsequent amendment (Field 6/3/1875 p.232 & 29/5/1875 p.531, Todd 1979 p.76, Badminton Library 1903 p.139).

⁸ Todd 1979 p.74

Lillie himself now absent as well as Peel and Law - in effect, without the participation of the Porter brothers Henry and Tindal, the male event would have sunk without trace⁹. The decline was to prove terminal. 1876 was to be the last croquet tournament for many years and as its flagship went down, the croquet club lost any coverage in the media and disappeared from public consciousness. Its helmsman, Arthur Lillie, went down with the ship. After June, honorary secretary, tournament and club vanished from the pages of the local journals and it was to be 1898 before tournament croquet made a comeback (with reports of a successful tournament at Cheltenham's East Gloucestershire Cricket Ground)¹⁰. Lillie and his sister evidently chose the month of June to take permanent leave of Cheltenham: they registered their departures in the Looker-on edition of 24th June, with Arthur heading for London and Louisa Tunbridge Wells, and subsequently no return visits were recorded for Arthur¹¹. Neither croquet nor tennis tournament had finished by 24th June – the tennis ended nearly a week later on Friday 30th June – and Arthur was demonstrating at the least a reduced involvement in their organisation and most likely complete disengagement¹². The Field of 1st July carried the story of the All England Club's annual croquet championships and Mr Lillie was prominent in its report as he brushed aside both Peel and Law in his progress to the All Comers' final; he may have been lost to Cheltenham, but he was not lost to croquet and the fire of his enthusiasm continued to burn brightly¹³. By the end of January 1877 J. Binny Scott was in place as Acting Secretary of Cheltenham lawn tennis club and the gap left by the founding father – a master of the early tennis rules – was filled in some measure¹⁴.

Encouraged by the success of the first two club tennis tournaments, the entertainment committee of the Cheltenham Conservative Association announced a week after the end of the June competition that their July fête would include a handicap event for Cheltenham LTC members to be played in Pittville Gardens. Two cups would be on offer, one donated by the committee and the other by J.T. Agg-Gardner MP, and the member for the Borough and his fellow Conservatives could be seen to be doing their bit to promote healthy outdoor exercise¹⁵. Agg-Gardner, a member of the Cheltenham College Council, was to become president of the club in later years and to maintain his role as munificent donor of prizes¹⁶. Demand for the tournament was greater than expected and the committee had to revise their plans in a hurry so that early rounds could be played in Montpellier Gardens the week before the fete - just the final was booked for Pittville Gardens. There were twenty-two entrants according to the Chronicle and the handicaps for eighteen were published in advance¹⁷. Henry Porter was the only player handicapped on "scratch" and Captain Scott – presumably the Acting Secretary in waiting - was at the other extreme as one of five players on "8 aces". There were only a few

⁹ Looker-on 24/6/1876 p.410 & Field 5/6/1875 p.559

¹⁰ Looker-on 27/8/1898 p.1 & p.823, 3/9/1898 p.841 & 2; "The History of Cheltenham Croquet Club", D Magee, Cloister House, 2020 p.10 – 13. The East Gloucester ground was in Charlton Park (Examiner 27/7/1898 p.4).

¹¹ Looker-on 24/6/1876 p.411 & see Chronicle 27/6/1876 p.2. The Chronicle for 23/11/1875 p.2 recorded the Removals of Captain & Miss Lillie to 23 Lansdown Crescent and this was their reported address for their departure notices in 1876.

¹² Looker-on 24/6/1876 p.410 & 1/7/1876 p.424

¹³ Field 1/7/1876 p.17 – the AECC tournament started on 27th June: "Something like a spasmodic effort at revival seems to have rescued croquet for the moment from the extinction with which it has lately been threatened". See also 8/7/1876 p.42 – Arthur lost in the final.

¹⁴ Looker-on 27/1/1877 p.1; Binny Scott was advertising the club's contact details for prospective members. This was probably Captain John Binny Scott, Royal Navy, a retired officer aged about 50, resident in Cheltenham for a year or two (Looker-on 5/2/1876 p.90 & 26/1/1878 p.69, Chronicle 12/11/1878 p.2, census 1881 for JBS etc).

¹⁵ Looker-on 8/7/1876 p.1

¹⁶ Looker-on 23/4/1881 p.265. Agg-Gardner was a member of the Council from 1875 to 1894 (CC register 1910 p.18).

¹⁷ Looker-on 8/7/1876 p.440 & 441; Chronicle 25/7/1876 p.5

other familiar faces – Tindal Porter was apparently on 4 aces and the winners from June, Francis Maltby and Dr Bell, were on 2 and 4 aces respectively¹⁸. Players on low handicaps fell to those on high and the competition was won by the pairing of Coles and Dawson, handicapped at 6 and 8 respectively. The Looker-on reported that in the final “the play on both sides was very good and several of the rounds were loudly applauded”, but the audience was smaller than might have been expected because of intense heat early on a glorious summer afternoon¹⁹. Agg-Gardner presented the prizes at the fête dinner soon afterwards, observing with Conservative wit “we have got a sky as blue as ourselves”, and displayed his enthusiasm for the fledgling game²⁰.

In some ways it is surprising that the Looker-on offered no comment on the passing of Arthur Lillie. He had featured in its columns over the years in such a variety of roles – theatrical, literary, social and sporting – that some words of appreciation of his sporting labours at least might have been expected. As early as 1872 The *Chronicle* referred to him as “a gentleman well known in this town as a croquet player and amateur actor” (before proceeding to savage his novel *Puppets Dallying*) and he was known to many²¹. Was there a falling out or was it just that at the age of forty-five, after more than ten years swept along in Cheltenham’s giddy social whirl, he sought a change of lifestyle and London beckoned as the place to pursue his more serious interests? An important factor may have been that in the autumn of 1875 his and Louisa’s closest family – his brother John and cherished nieces – left the locality for the parish of Halstead near Colchester and Cheltenham became too remote²². Judging by the books that he published in the next ten or so years, he was keen to focus on his scholastic interests - the study of Asia and Eastern religious traditions and practices – and London was probably a better place for research and dialogue with kindred spirits²³. *Buddha and Early Buddhism* was released to the public late in 1881 and in December the same year he was elected a member of the Royal Asiatic Society²⁴. *The Popular Life of Buddha* followed in 1883 together with a pamphlet entitled *Koot Hoomi Unveiled*, which was a criticism of *Esoteric Buddhism* and the views of one Madam Blavatsky²⁵. The census of 1881 places Arthur and his sister Louisa in Howick Place, Westminster, and for the remainder of his life his census residence was Kensington, where he died in November 1911²⁶. Between 1884 and 1910 he produced a dozen or so further works on religious topics and found time for two more novels and several books on croquet, as he kept faith with the sport he learnt at the feet of Arthur Law in 1868.

While tournament croquet died a death in Cheltenham in 1876, it limped on in Wimbledon until 1882 when the All England Club held its last competition for what proved to be fifteen years, and soon after voted to drop the word croquet from its name²⁷. In historian

¹⁸ Looker-on 8/7/1876, p.441. Francis Maltby was a Lieutenant in the 16th Madras Native Infantry (India Office IOR/L/MIL/11/90 f.14 etc). The Looker-on refers to “J. Porter” on 4 aces, but none of the Porter brothers have the initial J. and this should be Tindal, who was still in the country (left for Bombay in November [Looker-on 11/11/1876 p.730]).

¹⁹ Looker-on 22/7/1876 p.473

²⁰ Chronicle 25/7/1876 p.5

²¹ Chronicle 1/10/1872 p.5

²² Chelmsford Chronicle 17/9/1875 p.8 & 26/9/1879 p.2; JESL was curate of St Andrew’s Church.

²³ “The Theosophical Society”, Jeffrey D. Lavoie, Brown Walker Press 2012, p.252

²⁴ Morning Post 20/12/1881 p.3

²⁵ Birmingham Daily Post 8/8/1884 p.7. See also Lavoie 2012 p.252/3.

²⁶ Censuses for AL 1881 to 1911 (ACU); probate for AL to Louisa 12/1/1912 (ACU). See also electoral roll records 1894 to 1906 (ACU).

²⁷ Todd 1979 p.90, 92 & 93. AL was absent from the list of just 5 entrants for the 1882 AECC All Comers (Field 1/7/1882 p.26)

Prichard's words, the cuckoo had taken full possession of the nest²⁸ and tournament croquet was sent into a deep sleep. Lillie was a witness to the game's demise at the All England Club and it is uncertain where he played for the next decade as even private games had ceased at the club by 1887²⁹. Few clubs survived and he would have had to rely on private lawns, although at Oxford ("a donnish backwater") croquet apparently went on as if nothing had happened and Lillie played in a tournament there in 1891³⁰. Eventually the game was revived and in 1895 the All England Club was persuaded to return a lawn to croquet use. Thirty croquet members were signed up and two years later Lillie was appointed Honorary Secretary for Croquet³¹. He finished his croquet career as a recognised authority on the game and a senior administrator.

By the end of 1876 lawn tennis had a toehold in Cheltenham's social calendar but the game itself was still in its infancy and there was still no nationally accepted body of rules. All Cheltenham's reported local competitions had taken place on grass and in the absence of proper hard court facilities, the club game was subject to the vagaries of the weather and restricted to the warmer months. No one could be expected to make an investment in purpose-built tennis facilities at the time but the opportunity was to arise for a shared facility. Early in 1876 plans were in place for the construction of a leisure complex comprising a winter pleasure garden and skating rink - Cheltenham's own Crystal Palace. The skating rink was to be partly roofed and partly open to the elements, with a direct link to a large indoor auditorium, so that when completed the facility was to be capable of providing one outdoor and two indoor hard tennis courts and fulfilling two sporting purposes³². Cheltenham LTC was to enjoy probably the best tennis facilities in England during those early years but as so often with bold infrastructure projects, all was not to be plain sailing.

In April 1876 The Cheltenham Imperial Winter Garden and Skating Rink Company issued a prospectus to raise capital to acquire the Imperial Square site ("the finest and most central open space of ground in the town of Cheltenham" extending to about three and a half acres) and to erect thereon an Ornamental Winter Pleasure Garden and Skating Rink, the site being large enough to accommodate other recreational facilities that the shareholders might deem desirable such as a Museum, Picture Gallery, Library and Racquet Court³³. The Chairman of the Company was the MP for the borough of Cheltenham, James Tynte Agg-Gardner, who at that time combined a political career with owning and running a major local brewery³⁴; the Vice Chairman was George Parsonage, the head of one of Cheltenham's leading firms of builders and a political supporter of the Chairman³⁵, and the rest of the team of directors were an eclectic mix of gentry and tradesmen: one major general, a retired infantry captain (who happened to be gym instructor at Cheltenham College³⁶), two priests (one a master at the College³⁷), three esquires and then seven Misters – the tradesmen, including a hotelier, a tailor, a jeweller, a furniture retailer and a vendor of music (keeper of a Music

²⁸ "The History of Croquet", D.M.C. Prichard, Cassell 1981, p.59

²⁹ Prichard 1981 p.59

³⁰ Prichard 1981 p.61

³¹ Prichard 1981 p.62; obituary for AL in the Army & Navy Gazette 9/12/1911 p.1173; also London Standard 20/6/1900 p.4

³² See accounts of April 1879 club event (Chapter 9 p.6 below) and October 1879 open tournament (Chapter 9 p.13 & 15 below)

³³ Looker-on 22/4/1876 p.272

³⁴ ODNB for JTAG 2015 & obituary in Chronicle 11/8/1928 p.2

³⁵ Looker-on 31/1/1874 p.72, Chronicle obituary 12/12/1891 p.5.

³⁶ CC register 1910 p.40 – Captain GE Hodgson, late 44th Foot, appointed 1871

³⁷ Rev Percy Hattersley Smith – CC register 1910 p.39. He was a fine cricketer. Aged 31 in 1878, he played for Gloucestershire in WG Grace's team and was top scorer in their 1878 Cricket Week match against Sussex (Field 24/8/1878 p.262, Cambridge Alumni [ACU]).

Warehouse)³⁸. James Lillywhite was absent from the list, despite the relevance of his business experience, but he was destined to take up the key role of rink manager near the end of 1876³⁹. The Chronicle thoroughly approved of the composition of the board and pronounced it “a very strong one”- which was to prove one of its weaker judgments as a lack of financial good sense was to be the company’s swift undoing⁴⁰. The prospectus recorded that £12,500 of the proposed capital of £20,000 had already been subscribed privately and the company felt able to go ahead with the preparation of architectural plans. Tenders for building work were submitted in September and the construction of the outdoor skating rink began the same month with a view to providing an immediate facility for the public⁴¹. James took up his position as rink manager on a salary of £100 per annum and at the beginning of November a rink was opened comprising over 6,000 square feet of asphalt with temporary roof cover over slightly more than half⁴². The roof would have precluded use for tennis and it was to be a year before the Winter Garden declared itself ready to welcome tennis players, with play initially limited to a portion of the outdoor rink in the mornings⁴³.

The first year expenditure of the company included the surprisingly large sum of £3,000 for the purchase of Plimpton skates and the Plimpton roller skate concession from the Cheltenham concessionaires, although half of the sum was paid by the issue of Winter Garden shares⁴⁴. James was using Plimpton skates in the town hall from 1873 and indeed in 1875 he invited James Leonard Plimpton – inventor of the skate and president of the New York Roller Skating Association – to visit his rink in Cheltenham to engage with his loyal customers⁴⁵. Plimpton’s patent four-wheel skate was innovative and far superior to its rivals and he made the most of his advantage by selling only to rink proprietors and locking them into royalty arrangements that saw half of all hire charges to the public channelled into his pocket. In early 1876 he publicly stated that his profits from Brighton alone were over £100 a week⁴⁶. As James’s town hall skating business was absorbed by the Winter Garden it seems almost certain that he became a company shareholder, but as only one of the concessionaires was named in the local press (Captain George Hodgson) we have no idea how many concessionaires there were originally and how much capital James sank in the project⁴⁷. As gym instructor for Cheltenham College, Hodgson was well known to James and a close colleague⁴⁸.

1877 – Wimbledon makes the rules, Cheltenham’s ladies step forward

Cheltenham LTC began 1877 with John Binny Scott in place as Acting Secretary and late in January he placed an advertisement for new members in the Looker-on⁴⁹. This was his only reported act as a club official and as during the ensuing year his name was absent from competitor lists, his tennis commitments seem to have been short-lived. Three tournaments

³⁸ Looker-on 22/4/1876 p.272. Tradesmen (Looker-on refs): Davis – 11/11/1876 p.723, Haddon - 23/12/1876 p.824, Jack – 29/7/1876 p.482, Hewett - 17/6/1876 p.400, Dale – 30/12/1876 p.1.

³⁹ Chronicle 7/11/1876, p.4 & 5

⁴⁰ Chronicle 25/4/1876 p.4 & see designs Looker-on 24/6/1876 p.410

⁴¹ Chronicle 12/9/1876 p.4 & 3/10/1876 p.4

⁴² Chronicle 7/11/1876 p.4 & 5 & 30/4/1878 p.5

⁴³ Looker-on 22/12/1877 p.1, Chronicle 11/12/1877 p.4

⁴⁴ Chronicle 26/12/1876 p.5

⁴⁵ Looker-on 22/11/1873 p.754 & 13/2/1875 p.1

⁴⁶ Chronicle 1/2/1876 p.5, *Plimpton v Malcomson*, action for infringement of patent before Master of the Rolls.

⁴⁷ Chronicle 26/12/1876 p.5

⁴⁸ CC register 1910 p.40

⁴⁹ Looker-on 27/1/1877 p.1

were advertised or reported between May and December but no club officers were mentioned and a contact name appeared but once: the advertisement for a tournament in September gave place, date, entry fee and the bald message “For particulars contact W.D. Maltby Esq. or H. Wilkins Esq.” – no more, no hint as to how to contact the club worthies⁵⁰. Club officials may have been in short supply but the support of the Porter and Maltby families was a constant as was the presence of Clara Hill. As in 1876, the first tournament of the year was at the County Fête in Montpellier Gardens but it was held about a month later than before at the beginning of June. It was again a handicap competition but this time a separate event was advertised for women⁵¹. Six pairs entered for the men’s doubles and with five players on scratch and five on four points, the handicaps were largely neutralised in the pairings and Henry Porter was able to win playing with fellow Old Cheltonian Alfred Rooke – their reward was “two cups”⁵². William Maltby participated and played off scratch like Porter. The Chronicle gave generous coverage to the men’s event but omitted any reference to the women’s and it seems likely that it was cancelled at a late stage, perhaps because bad weather caused the fête to be postponed by a day.

Almost as Cheltenham played out its handicap tournament, history was being made in Wimbledon and lawn tennis was about to take its great leap forward. At a committee meeting of the All England Club in early June it was decided that an open lawn tennis championship should be held in July, and a sub-committee of Henry Jones, Julian Marshall and Charles Heathcote was appointed to draw up the rules for its conduct⁵³. The Wimbledon rules were drafted, the first championships held to general approval, and the new code pronounced a success. Discussion followed on certain points, such as the placing of the service line and the height of the net, and some refinements were made. Early in 1878 the All England Club and the MCC issued a revised joint code of rules and, with their acceptance across the nation, lawn tennis was able to progress from a novelty social game to a serious competitive sport⁵⁴. If it seems curious that the MCC and Wimbledon were able to work so well together, the harmony can be explained at least in part by the close relations between the clubs: Julian Marshall and Charles Heathcote were both members of the MCC and Charles was the brother of John Moyer Heathcote, who was national real tennis champion, a member of the MCC’s Tennis Committee and a leading advocate for lawn tennis within the MCC; at least eight of the twenty-two competitors at the first Wimbledon championships were members of MCC⁵⁵.

None of the Cheltenham club players competed in the first Wimbledon championships and with Lillie gone, and Arthur Myers absent, there was no obvious personal link between the two clubs such as might have led to the introduction of the Wimbledon rules in Cheltenham. James Lillywhite, with his contacts in the capital and in the MCC, might have acted as a conduit for information but one can reasonably assume that Cheltenham LTC continued with its 1876 code of rules until the new joint code was published in May 1878⁵⁶.

The club tournament advertised for September 1877 went unreported by the Chronicle and Looker-on and possibly never came to pass, although both journals publicised the event close to the start date, the Chronicle just days beforehand⁵⁷. The weather may have claimed another victim. It was billed in the Looker-on as “the final prize competition of the season” - a

⁵⁰ Looker-on 15/9/1877 p.1 & 22/9/1877 p.600. May report: Looker-on 26/5/1877 p.1; November: 1/12/1877 p.759 & 760.

⁵¹ Looker-on 2/6/1877 p.1

⁵² Chronicle 12/6/1877 p.4

⁵³ Todd 1979 p.88. The committee meeting was on 2/6/1877 and the Field publicised the rules of play in their edition of 16/6/1877 (p.709 – AELTC letter dated 12 June).

⁵⁴ Badminton Library 1903 p.146

⁵⁵ MCC Members Register for 1877, viewed 26/6/2014. For JMH, Chapter 8 page 1 footnote 7 above.

⁵⁶ Field 11/5/1878 p.573

⁵⁷ Chronicle 25/9/1877 p.4

singles and doubles tournament, open to non-members as well as members, to be held in Montpellier Gardens where the club used to meet for practice⁵⁸. At the end of November the club organised a handicap mixed doubles event and this was played out in Montpellier Gardens between six pairs of the leading players. The numbers may have been small but the event was noteworthy, firstly because it was held in “inclement weather” in November, and must have been played on asphalt, and secondly because the club’s ladies were named and took their first bow in the local press⁵⁹. Mrs Hill, Ella Ramsay, Jane & Ellen Maltby, and Edith & Fanny Byng Morris braved the winter conditions to form the advance guard of what was to be Cheltenham’s cadre of open tournament competitors. Mary Abercrombie, Marian Bradley and Florence & Beatrice Mardall joined them in 1878 and two years and four months later six of the ten won through to the second round of the singles in Cheltenham’s open tournament of April 1881, while a seventh – Beatrice - joined them in the ladies’ doubles. The Maltbys had left Cheltenham in the meantime and two of the sisters were to be found playing in the Brighton open tournament⁶⁰. Of the men Henry Porter was the anchor, as always, and he was joined by William & Ernest Maltby, Gerald Mockler and John Lewes (two more former Cheltenham College day boys⁶¹), and a Mr Taylor. The Renshaw twins – rising seventeen - were still a year away from their debut appearance in local tennis reports. The pairings of Henry Porter & Fanny Morris and William Maltby & Edith Morris made their way to the final but faced up on the wrong day of the week for the Looker-on, which disdained to report the outcome and left its readers hanging in the air.

When it comes to court surface, Montpellier Gardens is associated first and foremost with grass but as early as August 1875 the Looker-on mentioned that applications had been made to the Gardens Company to establish asphalt courts “for Lawn Tennis and for other fashionable games which may be indulged in as well in winter as in summer”. It seems the company had gone ahead and built some sort of hard play area by the end of 1877⁶². We know that James Lillywhite - for one - would have been only too happy to meet the company’s needs because by March 1878 he was advertising “asphalte courts laid at 1s 3d per yard”, along with all tennis accoutrements⁶³. He had become a one-stop shop for lawn tennis.

Work on the construction of Cheltenham’s crystal palace continued and late in August the Chronicle reported favourably on “the magnificent structure rising so grandly in our midst and now so popularly known as the Winter Garden of Cheltenham”⁶⁴. It predicted that the buildings would be complete by the autumn and celebrated the “beauty of design and completeness of the whole structure” that was attracting “the almost unanimous praise of everyone”. It gave the impression of maintaining its faith in the financial viability of the project but there was ambiguity in its wording: “Let Cheltenham take to the new and stately bantling – foster it, succour it – and there is little doubt but that such a local success will be achieved, as will encourage local men to invest their hard-earned savings in a concern as safe – and perhaps safer – than many of the bubble schemes they have from time to time been gulled into supporting hundreds of miles away from them”. The reality was that costs were over-running, construction was behind schedule, and the Winter Garden company was dangerously

⁵⁸ Looker-on 22/9/1877 p.600

⁵⁹ Looker-on 1/12/1877 p.759 & 760

⁶⁰ 1878: Looker-on 14/12/1878 p.801; seven at Cheltenham 1881 – Field 23/4/1881 p.562; Maltbys at Brighton venues - Field 9/10/1880 p.537 & 30/4/1881 p.595. See also Appendix to Chapter 9 p.88 below for Cheltenham LTC’s women’s champions and finalists in open tournaments from 1879 to 1884.

⁶¹ CC register 1910, JL p.215 & GM p.350. Ernest Maltby was still a day boy at CC at the time and with a birth date of 5/10/1861 was younger than the Renshaw twins (CC reg. p.397).

⁶² Looker-on 7/8/1875 p.505. The Looker-on of 24/9/1881(p.615) refers to the Montpellier Gardens’ asphalt court and how it was utilised for a match between Ernest Renshaw and Ernest Brown after heavy rain.

⁶³ Looker-on 30/3/1878 p.203

⁶⁴ Chronicle 21/8/1877 p.4

under-capitalised. More equity investment was needed from “local men” and the Chronicle report may have been encouraging the citizens of Cheltenham to fork out: if they were prepared to invest in bubble schemes, then they had the means to invest locally and charity began at home. There was a problem with the roof which was to delay the opening of the main part of the building but does not seem to have affected the southern wing initially, as the indoor skating rink was opened to the public on Tuesday 4th December⁶⁵. The full rink was now open for three sessions a day – morning, afternoon and evening – with a band playing every afternoon and three evenings a week. Tennis received rather grudging recognition with the allocation of part of the outer rink for the morning session - with the band absent tennis was permitted on less than half the rink from ten o'clock till one, but it was a start and a commercial baptism of sorts⁶⁶.

1878 – The club develops, the Winter Garden opens, enter three Renshaws

If Cheltenham tennis club officials were in short supply in 1877, they disappeared from sight altogether in the early part of 1878 and this may have been due in part to accidents of career moves and the vagaries of leave from employment amongst the males. Henry Porter was established in a full-time job as an assistant master at the Cheltenham Proprietary School⁶⁷; William Maltby sailed away early in January for a life in Australia⁶⁸; John Lewes and Gerald Mockler were both serving soldiers and Ernest Maltby was still at school⁶⁹. The club may have had no formal organisation at this time but a better day was dawning and as the revised Wimbledon code of tennis rules was published early in 1878, so did Dr John Abercrombie take his first step towards shaping the destiny of Cheltenham LTC. He was to be the father of Cheltenham's open tennis tournament in 1879 and was to manage the event until 1883. At the beginning of May the doctor organised a ladies invitation competition in the enclosed pleasure grounds of Suffolk Square, his home patch, and placed a toe in the water of tennis management. The Looker-on reported that play took place over four days but it provided no names for the competitors and gave no results⁷⁰. We can nevertheless be certain that prominent amongst the competitors were the doctor's daughter Mary, then aged just eighteen, and the sporty Clara Hill.

The county fete took place later in May and advertised handicap tennis competitions as in the past, but the local press were silent on the results after a day's postponement for rain⁷¹. Henry Porter's older brother Fortescue must have begun a long leave from the Indian Civil Service during the first half of 1878 as he arrived at the family home in Cheltenham in May and competed at the championships in Wimbledon in July, winning through two rounds before losing in four sets to L.R. Erskine⁷². His presence at events after July would have provided the club with first-hand experience of the new code of rules and intelligence on how the game was played at an advanced level. Arthur Myers also competed at Wimbledon in 1878 but although his family home was still his mother's house in Cheltenham, he was immersed in his medical training and probably resident in Cambridge, and would have had little involvement in

⁶⁵ Chronicle 11/12/1877 p.4

⁶⁶ Looker-on 22/12/1877 p.1

⁶⁷ Looker-on 19/9/1874 p.1 & 11/5/1878 p.299

⁶⁸ Looker-on 5/1/1878 p.10. By 1892 WDM was town clerk of Gayndah, Queensland (PO directory etc ACU).

⁶⁹ CC register 1910: JML p.215, GFM p.350 & ENM p.397

⁷⁰ Looker-on 11/5/1878 p.305

⁷¹ Looker-on 11/5/1878 p.1, Chronicle 21/5/1878 p.4 – with no mention of Cheltenham LTC

⁷² Looker-on 25/5/1878, p.338: “Arrivals.....Porter, Mr and Mrs F.W. and family, Covals [*Porter family home*]”. See also Homeward Mail 11/6/1878 p.630 (arrival in London). India List 1905 for career (ACU).

Cheltenham's club tennis⁷³; by the time he entered the Cheltenham tournament in October 1879, he was working as a physician at St George's Hospital in London and was a member of the All England Club⁷⁴.

In the second half of 1878 Clara Hill appeared to emerge as principal administrator of Cheltenham LTC but her laconic style of writing in public communications obscured her role, and she may have aimed to stay in the shadows to accommodate prevailing attitudes to the role of women. A tournament was planned on the skating rink for 30th September but had to be postponed and an announcement in the Looker-on to this effect bore no name or job title⁷⁵. An advertisement in the edition for 30th November announced the timing of the draw for the rescheduled tournament, and again failed to give the name and status of the author⁷⁶. Late in December Clara finally emerged from the closet when advertising for new members for the club: she offered her name and address as the destination for applications – “Mrs W. Hill, Hazel Lea, Lansdown” – and revealed her position as one of six people on the club management committee. Then in March 1879 in an advertisement for a doubles tournament at the end of the month, she unveiled a job title - “C. Hill Hon. Sec” - and dropped her husband's initial and the honorific that revealed her sex⁷⁷.

Clara Hill

By late 1878, Clara was thirty-one and the mother of a six-year-old, William Leonard Bertram Hill, her only child⁷⁸. She had lived in the Cheltenham area for nearly twenty years but her family background was unusual and her upbringing far from orthodox, if not tinged with a little mystery. Her father, Francis Higgins, came from an affluent family prominent in Eastnor, Worcestershire where his father enjoyed the living of rector⁷⁹. As the son of an Anglican minister, Francis followed a conventional path in his early years – educated at Rugby school under Arnold, qualified as a solicitor then practiced in Ledbury and Worcester – and in 1842 he married locally, a daughter of the Earl of Coventry named Elizabeth Williams⁸⁰. His wife's maiden name might have been expected to be Coventry rather than Williams, and her residence at the time of marriage the Coventry estate of Croome Court rather than a house in Severn Stoke a short ride to the west, but she was an illegitimate daughter and her mother was mistress to the 8th earl (who died in 1843, four years before Clara's birth)⁸¹. Some noble blood then ran in Clara's veins but her years in her mother's household were brief as Elizabeth died in March 1850 at the house of her brother-in-law Joseph Higgins⁸². Clara, aged nearly three, and an elder sister named Ada seem then to have been absorbed into the family of

⁷³ Obituary in British Medical Jnl 27/1/1894 & Cambridge Alumni (ACU): MA 1876, MD 1881. AM was absent from the club's first main tournament in December 1878 (Looker-on 14/12/1878 p.801).

⁷⁴ CC register 1910 p.261 & Field 11/10/1879 p.493

⁷⁵ Looker-on 21/9/1878 p.1

⁷⁶ Looker-on 30/11/1878 p.762

⁷⁷ Looker-on 28/12/1878 p.1 & 29/3/1879 p.1

⁷⁸ Clara – baptism record 17/9/1847 (ACU); William – born 2/12/1871 in Cheltenham (Gloucester Jnl 9/12/1871 p.5); he attended Cheltenham College for 3 years, leaving in 1887 (CC register 1910 p.498).

⁷⁹ Obituary for Joseph Higgins, Gentlemen's Magazine Dec. 1847 p.662

⁸⁰ Obituary for FH, Marylebone Mercury 8/3/1890 p.3; Rugby school register 1901 for 1675 – 1842 p.236; marriage register entry 1842 (George Williams a witness) (ACU).

⁸¹ www.historyofparliamentonline.org 21/5/2022; e-services.worcestershire.gov.uk Worcs CC records 21/5/2022: will of 8th Earl, “bequests to his mistress Elizabeth Williams” and 3 illegitimate children by her – George, James and Elizabeth Williams.

⁸² Worcester Chronicle 3/4/1850 p.5 – Elizabeth died at Joseph's house.

Joseph, who was married but childless and like Francis lived in Ledbury⁸³. Late in the 1850's Joseph moved to Cheltenham while brother Francis relocated to Marylebone in London, where for the next thirty years he devoted his energies to politics and the promotion of the Conservative Party⁸⁴. 1861 saw Clara and Ada boarding in Cheltenham at a small school run by the Langdon sisters, and Clara's induction into the local gentry was set fair⁸⁵. An eight-bedroom villa in Lansdown Road by the name of Hazel Lea was leased by Joseph in 1865 and that was to be Clara's home, on and off, single and married, for the next twenty years⁸⁶. Ada was married in London in May 1870 and less than six months later Clara tied the knot herself with one William Alexander Hill, only son of a "landed proprietor" resident in the village of Leigh near Cheltenham; William was an alumnus of Eton and Pembroke College, Oxford and a captain in the county militia regiment⁸⁷. The Hills established their marital home in the locality and then moved in with Joseph at Hazel Lea after a few years, possibly on the death of Joseph's wife in 1875⁸⁸. When Joseph himself died in 1885, Clara and her husband moved into a property with even more bedrooms and a garden large enough to provide two first class tennis courts⁸⁹.

Clara was to play tournament tennis from her base in Cheltenham for at least ten years and we have an unusual insight into her performance on the circuit because in 1889 she sued *The Sportsman* and the *Athletic Journal* (of Manchester) for libel in connection with their reports of her participation in the 1888 Macclesfield tournament and during the proceedings aspects of her playing record were laid out in public⁹⁰. Clara played at Macclesfield under an assumed name and the offending reports insinuated that the purpose of concealing her identity was to secure a favourable handicap – unsportsmanlike conduct which prompted whispering and worse amongst friends and acquaintances of the Hills in Cheltenham society⁹¹. Called to the witness stand, Clara was cross-examined on her status in the game and in answer to questions from Finlay QC, counsel for *The Sportsman*, she described her tournament schedule in recent years⁹²: in 1886 she played some five tournaments including Cheltenham, predominantly in the West of England and Wales; in 1887 she competed at six and extended her reach to the north, taking in Moffat in Scotland and the Northern Tournament in Scarborough; and in 1888 her total was eight tournaments, including Nottingham, Macclesfield and Scarborough. (The 1888 programme would have left her tolerant husband to fend for himself socially for much of the summer but domestically well looked after by living-in staff; by then their son and only child was rising seventeen and had left Cheltenham College after boarding for three years, so would have had no serious claims on

⁸³ Census for Joseph A Higgins & Clara etc, West Bank, Ledbury 1851. Baptism record & birth register entry for Clara (ACU). Francis in Ledbury: Electoral Rolls 1852 & 1857 (ACU) etc.

⁸⁴ Joseph: census 1861, Cheltenham (with wife Eliza) etc. Francis: obituary Marylebone Mercury 8/3/1890 p.3 – "over 30 years" as Secretary of Marylebone Conservative Union.

⁸⁵ Census 1861 for Clara & Ada (ACU)

⁸⁶ Looker-on 13/5/1865 p.303; Arrivals & Departures reports local journals (eg. Chron 17/6/1866 p.2), CH parish marriage register 4/10/1870, Probate for JA Higgins 25/7/1885 (died 19/6/1885); Hazel Lea letting details Looker-on 25/2/1888 p.143.

⁸⁷ Marriages per marriage register entries, ACU. William Hill: censuses for WAH's father 1861 & 1871, Gloucester Jnl 9/4/1870 p.5 etc, obituaries Chronicle 3/10/1931 p.2 & Gloucester Jnl 3/10/1931 p.16.

⁸⁸ 1877 Electoral Roll shows WA Hill's "abode" as Hazel Lea

⁸⁹ Looker-on 23/1/1886 p.60 - Removal to Queen's Gate West; house to let with 10 bedrooms & 2 tennis courts – Looker-on 20/9/1890 p.774.

⁹⁰ Chronicle 1/6/1889 p.6

⁹¹ In court, William Hill gave evidence that for months afterwards unpleasant remarks were frequently made to him "and post-cards and papers containing disagreeable observations were addressed to his family" (Chronicle Supplement 8/6/1889 Col'n 1); the report had caused Clara a great deal of unpleasantness among her friends (Chronicle 1/6/1889 p.6).

⁹² Supplement to the Cheltenham Chronicle 8/6/1889

his mother's time⁹³.) Defending counsel was keen to talk up her standard of play and Finlay asked if there were "distinguished" players present at these tournaments and whether she was able to hold her own against them. Her reply to the first question was "yes" and to the second "hardly". Pressed to admit that she was a "very good player" she conceded she was "fair", and Finlay felt this licensed him to refer to her thereafter as "the celebrated Mrs Hill". When counsel for the plaintiffs rose to his feet, he examined the editor of *Pastime* (Nicholas Lane Jackson, recipient of all tennis reports) on Clara's position in the hierarchy of competitors, and his aim by contrast was to play down her standing in the game. The court was apparently aware that in 1888 Clara lost 6-0, 6-0 to Mrs Watts at Nottingham⁹⁴ and Jackson declared that he knew Mrs Hill as a player and while "Mrs Watts was a very good player", "Mrs Hill was not one of the cracks....He should call [her] a good player. She was well known". The court also had knowledge of a win by Clara over Miss Bracewell in the 1887 Scarborough handicap singles (Clara receive 15, Bracewell owe 30)⁹⁵ and Jackson offered the view that if Miss Bracewell had met Mrs Hill on level terms "she would have beaten her easily"; he considered Miss Bracewell to be a very distinguished player and in 1888 she was about on a par with Mrs Watts⁹⁶. By 1888 Clara was forty-one and her best years were behind her. Singles was never her forte but in her prime she enjoyed some success as a doubles player and in the early years was a finalist in several open ladies' doubles events⁹⁷.

The cause of action had its humorous side and the proceedings were interrupted by laughter, even though the case was heard in the Queen's Bench Division before a special jury with QC's on both sides. It was hardly a life-or-death issue and judge and jury enjoyed the spectacle of a spirited sportswoman taking on a national newspaper (said to be widely read in Cheltenham). There were in fact three plaintiffs: Clara, her husband William (now a Colonel), and Miss Beatrice Rooke, a fellow member of Cheltenham LTC and daughter of Cheltenham physician Thomas Rooke⁹⁸. In June 1888 Clara and Beatrice had played in the Nottingham tournament and suffered what they considered to be an embarrassing loss in the women's doubles to the Misses Snook. Macclesfield was holding its tournament soon after and the two Cheltenham players made a late entry under assumed names, a common enough practice for players who wanted to avoid their real names appearing in the press. Clara called herself Mrs Henry, and Beatrice chose the thin disguise of Miss Rock. Their aim was to avoid the mockery of their friends if they lost again – to avoid being "chaffed by their friends" as their counsel put it⁹⁹. They played in the handicap ladies doubles and during the course of the event their true identities became known and caused comment. Subsequently the newspapers published articles which referred to "an unpleasant commotion" taking place when it was discovered that the pair were prominent players and indicated that the matter would be brought before the National Tennis Association; the *Athletic Journal* piece stated inter alia: "Their identity being established....there was no little indignation exhibited by the spectators and the pair cleared off the ground before the tournament concluded, scratching the mixed doubles". The implication of the reports was that they had concealed their identities in order to secure high handicaps and fled the field when found out.

In summing up the case against *The Sportsman*, the judge stated there was no doubt that the ladies had no intention to deceive and the question for the jury was whether the reports under discussion "conveyed a meaning of dishonesty and of an intention on the part of

⁹³ Censuses for Clara 1881 & 1891 (ACU); CC register 1910 p.498.

⁹⁴ Chronicle 1/6/1889 p.6 & Nottingham Evening Post 12/6/1888 p.3

⁹⁵ Chronicle 1/6/1889 p.6

⁹⁶ Supplement to Chronicle 8/6/1889. Playing together Watts & Bracewell won the first All England Ladies' Doubles at Buxton in 1885 (Badminton Library 1903 p.438).

⁹⁷ See Appendix at end of Chapter 9 below

⁹⁸ Chronicle 1/6/1889 p.6 & supplement 8/6/1889. Beatrice: censuses 1871 & 1891 (ACU).

⁹⁹ Chronicle 1/6/1889 p.6

the plaintiffs to deceive the players and so obtain an unfair advantage¹⁰⁰. Jury deliberations took just a few minutes and a verdict was returned for the plaintiffs, damages being assessed at £25 each for Hill and Rooke. Mr Justice Denman gave judgment accordingly and awarded costs. The *Athletic Journal* for their part consented to the same awards, with costs, and added a fulsome apology in which the proprietor accepted that the wording of the report “conveyed an imputation upon the honour of the plaintiffs” and expressed his deep regret¹⁰¹. Honour was satisfied but the court proceedings may have provided further food for embarrassment for the Hills because of the personal nature of the evidence and sideswipes from Finlay QC, such as his observation to the jury that “Mrs Hill had forgotten a good deal of what took place....and had imagined much that did not occur”¹⁰².

A year or two after the court case Clara moved to Maidstone and there she revived her interest in the game she had learned at the hands of Arthur Lillie over twenty years before¹⁰³. In 1894 she inaugurated the Maidstone open croquet tournament and earned a place in croquet history by singlehandedly resuscitating the national tournament game¹⁰⁴. In the nineties she also took up golf and by 1900 was involved in the administration of the sport as honorary secretary to the Maidstone Ladies Golf Club; she and the club captain presented the Kent County Challenge Cup, which was competed for on their Maidstone course in 1901 and referred to as “the Maconochie-Hill Kent County Cup”¹⁰⁵. In the late nineties she diversified into cat-breeding and added animal welfare to her portfolio of activities. She joined a Cat Club whose primary object was the promotion of the general good and welfare of the cat, and was soon sucked into its administration; by 1903 she was a Vice President and member of the managing committee¹⁰⁶. Tennis, croquet, golf, cats – wherever her interests led her, she took on management responsibilities and was a force to be reckoned with.

[A mixed tournament in December 1878 and the club relaunched](#)

The tournament planned to take place on Cheltenham’s skating rink at the end of September 1878 was probably postponed because of delays in the completion of work on the Winter Garden buildings¹⁰⁷. The financial problems that had been bubbling in 1877 boiled over early in 1878 and the Winter Garden company became strapped for cash and was threatened with legal proceedings for some of its debts¹⁰⁸. The factors giving rise to the situation were to prove a lethal cocktail. Originally the company had set out to raise equity capital of £20,000 but it achieved subscriptions of just £15,400 and went ahead with the project nevertheless¹⁰⁹. At a late stage there was found to be problem with the roof which rendered the building unsafe, and remedial work inflated the costs and delayed the commencement of full trading, adding a loss of income to increased construction and interest costs. At the beginning of 1877 the full cost of the project was forecast to be £23,000¹¹⁰ but expenditure was heading towards

¹⁰⁰ Chronicle supplement 8/6/1889

¹⁰¹ Chronicle supplement 8/6/1889

¹⁰² Chronicle supplement 8/6/1889 Col’n 1. The Chronicle devoted 3.5 columns to its report in the supplement, playing to local interest.

¹⁰³ Census for Clara 1891 (ACU), Looker-on 7/11/1903 p.1111

¹⁰⁴ See Chapter 7 page 49 above; Prichard 1981 p.62/63, 208 & 211

¹⁰⁵ “Kent County Ladies’ Golf Association – 1900 – 2000”, by Shirley Daniel, pub. 2001 KCLGA, p.7 & 8

¹⁰⁶ “The Book of the Cat”, Frances Simpson, 1903, Cassell & Co, p.28 & 29. There were several cat clubs in the UK and Clara’s club seems to have been an offshoot of the National Cat Club. Formation of club: Gloucester Citizen 29/10/1898 p.3, Looker-on 5/11/1898 p.1048. Clara’s cats: Cat Club Register 1899.

¹⁰⁷ Looker-on 21/9/1878 p.1

¹⁰⁸ Chronicle 16/4/1878 p.5

¹⁰⁹ Prospectus: Chronicle 25/4/1876 p.4; capital raised 16/4/1878 p.5.

¹¹⁰ Chronicle 26/12/1876 p.5

a final total of over £28,000 and by April 1878 the company was fighting for survival¹¹¹. A writ was issued against the company carrying the threat that if put into execution, the building would pass into the “possession of legal authorities”¹¹². Special meetings of shareholders were called to address the crisis. Not surprisingly, additional share capital was not forthcoming, the prospect for dividends being a mirage at best, and the despondent investors chose short-term relief through an increase in borrowings - a small issue of debentures together with an extension of support from the company’s bank, which was more than comfortable with its security¹¹³. Interest costs were to be further inflated. Immediate collapse was averted, and the project was given the wherewithal to proceed to completion, but the measures were a patch-up and judgment day merely deferred. The creditors knew a completed building was better security than work in progress.

Towards the end of March 1878 the Winter Garden had opened up its grounds for the summer season and the facilities offered to the tennis fraternity had been upgraded from a portion of the outer rink to grass courts as well¹¹⁴. In May the hard courts (“finest in the country”) were made available from dawn to dusk with roller skating restricted to the evenings¹¹⁵. Skating was becoming seasonal, and beginning to decline in popularity, and tennis was stepping into the breach. In October, as the Winter Garden neared completion, the Chronicle was to observe that James Lillywhite remained “at the head of the Rinking and Lawn Tennis Departments” and this was a new title which demonstrated recognition by the directors of the importance of the new sport¹¹⁶. However, in June work on the main building and completion of the interior of the indoor rink caused the closure of the rink for four months and the tennis players were deprived of their asphalt¹¹⁷. In the opinion of the Looker-on, during its “long vacation” the rink was much improved in the quality of accommodation for both skaters and spectators and was brought up to the standard of the best in the country. The whole Winter Garden development was substantially complete by the beginning of November and the inaugural opening of the building took place on Wednesday 6th November amongst flags and banners and fine speeches, and to an orchestral accompaniment under the baton of Mr A.G. Pollock¹¹⁸.

Soon after the opening the hard court facilities offered to tennis players were extended beyond the outdoor rink to the area under the central dome, which had a wooden floor “supported upon indiarubber buffers”, and in late December the Chronicle even referred to this area as “The Tennis Court”¹¹⁹. Tennis could now be played outdoors on asphalt or indoors on wood between the hours of 9am and 2pm. The central section of the Winter Garden converted well to tennis use and in combination with the skating rink, it was to provide the stage for Cheltenham’s next three principal tournaments - in December 1878, April 1879 and October 1879, three tournaments which saw William Renshaw develop from club enthusiast to national championship contender. Although designed without tennis in mind, the Winter Garden complex provided a fine setting for tournament play with first class clubhouse facilities for the players and flexible accommodation for spectators. The Chronicle provided this description of the complex in its edition of 12th November 1878 (page 2):-

¹¹¹ Final cost: Looker-on 29/3/1879 p.201

¹¹² Chronicle 16/4/1878 p.5 & 30/4/1878 p.5 (writ)

¹¹³ Chronicle 30/4/1878 p.5 & 21/5/1878 p.8; Looker-on 18/5/1878 p.320

¹¹⁴ Chronicle 26/3/1878 p.4

¹¹⁵ Looker-on 11/5/1878 p.1

¹¹⁶ Chronicle 8/10/1878 p.4

¹¹⁷ Looker-on 19/10/1878 p.672

¹¹⁸ Chronicle 12/11/1878 p.2

¹¹⁹ Looker-on 16/11/1878 p.1 & 7/12/1878 p.785, Chronicle 12/11/1878 p.2 (dome floor) & 24/12/1878 p.4

“The style of the building is Italian, its plan is cruciform, and is set apart for three sections, the winter garden, dome and transepts, and skating rink. The floors are on the same level, by which means the whole area is available for any purpose where space and magnitude is required. The building is flanked with towers, and in the centre of the arcade transepts there is a lofty dome, rising to the height of nearly 100 feet. The walls are of brick, faced with white Leicester bricks, relieved with bands and arches of red bricks; the mouldings being executed in Portland cement. The floor area is 16,500 feet, inclusive of retiring rooms, offices, lavatories, &c., the extreme length is 250 feet, and the average width 50 feet. Special attention has been paid to the laying of the dome floor; it is not only supported upon indiarubber buffers, but the surface is devoid of nails, and with these precautions and its great area it may justly be said that it is the finest ball room in the town or country. One of the principal features of the building is its large in and out-door skating rinks, no expense having been spared in that direction. The surface has been formed by the Limner Asphalte Company, and those competent to judge in such matters are unanimous in stating that the rinking surface is simply as good as it can be. The out-door rink is 1,000 square yards in extent, and the in-door is about 700; the former one being available for lawn tennis. The roof which is of an elegant and novel construction is composed of iron and glass throughout. The main ribs are semi-circular with pierced openings, relieved with colour; it contains in the aggregate 30,000 square feet of glass..... Leaving the interior, we find that the grounds by which the buildings are surrounded have been laid out in large grass plats for various outdoor games, and the whole is encircled by a handsome wrought iron fence.....”

The Dome court had a “ballroom” finish to it and would have provided a fast wood surface in striking contrast to the slower asphalt of the rink courts. Vere Gould was lucky to play William Renshaw on the outdoor asphalt in October 1879 or the young Cheltonian would have enjoyed a crushing home advantage, not that it spared the Irishman from defeat¹²⁰.

While Lillywhite, as manager of sports at the centre, was battling with the decline of roller skating and the practical problems thrown up by the staggered launch of the Winter Garden amenities and construction interruptions, his work continued under his Cheltenham College contract for cricket coaching and management of the school sports facilities. His cricket activities reached a pinnacle of achievement in August 1878 with the successful inauguration of Cheltenham’s Cricket Week and he was lauded in public by the likes of the mayor of Cheltenham and James Agg-Gardner MP¹²¹. This would have been of some comfort to him in the midst of the Winter Garden travails, which posed the threat of the loss of a significant source of income. Between cricket, Winter Garden and retailing activities James must have been over-stretched and he was to relinquish his role as College cricket instructor and sports manager by the summer of 1880¹²².

¹²⁰ Looker-on 11/10/1879 p.648. According to the Field, the indoor rink court was “devoted to the ladies’ games as it is somewhat limited in size...” (11/10/1879 p.493).

¹²¹ Speeches at the celebration banquet, Chronicle 27/8/1878 p.5 etc. See Chapter 7 page 40 above (“In July 1872 James....”).

¹²² Obituary in The Cheltonian, January 1883. William A Woof was taken on as professional “Second Bowler” at CC in 1879 and appears to have taken over the responsibilities of coach for the summer of 1880 (profile of WAF in Chronicle 16/6/1885 p.2, obituary Chronicle 10/4/1937 p.2). He stayed for two years, moved to MCC at Lords in 1882, then returned to CC in 1886 and remained in post until 1925.



NEW WINTER GARDEN AND SKATING RINK AT CHELTENHAM.

8.1 The Winter Garden 1878, looking north-east from the south-west corner – almost the view from the Renshaws' house.¹²³

On 9th December 1878 there began the delayed club tournament that was to prove to be the launch pad for serious competitive tennis in Cheltenham¹²⁴. It was a mixed doubles tournament played indoors at the Winter Garden between twenty-two couples. Social players confronted seasoned sportsmen, teenagers mingled with the mature, novices shaped up against veterans (such as Henry Porter), and a third round loser at Wimbledon in the shape of Fortescue Porter provided a seasoning of national tournament experience. The mixture of players was catholic but a surprising number were to participate in major tournaments in later years. Four of the male players present were to play at Wimbledon and two were to be Wimbledon champions. Four of the ladies were to win major singles events in Cheltenham, Dublin or Bath and a further two were to become regulars on the tournament circuit. The male roll call for Wimbledon was William Renshaw, Ernest Renshaw, Fortescue Porter and Henry Porter. The tournament ladies were Florence Mardall, Marian Bradley, Mary Abercrombie, Fanny Morris, Clara Hill and Ella Ramsay¹²⁵. Beatrice Mardall, Florence's younger sister, competed in December as well and in later years she was to play in a few open tournaments, under the name of Kay after her marriage in 1881¹²⁶. A "Miss Maltby" was listed as a competitor and this was probably Ellen Maltby, who played in the Cheltenham tournament of

¹²³ Illustrated London News 9/11/1878 p.449 (BNA), Image © Illustrated London News Ltd/Mary Evans, picture no.13046811

¹²⁴ Looker-on 14/12/1878 p.800 & 801

¹²⁵ Looker-on 14/12/1878 p.801 & see Appendix at the end of Chapter 9 below

¹²⁶ Playing with Florence, Beatrice was a losing finalist in the Bath Ladies Doubles in 1882 (see Appendix)

1879, won the ladies singles at Brighton in 1880 and was Brighton runner-up in 1881 (but won the mixed)¹²⁷.

William Renshaw was paired with Marian Bradley and not surprisingly they came through to win the event after encountering their toughest resistance against Florence Mardall and Mr Francis¹²⁸. The Looker-on described how they played “the most scientific game” of the first round to defeat Henry Porter and Beatrice Mardall, but on the basis of future performance Beatrice would have played to a standard well below that of Marian. Ernest Renshaw survived the first round in partnership with one of the Morris sisters but succumbed to Fortescue Porter and Miss M. Atherley in the second¹²⁹. An interesting casualty of the first round was Miss Renshaw – almost certainly the twins’ elder sister Edith¹³⁰ – and she was to compete in the Cheltenham ladies doubles in October 1879 with Ella Ramsay. In the final William & Marian cruised to an easy victory over Mrs George Bolton & the Rev Hattersley Smith “amidst the applause and congratulations of the large circle of friends who were present to witness and compliment them on their success”¹³¹.

Some ten days after the conclusion of the tournament, an advertisement appeared in the Looker-on effectively relaunching Cheltenham lawn tennis club¹³²:

TENNIS

It is proposed to form a TENNIS CLUB in Cheltenham, and Ladies and Gentlemen wishing to join must send in their Names to Mrs W. Hill, Hazel Lea, Lansdown. The Annual Subscription of 5s. each will date from January 1st 1879. The following Ladies and Gentlemen have kindly consented to be on the Managing Committee for the first year: - Mrs Byng Morris, Mrs W. Hill, Miss Maltby, Dr Abercrombie, Henry Porter Esq, and W. Renshaw Esq.

Hill, Maltby and Porter were all familiar names – dating from croquet times - and the proposed tennis club presented itself as a reconstitution of the original Cheltenham LTC, with the Winter Garden probably intended as home ground, providing as it could indoor and outdoor courts, hard and grass surfaces¹³³. Mrs Byng Morris was the mother of tennis-playing daughters. Dr Abercrombie, who over the years graced a good number of press reports as a flower show competitor but never as a tennis player, would have been there to serve the public good and indulge the interest of his youngest daughter Mary. William Renshaw, just coming up to his eighteenth birthday, was a surprising inclusion. He was by far the youngest on the committee – by ten years – and to have secured the appointment he must already have been well known to the club seniors. It is well recorded that the twins learned their tennis in Cheltenham and this suggests an education that began before the 1878 season, no doubt under the eye of Henry Porter¹³⁴.

The balance of the sexes in the committee – a woman for every man – must have been remarkable for its time and a stark contrast to the male saturation of the committees of the All

¹²⁷ There were three Maltby sisters – Jane (32 in 1878), Ellen (27) and Mary (21). Brighton tournament: Field 16/10/1880 p.573 & 30/4/1881 p.595.

¹²⁸ Looker-on 14/12/1878 p.801 & 21/12/1878 p.816

¹²⁹ Probably Maud (c.24), possibly May (18), daughters of General Mark Atherley of Cheltenham

¹³⁰ At this time, only one Miss Renshaw appears in the Looker-on & she is based at the Renshaw home: 12/1/1878 p.26: “Departures...Capt. Meara RN, Mrs Meara, Miss Renshaw – Clarence House for London”.

¹³¹ Looker-on 21/12/1878 p.816

¹³² Looker-on 28/12/1878 p.1

¹³³ From March to April 1878, the Winter Garden advertised “fashionable outdoor games” for the Summer season including croquet (Chronicle 19/3/1878 p.4 & 9/4/1878 p.4, Looker-on 23/3/1878 p.1 etc.)

¹³⁴ Obituaries: Ernest - Field 9/9/1899 p.464 & Looker-on 9/9/1899 p.858; William - Field 20/8/1904 p.352.

England Club and the Fitzwilliam in Dublin. However, it was probably a natural reflection of the strength of interest of Cheltenham's young gentlewomen and the forceful presence of Clara Hill. Dr Abercrombie, however, would soon emerge as the dominant influence in the club, with James Lillywhite providing expert and discrete support.

John Abercrombie

At sixty-one years old, John Abercrombie was a grandfather and a generation beyond the other seniors on the committee¹³⁵. All of his children apart from Mary had left Cheltenham and were off his hands: his four sons were established in their careers and his eldest daughter Clara was married and living in Dublin, a mother of two¹³⁶. A scholar at Caius College, Cambridge in his youth, he played cricket once for his university, against Oxford in the fourth annual match of 1838, and in 1839 year he rowed for Cambridge in what was only the third Boat Race in history (the second on the Thames)¹³⁷. As a blue in both sports in pioneer days, he had first-hand experience of major competitions played out in public and this would have stood him in good stead when managing Cheltenham's first open tennis tournament. Married in 1847, he qualified as a doctor shortly afterwards and moved to Cheltenham to practise, in course of time becoming a physician at Cheltenham General Hospital and physician to Cheltenham College, roles he filled for many years¹³⁸. His first child, Clara, was born in Cheltenham late in 1848 and Cheltenham was his home for the following thirty-five years¹³⁹. Four sons were born to him and they were all educated as day boys at Cheltenham College, although his second son John spent a few terms at Eton around the age of ten¹⁴⁰. By 1878 he was firmly placed at the heart of the Cheltenham establishment - medical, educational and social – and he was no newcomer to the management of local sports facilities. When the Montpellier Gardens company was formed in 1861, John was a founding director along with ten other esquires and a team of eight tradesmen under the chairmanship of Sir Alexander Ramsay¹⁴¹. The gardens became popular as host to promenaders and archers and were adapted to provide manicured lawns for bowls enthusiasts, croquet players and latterly tennis players as fashions changed. Seventeen years on the number of directors had been slimmed down to nine but John was still in post, and by the end of 1881 he was chairman¹⁴². He was eminently well qualified to build a showpiece for the new game in Cheltenham and the time was right for him. In May 1878, when he organised the Suffolk Square ladies' tournament, he had retirement in view and he resigned from his Cheltenham College role in November¹⁴³. At

¹³⁵ Census 1871 (ACU) & Tonbridge School register 1820 - 1893

¹³⁶ Sons per CC register 1910: Alexander p.242, John p.264, Francis p.305, George p.305 (George entered solicitor's articles as a resident of London in 1874 [ACU]). Clara: census 1901 (ACU)

¹³⁷ Caius College Register, ACU: "Cricket blue 1838, rowing blue 1839". Boat race history: Bell's Life in London 7/4/1839 p.3: Cambridge wore white Guernseys and white straw hats with light blue ribbons; Oxford dark blue Guernseys with white stripes & dark straw hats with dark blue ribbons. Cricket: Bell's Life in London 15/7/1838 p.4; Wikipedia 13/6/2022 & www.espnricinfo.com 14/6/2022.

¹³⁸ Marriage register (ACU). Physician: Tonbridge register 1820 – 1893, Caius register (ACU). Provincial Medical Directory 1850 listed JA as Physician to Cheltenham General Hospital; Looker-on 24/1/1863 p.60 reported post as Senior Physician; 5/4/1879 p.217 referred to "about" 30 years of service at the hospital.

¹³⁹ Clara: baptism & birth registers (ACU). Home: censuses for JA 1851 to 1881 (ACU) etc.

¹⁴⁰CC register 1910 p.264, Eton register 1862 - 1868. Judging by his subsequent career in the medical profession, John had a fine academic brain and was exceptionally able.

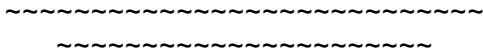
¹⁴¹ Chronicle 17/9/1861 p.4 & 16/12/1862 p.5; Ramsay chairman Looker-on 23/12/1865 p.829.

¹⁴² Looker-on 22/12/1877 p.814 – JA re-elected; chairman: Examiner 4/1/1882, Almanack

¹⁴³ Looker-on 23/11/1878 p.753

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the end of March 1879 he signed off as a staff member of Cheltenham General Hospital and his decks were cleared for tennis action¹⁴⁴.



¹⁴⁴ Looker-on 5/4/1879 p.217 & 3/5/1879 p.280

Chapter 9: Cheltenham LTC gets serious and joins the top flight

1879: Irish social connections, the Renshaws take to the dance floor

One of the first acts of the new club committee seems to have been to arrange a match against the Fitzwilliam Club of Dublin. The programme for the Winter Garden advertised on 4th January 1879 included a "Lawn Tennis Tournament - Fitzwilliam Club (Dublin) versus Cheltenham Club; Week commencing Monday Jan. 6th"¹⁴⁵. No subsequent report of the match was forthcoming from the *Looker-on* or *Chronicle*, which is a pity, but the mere planning of such an event when Cheltenham's tennis had barely progressed beyond the social would suggest a close relationship between leading members of the two clubs. The initiative is likely to have come from the Fitzwilliam, which had been founded in November 1877 and was firmly established by the end of 1878¹⁴⁶. Matches had already been played on its home ground against Monkstown and Dublin University in October 1878, although these were small affairs with just two men to each team (- Goid and Barry representing the Fitzwilliam) and it may have been looking for stronger opposition¹⁴⁷. In future years there was to be a strong connection between the clubs through Old Cheltonian Ernest Browne (who joined the Fitzwilliam in 1879/80) and the regular contingent of Cheltenham players who competed in the Irish Championships¹⁴⁸. A number of prominent Fitzwilliam members had personal links to Cheltenham and Dr Abercrombie for his part had a close family link to Dublin. Abercrombie's eldest daughter Clara had married an Irish solicitor named George O'Brien Kennedy in 1873 and their home was in Dublin – they may have had a personal connection to the Fitzwilliam¹⁴⁹. Mary Abercrombie visited Dublin in February 1880 and played in the Irish Championships of 1881 as Cheltenham's sole female representative, partnering William Renshaw to win the mixed doubles (the only women's event at the championships that year)¹⁵⁰.

Of the ten founding fathers of the Fitzwilliam three are known to have had family links to Cheltenham¹⁵¹. Christopher Digges La Touche – a scion of the Dublin banking dynasty – was the first honorary secretary of the club and stayed in post until Ernest Browne took over in 1882¹⁵². His aunt by marriage, Mary Digges La Touche, moved to Cheltenham with her six children after the death of her husband in 1862 and sent her eldest son William to Cheltenham College, where he was a contemporary of Ernest Browne and a similar age¹⁵³. John James Digges La Touche, honorary treasurer of the club in 1879 and first cousin to Christopher's father, found romance in Cheltenham and was married there in Christ Church in 1866¹⁵⁴. His wife, Anne, was a daughter of the Raj, born in Bombay to an officer of the Indian Army named Andrew Pringle. Her father died soon after her birth and her mother had taken up residence in

¹⁴⁵ *Looker-on* 4/1/1879 p.2

¹⁴⁶ "Fitzwilliam's First Fifty", J.J. Treacy, 1927 p.5 & 6

¹⁴⁷ *Freeman's Journal* 14/10/1878 p.7 (Monkstown) & 1/11/1878 p.7 (University)

¹⁴⁸ Chapter 6 above p.14 et seq

¹⁴⁹ One of the founders of the Fitzwilliam was James Gilbert Kennedy (b.1855), a son of Dr Evory Kennedy of Belgard Castle, Clondalkin. However, there is no obvious link between the families (per ACU family trees).

¹⁵⁰ *Looker-on* 7/2/1880 p.89 & *Examiner* 11/2/1880 p.2. *Field* 28/5/1881 p.732.

¹⁵¹ "The Fitzwilliam Story", Ulick O'Connor, 1977 p.1

¹⁵² O'Connor 1977 p.77. Obituaries: William D La Touche (father) - *Illustrated London News* 30/9/1882 p.362, Christopher - *Irish Times* 28/11/1914 p.7. See also *Dublin E Telegraph* 10/8/1894 p.3. In 1877 CDLaT was a young employee of the Guinness brewery and he rose to be Managing Director.

¹⁵³ *Census 1871*: Mary was living at Sans Souci, Leckhampton Road with her 6 children, all born in Dublin. *CC register 1910* p.347 for William. She was still in Cheltenham in 1877, "Villa Park", and probably moved to Oxford in late 1878 after her son Charles went up to Oxford (*Examiner* 26/1/1876 p.8 & 20/6/1877 p.8).

¹⁵⁴ *Treasurer*: *Field* 7/6/1879 p.681. *Marriage*: entry in register for Christchurch, Cheltenham 4/10/1866 (ACU).

Cheltenham by 1857¹⁵⁵. The third Fitzwilliam founder with links was the multi-talented Arnold Felix Graves. Arnold's uncle John Thomas Graves was a Cheltenham resident as early as 1850¹⁵⁶ and Arnold's older brother John attended Cheltenham College as a day boy between 1852 and 1857, presumably living with his uncle¹⁵⁷. Uncle John died in 1870 at his house in Cheltenham, Thirlestaine Lodge, but his wife Amelia stayed on and was still living there in 1881¹⁵⁸. Arnold was probably the "Mr Arnold" who played in the Cheltenham tournament of October 1879 (and lost to William Renshaw in the third round of the singles)¹⁵⁹.

Some, all or none of these connections may have led to the tennis match of 1879 but whoever made the first overture, they are illustrative of the social strands which linked the Protestant professional classes of Dublin's fair city with the gentry of England's garden town, and underpinned the participation in each other's tournaments in those early years¹⁶⁰. Mike Morgan in his history of Cheltenham College highlighted the strong relations between the school and the Irish gentry and offered an enthusiastic if irreverent view:

"College itself grew very rapidly [*from its founding in 1841*]...Many parents with boys to educate came to live in the town...From the start there were a good many Irish parents: an average of forty-four in any given year of the first decade. A number of well-born Irish families had settled in Cheltenham, attracted by its amenities:

The Churchyard's so small and the Irish so many,
They ought to be pickled and sent to Kilkenny.¹⁶¹

And after 1848 the London and North Western Railway ran a regular steamer service from Dublin to Holyhead linked to the main line to the north-west. Thus began an Irish connection with College which has flourished, to its great benefit, from that day to this."¹⁶²

Amongst Irish families patronising the College was to be found the Martins of Agher, County Meath (later of Dublin), the family of future Cheltenham and Irish champion Louisa Martin¹⁶³. Two of Louisa's brothers boarded at the school at different times between 1875 and 1885 and they were kept company by two of Louisa's cousins, all inmates of Boyne House¹⁶⁴. Louisa's paternal grandmother lived with one of her sisters in Cheltenham's Suffolk Square – so a neighbour to the Abercrombies - and when Louisa first played the Cheltenham open in 1884 there was a family home conveniently placed a stone's throw from Montpellier

¹⁵⁵ Bombay Gazette: birth of Annie 23/10/1837 p.582; death of Capt AWP 27/12/1837 p.698; Looker-on 26/9/1857 p.931 (removal from 8 to 12 Lansdown Parade); census for Ann Pringle 1861 (ACU).

¹⁵⁶ Looker-on 2/11/1850 p.700 – Removals of Mr & Mrs JTG to 12 Imperial Square; same address census 1851 for Amelia (Lodger) (ACU). See also Looker-on 9/5/1863 p.299 – removal to Thirlestaine Lodge.

¹⁵⁷ CC register 1910 p.146. JCG joined the Indian Civil Service in 1861 (very Cheltenham)

¹⁵⁸ Probate for JTG 1870, Amelia censuses 1871 & 1881 (ACU). The house was in Thirlestaine Road. Staff included cook, footman & maid, so well equipped for family visits. Amelia was still there when she died in 1901 (probate, ACU).

¹⁵⁹ Field 11/10/1879 p.493

¹⁶⁰ O'Connor 1977 p.1: "...the background of the founders of the club was Anglo-Irish and Protestant, drawn mainly from the Dublin professional classes".

¹⁶¹ This seems to be an adaptation of verse that appeared in the Cheltenham Looker-on of 21/9/1833 p.260: "He died of three doctors, one surgeon, one druggist/As the churchyard's so small, and the M.D.s so many/The Irish are pickled and sent to Kilkenny".

¹⁶² Morgan 1968 p.10

¹⁶³ Bomford family website <http://www.bomford.net>, 15/5/2015. LM was also 3 times runner-up in the All-Comers ladies' singles at Wimbledon – 1898, 1900 & 1901 (50 Years of Wimbledon 1926 p.80).

¹⁶⁴ CC register 1910: Louisa's brothers – Charles RHM p.406 (senior prefect 1882, p.699), George HFM p.502; cousins – Charles FM p.406, Charles RM p.463.

Gardens¹⁶⁵; in the Field report of the tournament Louisa was listed as a member of Cheltenham LTC and she took her first bow in the Irish open a year later¹⁶⁶.

The Renshaw twins themselves had a family link to Ireland through their stepfather Edward Meara, who came from an Irish family with roots in Waterford¹⁶⁷. Edward and his brother George were sent to school at Cheltenham College in 1845 but only stayed a couple of terms. The Meara/Waterford connection may have prompted the Renshaws' participation in the Waterford tournament of 1881 in which they teamed up with the children of Sir James Langrishe of Knocktopher Abbey, some twenty miles from Waterford¹⁶⁸. William partnered Hercules Langrishe (of the Fitzwilliam) in the men's doubles and his sister Beatrice in the mixed, while Ernest linked up with sister May for the mixed. On the other hand it may have been friendship between William and Hercules that brought the Renshaws to Waterford, but either way there was a strong relationship in evidence. William partnered Hercules again at the 1881 Limerick tournament and in 1882 he partnered May in the Northern tournament and Beatrice at Cheltenham¹⁶⁹.

In January 1879 the Renshaw twins celebrated their eighteenth birthdays and on Valentine's day the family stepped out in full strength at the Ladies' Invitation Dance in the Assembly Rooms¹⁷⁰. William and Ernest were resplendent in the uniform of the militia regiment they had joined in August 1878, the 1st Royal Lancashire Militia; Edith attended as *Bergère Louis XV*; Captain Meara sported his naval uniform and Mrs Meara contented herself with Full Dress¹⁷¹. They joined an assembly of over three hundred and fifty guests, mainly in fancy dress, which the Looker-on considered to be as gay and representative of Cheltenham Society as it was possible to be¹⁷². The tennis club fielded a strong mixed team alongside the Renshaws. Mary Abercrombie impersonated *A Starry Night*; Mrs Hill appeared as an eccentric *Little Dr Faust* attended by Captain Hill (*A Speaking Likeness*) who graced the receiving line at the entrance; Mrs Byng Morris was there with Edith and Fanny, garbed as *Night, Flora* and *Olivia Primrose*; Fortescue and Mrs Porter were disguised as a *Neapolitan Fisherman* and a *Neapolitan Fish Girl* (Henry seems to have been shy of the dance floor); and Florence Mardall was *Cendrillon*, while her younger brother George – destined soon for military service with the Natal Mounted Police¹⁷³ – masqueraded as a *2nd Class Petty Officer RN*. Alfred Rooke, who played in the county fete tournament of 1877, had joined the 1st Royal Lancashires two months after the Renshaws and he kept them company in regimental uniform¹⁷⁴. The dance followed a familiar Cheltenham pattern and came hard on the heels of the New Club's ball a few days earlier, when over three hundred gathered to dine and dance at the Assembly Rooms and many of the same families attended as well as Ella Ramsay, but just one Mr Renshaw¹⁷⁵.

¹⁶⁵ Census 1881 for her grandmother Susan Margaret Martin and her sister Frances Bolton – both Bomfords by birth; probate for SM 1885, date of death 24/8/1884 – Louisa's uncle General CN Martin also lived at Suffolk House at the time (probate & "Removals" Looker-on 4/2/1888 p.87). 1884 tournament: Louisa lost to Edith Davies in the singles final after beating Lilian Watson in the semi (Field 14/6/1884 p.832 & 21/6/1884 p.869)

¹⁶⁶ Field 30/5/1885 p.715. In the Cheltenham open of 1885 LM was listed as "Dublin" (Field 6/6/1885 p.752).

¹⁶⁷ Chapter 6 above p.8 ("Edward came from...")

¹⁶⁸ See this chapter pages 50 & 51 below, "The Waterford open handicap at the beginning of August...."

¹⁶⁹ Limerick: page 51 below; Northern: Field 17/6/1882 p.823; Cheltenham: Field 23/9/1882 p.460.

¹⁷⁰ Looker-on 15/2/1879 p.107 to 109

¹⁷¹ Looker-on 15/2/1879 p.109; email from curator King's Own Royal Museum, Lancs, 3/9/2013.

¹⁷² Looker-on 15/2/1879 p.107

¹⁷³ CC register 1910 p.400

¹⁷⁴ Email from curator King's Own Lancs, 27/11/2014. Alfred was the brother of tennis player Beatrice Rooke and was at Cheltenham College as a day boy from January 1874 to July 1876, overlapping for six months with the Renshaw twins (who were a year younger). He joined the regular army from the militia in February 1881 (census for father Thomas Rooke 1871 [ACU] & CC register 1910 p.390).

¹⁷⁵ Looker-on 15/2/1879 p.107

Which of the brothers attended the earlier event is unknown but the family presence at the Ladies' Invitation illustrated the sociability of both generations and the intention of the parents that the young should find their feet in polite society.

Guests were greeted in the Vestibule, refreshments were served in the front Assembly Room, and dancing began at ten o'clock to the music of Mr Hatton's Quadrille Band, who "selected for their Card some of the most popular and modern dances, the performance of which did them very great credit, and materially enhanced the enjoyment of those who kept time to their music". At midnight, supper was served in the Club Room upstairs and afterwards guests returned to the Ball Room to dance into the early hours¹⁷⁶.

The Winter Garden sinks into insolvency but Lillywhite stages a club competition

When available the Winter Garden complex provided a fine venue for winter tennis, but the game coexisted with a range of other uses and had to take its turn in the off season. As part of a Grand Christmas Festival starting on Boxing Day in 1878 the Dome was occupied by a gigantic Christmas tree, hung with a thousand prizes for those who paid the entrance fee, and there were decorations, illuminations and scented fountains, three concerts daily by the Birmingham Orpheus Glee Union, and skating morning, afternoon and evening to the accompaniment of Mr Pollock's Winter Garden orchestra¹⁷⁷. The programme for January included promenade concerts, evening entertainments by a comedian of the Opera Comique, and a performance of Handel's *Messiah*¹⁷⁸. On 21st January two hundred singers and musicians took their place in the auditorium to perform the great oratorio before an audience estimated at two thousand, the largest audience ever assembled for a public performance in Cheltenham according to the Looker-on¹⁷⁹:

"Everyone present was delighted at the success achieved" and no one should have been happier than the shareholders of the Company "to find what a splendid building their *Crystal Palace* is for such and such like undertakings....The acoustic properties of the building are perfect and no one in the large building but must admit they heard every word....The Promenaders, or those who only paid a shilling admittance fee, heard quite as well as those in the front row"¹⁸⁰.

A few days later there was a *Scotch Concert* in which the famous pipers of the Fusilier Guards favoured Cheltenham with some of their "Highland music"¹⁸¹. For the less musically inclined there followed a *Grand Military Assault at Arms* at the end of January, performed by the staff of Aldershot's military gymnasium, and there was a very large and appreciative audience for acts such as Sword and Bayonet Fencing, Sheep Cleaving, Boxing and gymnastics¹⁸². In early February, the outdoor rink was made available for tennis and skating once again¹⁸³. To the innocent onlooker all seemed to be progressing well with the new complex but the success of the public events created an illusion of wellbeing and the company was actually in dire financial straits. The problems of 1878 were unresolved and the underlying position was if

¹⁷⁶ Looker-on 15/2/1879 p.107 to 108

¹⁷⁷ Looker-on 21/12/1878 p.810 & 816, also 28/12/1878 p.1

¹⁷⁸ Looker-on 4/1/1879 p.2 & 11/1/1879 p.18

¹⁷⁹ Looker-on 25/1/1879 p.56 & 18/1/1879 p.34

¹⁸⁰ Chronicle 28/1/1879 p.4

¹⁸¹ Chronicle 21/1/1879 p.4

¹⁸² Looker-on 18/1/1879 p.34 & 1/2/1879 p.72. Sheep cleaving seems to have consisted of "dividing" the carcass of a sheep, suspended head down, with one "perfectly horizontal cut".

¹⁸³ Looker-on 8/2/1879 p.1

anything worse than a year earlier - the creditors were back knocking on the door, with increased insistence. Although the tennis club enjoyed the enthusiastic support of James Lillywhite, and was confidently planning a tennis tournament for the end of March, it was some way away from securing a dependable home ground for hardcourt tennis¹⁸⁴.

On 18th February the Winter Garden company made a final appeal to the public for additional funds and advertised a subscription for debentures with a face value of £12,000¹⁸⁵. It was the last throw of the dice. Who knows what claims it felt able to make in the prospectus but whatever they were, the issue of debentures flopped and on 15th March the company called an Extraordinary General Meeting to appoint a liquidator and wind up the company¹⁸⁶. Just over four months after the opening ceremony the company had collapsed.

The Looker-on described the failure as the most serious “financial disaster” that had ever occurred in Cheltenham (the Chronicle called it a “smash”), and was quick on the draw with allegations of incompetence and hubris, but if it was the worst ever, then local enterprise had led a charmed existence until that time¹⁸⁷. The company was insolvent – lacking the wherewithal to meet its current liabilities – but it owned a substantial asset and when this was sold, and its lawsuit in connection with the roof defects concluded successfully, it was in a position to meet its liabilities to both debenture holders and other creditors in full¹⁸⁸. The equity shareholders were to lose everything but theirs was risk capital and fortune does not always favour the brave. The Looker-on reported that the final expenditure on the Winter Garden and skating rink amounted to over £28,000; equity capital subscribed was £15,400 and Debentures a mere £3,000; the Worcester City and County Bank had advanced £8,000 in short term finance, and other creditors amounted to around £2,300¹⁸⁹.

Assembled fittingly at the skating rink on Wednesday 26th March, the shareholders passed the resolution to wind up the company and one Edwin Lawrence was appointed liquidator¹⁹⁰. Edwin, who had offered his services free, immediately suggested that a small committee be appointed to assist him in his work and three men were chosen representing respectively the directors, the creditors and the shareholders. James Lillywhite, an uncomfortable witness to the proceedings, thereupon offered his services free to the committee, and a new management team for the Winter Garden was in place. Mr Grant, erstwhile General Manager and Secretary, was out of a job and by late April the director of the Winter Garden Orchestra, Andrew Pollock, had been appointed Acting Manager (probably causing a ripple of surprise among his former pupils of the harp, pianoforte and cornet-à-piston)¹⁹¹.

From a Lillywhite perspective, Edwin was both family and a close sports associate - a happy combination for the promotion of sports activities in Imperial Square in the run-up to sale. Married to James’s eldest daughter Fanny and in his mid-thirties, Edwin had fathered three grandchildren for James by 1879 and he was to oblige with as many more¹⁹². His business was that of coal merchant - he traded as Lawrence, Norman and Co of the

¹⁸⁴ Looker-on 29/3/1879 p.1

¹⁸⁵ Looker-on 22/2/1879 p.125

¹⁸⁶ Chronicle 18/3/1879 p.5

¹⁸⁷ Looker-on 29/3/1879 p.202, Chronicle 1/4/1879 p.4

¹⁸⁸ Chronicle 20/12/1881 p.4: the liquidator had funds to pay unsecured creditors 19s 9d per £1 (98.75%), but the creditors then voted a payment of £200 to the liquidator and so received 18s. Lawsuit for breaches of contract in construction of roof: Looker-on 19/3/1881 p.185 & 186.

¹⁸⁹ Looker-on 29/3/1879 p.201 & 202

¹⁹⁰ Chronicle 1/4/1879 p.2, column 6.

¹⁹¹ Grant: Chronicle 1/4/1879 p.2 col 6; Pollock: Chronicle 22/4/1879 p.4 & Looker-on 20/12/1873 p.1

¹⁹² Censuses for EL 1881 & 1891 (ACU)

Montpellier Coal Exchange - and he had good standing with the local gentry¹⁹³. Perhaps curiously, he combined the conduct of his trade with the provision of administrative and financial services and he had acted as liquidator for Cheltenham's Imperial Club in 1875/76¹⁹⁴. A fine cricketer and great sports enthusiast, he was James's right-hand man in the running of Cheltenham's Cricket Week and assisted with the provision of tickets, collection of subscriptions and preparation of the ground¹⁹⁵. The Winter Garden was to benefit from an extension of their collaboration and when the liquidation was completed late in 1881, Edwin had been so successful in the job, and achieved so much for the creditors, that he was voted a fee of £200 despite undertaking to work for nothing¹⁹⁶.

Calm within the financial storm, and just days after Edwin's appointment, James proceeded to lease the Winter Garden for the week commencing 31st March to complete the skating season and to enable the planned tennis tournament to go ahead – a public-spirited act which hopefully also made commercial sense¹⁹⁷. In the Looker-on of 29th March Clara Hill was therefore able to go public with confirmation that the tournament for club members would begin the following Monday in the rink¹⁹⁸. Her laconic advertisement mentioned only "Double Ladies and Double Gentlemens" but more information was forthcoming in James's Winter Garden advertisement a few days later. The tournament was to consist of singles and doubles and was to be played over the week between 11am and 5pm daily. Admission for the public was to be charged at one shilling a head but annual subscribers to the "late" company would be admitted free¹⁹⁹. (Skating would take place every evening, except on the Tuesday when Mendelssohn's oratorio *Elijah* would be performed as the last concert of the season, and Pollock's Winter Garden band would accompany the skaters.) It was common enough at the time to charge the public admission to watch amateurs at play, but there would probably have been some raised eyebrows amongst the old guard at the prospect of ladies of apparently good breeding prancing around under public gaze, risking the flash of a well-covered ankle and compromising their modesty. In their lack of inhibition about performing in public the Cheltenham ladies were ahead of the times, but they were playing in working hours and the target audience was something other than a cross-section of society.

The event presented itself as the club's first tournament for serious rather than social players and may have been conceived as the stepping stone to a full open tournament, providing experience to both players and organisers (even perhaps looking ahead to Renshaw participation at Wimbledon). There were no handicaps and no mixed doubles. The format for the singles was all-play-all, a "league" rather than knockout formula. Seven men each played six matches as did seven women, although it must be said that arithmetic was a casualty in the Looker-on report which had seven men playing seven matches and a player of each sex neither winning nor losing any matches²⁰⁰. Filling in some blanks for the journal, the result for the men was a strict hierarchy in which William Renshaw won all his matches, Fortescue Porter lost only to William, Ernest Renshaw lost only to his brother and Fortescue, Mr Mardall lost three and won three, and Henry Porter ranked fifth despite his longevity in the game, beating only Mr Lidwill and Dr Corbyn; Dr Corbyn competed with Mr Lidwill for the wooden

¹⁹³ Inter alia he acted as honorary secretary to the local Poor Relief Committee (Looker-on 13/12/1879 p.793 & 794, Chronicle 13/1/1880 p.5). Trade name: Examiner 12/3/1879 p.4. Censuses 1881 & 1891 (ACU).

¹⁹⁴ Obituary Chronicle 14/4/1900 p.5, Chronicle 1/4/1879 p.2 col'n 5, Examiner 6/10/1880 p.2 (audit work).

¹⁹⁵ "Lillywhite's Legacy", by Grenville Simons, Wisteria Books 2004 p.37, 50 & 51, Obituary Chronicle 14/4/1900 p.5 col'n 2 (cricketer etc)

¹⁹⁶ Chronicle 20/12/1881 p.4: "...warm and hearty were the congratulations tendered to Mr Lawrence for the admirable way in which he had discharged his stewardship".

¹⁹⁷ Chronicle 1/4/1879 p.4 col'ns 1 & 3

¹⁹⁸ Looker-on 29/3/1879 p.1

¹⁹⁹ Chronicle 1/4/1879 p.4

²⁰⁰ Looker-on 5/4/1879 p.216

spoon and won. William beat Fortescue 6-4, after playing “several interesting games”, and Mardall seems to have given him a run for his money in their match (- “the last two games were cleverly won by Mr W. Renshaw”). The women’s singles presented a more confused picture. Mary Abercrombie was the William of the group and conquered all, and she was followed by Clara Hill in second place with two matches lost. Then came three players who won three and lost three - Mardall, Bradley and Ramsay - and hard on their heels was a Miss Gray, who won two and lost four. Mrs Corbyn scored a bagel, like her husband, and came seventh. Abercrombie’s closest contest was with Bradley – like William and Fortescue they “played some very interesting games” – and she won only “by a single advantage” (presumably 6-5). The reporting of the doubles was limited to another William Renshaw victory and there was no mention of the ladies’ event: “...Mr W. Renshaw and Mr Rawlinson played remarkably well defeating their opponents” (- press analysis of tennis performances as yet in its infancy). It is of interest that at this stage William’s tennis seems to have been well ahead of his brother’s and the twins passed up the opportunity to play together in the doubles (but they were to team up for the men’s doubles in Cheltenham’s October tournament).

The doubles matches were played on wood under the Dome and the singles on the indoor rink on asphalt, the Dome court being the wider²⁰¹. It is to be hoped that James Lillywhite turned a profit on his lease of the venue. There is little precise information on James’s wider involvement in the development of the game in Cheltenham. Apart from managing the Winter Garden tennis facilities for nearly two and a half years from December 1877²⁰² he was the supplier of tennis equipment to both players and court owners and as former rackets coach to Cheltenham College²⁰³, and a leading promoter of Badminton, he would undoubtedly have had ideas on how to play the game and may well have given coaching to the leading players such as the Renshaws. Beyond that there is tournament administration. Given his long experience with cricket, rackets, fives and athletics events he was as experienced as anyone at arranging sports competitions and his network of contacts was second to none. It is hard to believe that the tennis club committee would not have drawn on his expertise and enthusiasm. They were novices and he was on the spot, and when he was lessee of the Winter Garden for part of 1879/80 and Montpellier Gardens from April 1881, he had a financial interest in the success of the events and a right to influence proceedings²⁰⁴. The likelihood is that he played a major role at all levels in the promotion of the game in Cheltenham.

By the time that tennis arrived in Imperial Square the Renshaws had lived at Clarence House for nearly ten years²⁰⁵. The house was positioned perfectly for the town’s lawn tennis facilities. The family home was the last house on the Promenade and was just across the road from the Winter Garden. When the leaves were fallen from the trees, Cheltenham’s crystal palace could be viewed from the reception rooms on the ground floor, and from the front door there was a walk of about 130 yards east to the grand entry portal. Lillywhite’s shop was a stone’s throw away, just across Queen’s Circus, so close in fact that in the census of 1871 the Clarence House butler and four servants found themselves on the same page as James and his family²⁰⁶. Montpellier Gardens was about 170 yards due south, so that indoor courts, outdoor hard courts, grass courts and the sports shop supplying every tennis need were all

²⁰¹ Looker-on 5/4/1879 p.216

²⁰² Looker-on 16/6/1877 p.1, 22/12/1877 p.1 (rink open for tennis), 8/11/1879 p.711 & 3/4/1880 p.215; Chronicle 8/10/1878 p.4 & 28/10/1879 p.4

²⁰³ George Gray took over in 1870 & was followed by W. Newman. See Chapter 7 above p.33 & 34 footnotes 351 & 352.

²⁰⁴ Montpellier Gardens lessee: Examiner 13/4/1881 p.4, Chronicle 19/4/1881 p.8, Examiner 3/1/1883 p.11

²⁰⁵ Looker-on 28/3/1868 p.203: “REMOVALS”

²⁰⁶ Census 1871 for Edward Meara (ACU)

just a brief walk away. And James – ever sociable sports guru - was on hand for consultation or a chat for a large proportion of the waking hours.



9.1 Clarence House from the front, December 2013, the Domestic Offices of the basement floor are just visible. The Promenade runs to the right.²⁰⁷.



9.2 Clarence House from the back, December 2013. Queen's Circus is to the right.

²⁰⁷ See Chapter 6 above, pages 7 & 8

As the April tournament began, the Winter Garden announced that “Lawn Tennis and Rinking” would be discontinued from the sixth of the month, the Sunday after the tournament finished, and Cheltenham LTC would have transferred its allegiance to the grass of Montpellier Gardens²⁰⁸. The County Fete tournament was advertised to be held there in the middle of June and the club put on a low key event which apparently attracted little public interest and its results went unreported – no prizes were awarded, according to the Cheltenham Examiner²⁰⁹. The tournament was “confined exclusively to the Nobility and Gentry of the County of Gloucester and their friends” and was anything but an open event²¹⁰. In July the club arranged a match against Malvern LTC for teams of four players in Montpellier Gardens but with the Winter Garden booked on standby in case of rain as recent weather had been so poor²¹¹.

Oxford University Lawn Tennis Club launched its All England doubles tournament in May but the Cheltenham players passed up the opportunity to participate, even though the tournament secretary – Kenelm Digby Cotes – had strong links to Cheltenham and wrote his letter to *The Times* and other papers promoting the event from the family home in Bath Road (which was almost as close to Montpellier Gardens as Clarence House)²¹². Cotes’ younger brother Edward was then a day boy at Cheltenham College²¹³. Although his tennis base was Oxford University, Cotes played at least occasionally in Cheltenham and in September 1880 the Field reported a two-man team match between “Montpellier (Cheltenham) Club” and Gloucester Club, with Kenelm and his brother Edward representing Montpellier²¹⁴; it seems as though when residing in Cheltenham the Oxford secretary preferred to be king of his own tennis castle. Judging by the press silence on the doings of Montpellier LTC, membership may not have extended much beyond the Cotes family²¹⁵.

Up to the end of 1878, few open tournaments had been established across the nation – the Field’s Fixtures lists for the season featured just one “all-comers” event²¹⁶ - but now more clubs found ambition beyond their home turf and stepped up to follow the example of the All England Club²¹⁷. The Fitzwilliam in Dublin was one of these and at the beginning of June it staged its inaugural Irish Championships, open to all comers²¹⁸. As far as the English were concerned it was something of an unknown quantity and Irish players had yet to prove themselves (although prove themselves they did in July when Gould and Barry reached the last six at Wimbledon)²¹⁹. London’s best and Cheltenham’s newcomers declined to make the steamer crossing to Kingstown and the English raiding party held off for a year. An open Grand National Tournament was arranged in Hendon for the week directly preceding

²⁰⁸ Discontinuance: Chronicle 1/4/1879 p.4. Transfer to grass: Examiner 15/10/1879 p.4: “...Montpellier especially having been adopted as the usual meeting place of the Cheltenham Club”.

²⁰⁹ Examiner 25/6/1879 p.2

²¹⁰ Looker-on 14/6/1879 p.1

²¹¹ Looker-on 26/7/1879 p.472

²¹² The Times 15/4/1879 p.10 – from Lonsdale House, Bath Road. KDC was educated at Magdalen College School (Oxford Alumni, All Souls, BA 1879 [ACU]) and was more a son of Oxford than Cheltenham. Censuses for Mrs G Cotes, 1871 (Oxford) & 1881 (Cheltenham).

²¹³ CC register 1910 p.405. Edward left the College in July 1881 aged 19.

²¹⁴ Field 25/9/1880 p.480. In April 1881 the Cotes brothers played together in the men’s doubles of the Cheltenham open and lost in the first round (Field 23/4/1881 p.562).

²¹⁵ Cotes brothers in 1881 Cheltenham LTC tournaments: Field 23/4/1881 p.562 & 24/9/1881 p.461 (last identified press reference to Montpellier LTC). KDC was an academic at Oxford for several years and a private tutor in Cheltenham (obituary Looker-on 21/7/1917 p.12).

²¹⁶ Field 18/5/1878 p.609, 22/6/1878 p.734, 3/8/1878 p.142

²¹⁷ Badminton Library 1903 p.148, JM Heathcote; Field “Lawn Tennis Fixtures”: 3/5/1879 p.517, 14/6/1879 p.710, 20/9/1879 p.399 (includes Cheltenham).

²¹⁸ Treacy 1927 p.7 & 11

²¹⁹ O’Connor 1977 p.3, Todd 1979 p.221, Field 12/7/1879 p.45

Wimbledon, with luminaries such as Sir William Hart-Dyke, Julian Marshall and Kenelm Cotes on its management committee, and it attracted a strong field that included Edgar Lubbock, Lestocq Erskine, Herbert Lawford, William Marshall and Otway Woodhouse²²⁰. However, Cheltenham passed it by and Fortescue Porter and the Renshaws chose instead to enter their names for the All England Championships as their first major open tournament of the year, set to commence on 7th July.

The choice might seem ambitious, particularly for Ernest, but William had proved himself in competition with Fortescue Porter, and Fortescue was himself entering for a second year and could show them the ropes. Arthur Myers, a day boy contemporary of Henry Porter at Cheltenham College who would have played rackets with him²²¹, was also entering for a second year and at least two other Old Cheltonians in William Marshall and Cecil Parr planned to compete²²². The Renshaws filed their applications but their diary management was seriously flawed. Without taking into account the sporting interests of its most junior officers, the 1st Royal Lancashire Militia had fixed the start date for their twenty day annual training as 30th June with a field inspection to round things off on 18th July; the Championships was plumb in the middle²²³. After joining up in early August the previous year, Second Lieutenants William and Ernest Renshaw were needed on parade and the call of Queen and country brooked no denial - Wimbledon was to have to wait another year for a first glimpse of its future stars²²⁴. The curiosity is that the twins were left in the draw for the championships, and recorded for posterity as walkovers, but it may be that they were hoping to be absent with leave for the first few days of the tournament and their hopes were dashed at the eleventh hour²²⁵. On Saturday 12th July, while the Wimbledon semi-finalists Hartley, Goold and Parr were enjoying a rest day in deference to the Eton and Harrow cricket match, the Renshaw twins were dodging the showers on the Giant Axe Field, Lancaster, playing cricket rather badly for the officers of the 1st Royal Lancashire's in their annual match against Lancaster Cricket Club²²⁶. Military duty was multifaceted.

[The militia experience – manoeuvres in Lancaster fields](#)

The regiment's list of batsmen was richly stocked with the names of Cheltenham College old boys, none of whom had played for their school first eleven. At Number 4 was Hudson Lutwyche, aged 23 - bowled on the day for no runs; at Number 6, James Vyvyan aged 17 - a "high" scorer with 7 runs; at Number 8, Hubert Durham aged 24 – no runs; at Number 9, Lieutenant William Renshaw - 1 run not out; and at Number 11, Lieutenant Ernest Renshaw - 3 runs, so the twins may have achieved a partnership of four runs. None of the Cheltonians were reported to have taken wickets as bowlers but William achieved some distinction by catching the cricket club's top scorer. The officers were all out for just 41 (including 8 extras) but in their defence it must be said that conditions were better suited to mudwrestling than

²²⁰ Field 5/7/1879 p.19

²²¹ Myers was school rackets champion in 1869, Porter in 1870 (Karl Cook's "Rackets at Cheltenham College Through the Years", 2010).

²²² There was possibly a seventh in the form of Benjamin Temple Cotton, who had boarded at the College from 1853 to 1857 (CC register 1910 p.158) but he was considerably older than the other OC's and can only be identified by his initials in the tournament records ("B.T. Cotton"). A brief obituary in 1897 makes no reference to tennis playing (Isle of Wight County Press 20/2/1897 p.5).

²²³ Lancaster Gazette 5/7/1879 p.5 & 23/7/1879 p.3, Preston Chronicle 19/7/1879 p.6. The last day of training was inspection day on Friday 18 July.

²²⁴ Email 3/9/2013 from Peter Donnelly, curator of the King's Own Royal Regiment Museum, Lancaster

²²⁵ Field 12/7/1879 p.45. Badminton Library 1903 p.149: Charles Heathcote, who won through three rounds that year, states simply "the two Renshaws were prevented from putting in an appearance..."

²²⁶ Lancaster Gazette 16/7/1879 p.2. Wimbledon: Field 12/7/1879 p.45

cricket. Downpours before the game had rendered the pitch soft and slippery and as showers continued to dog play, conditions degenerated from the difficult to the impossible. The match was eventually called off and declared drawn, and the suffering of the players was ended²²⁷.

Bearing in mind that Alfred Rooke (aged nineteen) was on site for training with his brother officers, there were present in the 1st Lancashire body of officers at least six Old Cheltonians²²⁸. A likely reason for this cluster of alumni so far from home was a Cheltenham resident who had been an officer of the regiment since 1873 and was second in command by 1878, Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Dawson Sheppard²²⁹. Sheppard had taken up permanent residence in Cheltenham by 1871 and won his spurs in local society by taking on the role of first Honorary Secretary to the New Club when it was establishing itself in 1872²³⁰. He was soon listed as a supporter of the Cotswold Hunt²³¹ and would have been well placed within the establishment to recruit young gentlemen for service in the distant north. He himself had served in the regular army for some thirteen years as an officer of the 4th King's Own Foot, seeing action firstly in the Crimean War (Alma, Inkerman and the siege and fall of Sebastopol) and then in the Indian Mutiny Campaign of 1857/58²³². He rose to the rank of Captain and then retired in 1864, joining firstly the militia in Wexford, and then transferring to the Royal Lancashires after moving to Cheltenham²³³. With his experience of famous battles and campaigns, he would have been well qualified to paint a seductive picture of military life and turn the heads of impressionable young men. For those considering a career in the army, the militia would have provided a good introduction to army life and although both Renshaws were to opt out after a few years, their contemporaries Rooke and Vyvyan both progressed from the Royal Lancashires to the regular army²³⁴.

The regiment assembled for training in the Lancaster Barracks numbered some seven hundred men in two battalions under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Sheppard. Lieutenant Durham and Second Lieutenants Ernest Renshaw and Alfred Rooke were in the First Battalion, and Lieutenant Lutwyche together with Second Lieutenants William Renshaw and James Vyvyan were in the Second, so that the young Cheltonians were split equally between the battalions and the twins were separated²³⁵. Vyvyan was the most recent recruit, having been commissioned just before the muster began, and the four second lieutenants would have formed a companionable group as they underwent their first officer training²³⁶. Drilling took place assiduously every day in the Giant Axe and "in the evening the excellent brass band of the regiment [gave] choice selections of music in front of the officers' mess in Dalton Square, which [attracted] large crowds of listeners"²³⁷. In the last few days of the training period, a Colonel Lock arrived to assess progress and on the final Thursday he tested the officers on their knowledge of their duties and carried out an examination of kit and weaponry²³⁸. Friday, the final full day, was the time for regimental parade, field inspection and manoeuvres. The 1st Royal Lancashires drew themselves up in serried ranks in the Giant Axe

²²⁷ Lancaster Gazette 16/7/1879 p.2.

²²⁸ CC register 1910: Lutwyche p.357, Vyvyan p.408, Durham p.259, Rooke p.390

²²⁹ Email 24/11/2014 from Donnelly, King's Own museum, Lancaster; 2nd i/c: Lancaster Gazette 8/6/1878 p.5 & 5/7/1879 p.5

²³⁰ Census for TDS 1871 etc; New Club: Looker-on 21/12/1872 p.1

²³¹ Looker-on 29/3/1873 p.200, Examiner 28/5/1873 p.8

²³² Email 24/11/2014 from Donnelly, King's Own museum. In India, he commanded two companies of the 4th attached to a Field Force sent in pursuit of Tantia Topee.

²³³ TDS was born in Waterford, Ireland – like Edward Meara - and had strong family links to Ireland.

²³⁴ CC register 1910 p.390 & 408

²³⁵ Lancaster Gazette 5/7/1879 p.5

²³⁶ Vyvyan: email 24/11/2014 from Donnelly, King's Own museum

²³⁷ Lancaster Gazette 5/7/1879 p.5

²³⁸ Preston Chronicle 19/7/1879 p.6

Field and Colonel Bancroft, the officer commanding the Preston district depot (senior brass-hat for the occasion) rode in to be greeted by “the regiment in line with a general salute, the band striking up the usual air”²³⁹. The formal inspection took place, then assorted march-pasts and finally there was a series of battalion movements under Sheppard’s command. These included “the new plan of attack, the men charging with loud Hurrahs, accompanied by the beating of drums and sounding of bugles, and afterwards rallying on the reserve and forming line”. The last movement was to form a square around the colours, officers and Colonel Bancroft, so that the inspecting officer could address the troops. Bancroft then delivered a conventional mixture of criticism and congratulation, packaged with optimism for the future, and an interesting request for the men to seek out those who had failed to turn up for training (“you must know where those men are”) and to persuade them to “come back with a soldierlike spirit next time”. The regiment then re-formed in fours and marched back to the town headed by their band. During the rest of the day and on Saturday morning the men delivered their equipment to the stores and were paid off and disbanded. The officers for their part rounded off the annual training by throwing a ball in the Town Hall and inviting the “leading gentry” of the town and neighbourhood. Thus ended the Renshaws’ first serious taste of regimental life.

In Cheltenham, meanwhile, the Winter Garden was advertised for sale as a going concern and was available for hire “for temporary purposes”²⁴⁰. The usual events were taking place: for a week lady gymnast Zazel – “the Human Cannon Ball” - dived from great heights, ran on a thread, swung from a trapeze and was fired from a cannon; the RHS held a Floral Fete with the band of the Grenadier Guards providing musical support; and Grand Evening Concerts were performed²⁴¹. The Looker-on complained that the sale of the building was taking too long (given the speed with which the collapse had been effected), professed ignorance of the meaning of “going concern” (irony intended), and prayed the complex would escape the clutches of an adventurer who might divert it from its original purposes and render it a discredit rather than attraction to the town²⁴². The journal’s tone was one of scepticism and it was doing less than justice to the management team. At the end of June, Edwin Lawrence published a report on progress over the first three months which gave grounds for optimism²⁴³. Trading had been reasonable and this provided the opportunity to be selective in the choice of purchaser and avoid a forced sale to “strangers” who had little interest in the welfare of the locality. If the facility was sold for half the original cost, there was a prospect of it being commercially viable. Edwin therefore maintained his approach to running the business, enjoying the support of creditors and investors alike while observers such as the Looker-on veered between gloom (May and July) and mild optimism (June)²⁴⁴. For the time being Cheltenham LTC therefore had the run of a fine all-weather tennis facility - under benevolent management – and this happy situation was to continue until completion of the sale of the Winter Garden became imminent after the first quarter of 1880²⁴⁵. In October 1879 the Examiner could report that, in the face of generally bad weather during the year, Cheltenham LTC players had had “unusual facilities for the practice of their game at the Winter Garden, the boarded and asphalted floors of which building have, by arrangement with the official Liquidator, been pretty constantly made use of as tennis courts”²⁴⁶.

²³⁹ Lancaster Gazette 23/7/1879 p.3. Bancroft: Reynold’s 30/3/1879 p.2

²⁴⁰ Chronicle 22/4/1879 p.8

²⁴¹ Looker-on 19/4/1879 p.1 & 3/5/1879 p.280, Chronicle 22/4/1879 p.4 & 29/4/1879 p.4 etc.

²⁴² Looker-on 31/5/1879 p.345

²⁴³ Looker-on 28/6/1879 p.407

²⁴⁴ Looker-on 31/5/1879 p.345, 28/6/1879 p.407, 26/7/1879 p.472

²⁴⁵ Gloucester Journal 10/4/1880 p.5, Chronicle 16/6/1880 p.4

²⁴⁶ Examiner 15/10/1879 p.4. See also Field 11/10/1879 p.493 – “constant practice” on the Winter Garden courts.

Cheltenham's first open tournament - William Renshaw centre stage & the first women's doubles

In June, before the Renshaws were called away to Lancaster, John Abercrombie was considering the possibility of an open tournament to take place in August, and apparently giving thought to a practical problem for the entry of ladies. Perhaps at the prompting of his daughter Mary, he was looking for a way to arrange safe travel to Cheltenham for young women from outlying clubs. At the time there had been no open tournament for women in England and for its Irish Championships at the beginning of June, the Fitzwilliam in Ireland had attracted a weak singles entry of nine, three of them sisters (the Langrishes)²⁴⁷. The intelligence from Ireland may have been that assistance was called for. England's Grand National Archery meeting was booked to take place on Cheltenham College's playing fields in early August and over half the competitors were to be female – well over eighty Amazons turned out²⁴⁸. The archers had cracked the problem of female participation in earlier years and Abercrombie wondered if Cheltenham LTC could somehow piggyback on their arrangements. Through the medium of the Field he sought to canvass opinion in the nation's tennis clubs. In a letter dated 12th June he drew attention to Cheltenham's archery event and offered the view that it provided the opportunity "of an escort from distant places to young ladies who might be anxious to join in playing in an open lawn tennis tournament"; Cheltenham LTC was willing to organise such a tournament with prizes for "a lady and gentleman competition" and he invited comments and suggestions from the officers of other tennis clubs²⁴⁹. The idea presumably died a death, as no open tournament materialised for August, but the letter is indicative of the importance the club attached to women's participation.

Early in September Cheltenham LTC laid plans for a tournament on the Winter Garden courts in October and a committee of gentlemen – "experts in the game" - was formed to make the necessary arrangements²⁵⁰. Just how much expertise there was vested in the committee was debateable, although there was no shortage of enthusiasm, but what was striking about the tournament committee when it was publicised was that it was uniformly male²⁵¹. From the equal balance of the sexes within the management committee at the start of the year, the club had progressed within a period of months to the appearance of absolute male domination. The tournament itself was built around an equal billing of four events – male singles and doubles and female singles and doubles – and there was no shortage of female entrants²⁵². One can only guess at Clara Hill's sentiments at being pushed into the shadows while the young Renshaws and the unknown Graham Parry were advertised as part of a controlling panel of nine, but one fears that the ears of the amiable Captain Hill were assailed in the privacy of his home with some choice words expressive of something other than quiet resignation. Seven of the committee members were familiar names as players or administrators: Dr Abercrombie, the Renshaw twins, Henry Porter, Joseph Corbyn, Robert Rawlinson and Robert Lidwill²⁵³. The newcomers were Graham Parry and John Bowle Evans. Parry was an Old Cheltonian in his early thirties whose only qualification seems to have been a willingness to help (- and he would have needed to be kept well away from the tournament finances as he spent his way to

²⁴⁷ Field 14/6/1879 p.711

²⁴⁸ Field 9/8/1879 p.194. Earlier year: 7/8/1875 p.160 (in Richmond).

²⁴⁹ Field 14/6/1879 p.710

²⁵⁰ Looker-on 6/9/1879 p.568

²⁵¹ Looker-on 20/9/1879 p.1

²⁵² Field 13/9/1879 p.1

²⁵³ R Rawlinson: Eton and Cambridge – Eton cricket team 1857 (Eton register 1853 – 1859 xii, Cambridge Alumni [ACU]); Gloucester Echo 14/6/1889 p.3 "well-known in sporting circles as an owner of racehorses...prominent member of the local clubs..."

bankruptcy in the mid 1880's)²⁵⁴. Bowle Evans, appointed treasurer to the tournament, was by contrast a figure of high local standing and would have enhanced the status of the tournament as well as providing a safe pair of hands on the purse strings (particularly important as the Winter Garden facilities came at a price and there was prize money to be funded). A former Lieutenant of the Rifle Brigade, he was in his early forties and already a Justice of the Peace and Deputy Lieutenant of Herefordshire²⁵⁵. He owned an estate in Pembridge, Herefordshire and included Lord of the Manor amongst his titles. He was a solid member of the landed gentry and a good citizen who at the end of 1879 was elected as a member of the Council of Cheltenham Ladies College²⁵⁶. Over time his social commitments were increased by membership of the Monthly Board of Cheltenham General Hospital and active involvement in other charities such as the Female Orphan Asylum²⁵⁷. Unusually perhaps for men of his time, he believed in advanced school education for women and his eldest daughter Isabella had been enrolled as a pupil at Ladies College by 1878, while his younger daughter Anna was to be entrusted to the care of Principal Beale in 1883²⁵⁸. He remained on the Ladies College council until his death in 1906 and Dorothea Beale held him in high regard, describing him publicly as a valuable member of the council and a true friend to the college²⁵⁹.

Unlike Parry and Evans, Dr Corbyn had played in the April tournament, but he had emerged as the weakest of the male competitors and aged fifty, he elected to leave the October tournament to the youngsters, even opting out of the doubles. He too brought weight to the committee. After graduating in medicine in Edinburgh in 1851, he had spent some twenty-seven years in the medical branch of the East India Company and Bengal Army in India and had a striking service record, one that could appeal to both soldier, doctor and feminist²⁶⁰. He was actively involved throughout the Indian Mutiny campaign of 1857/58, serving as a doctor with the 3rd Sikh Cavalry, and was awarded the mutiny medal with clasps for Delhi and Lucknow. Present at every action fought by his regiment, he provided the normal services expected of an army surgeon but because of his expertise in the native dialects and a shortage of officers, he was called upon to take part in frequent "hazardous and delicate outpost and reconnaissance duty as a combatant officer". These special expeditions often involved hand-to-hand fighting and he carried the scars of combat into retirement. He was mentioned in despatches several times. On returning to peacetime duties, he became increasingly concerned at the predicament of native women who were denied access to the services of male practitioners because their culture and conventions prevented contact with men from outside the family. It seemed to him that the solution was to give medical training to Indian women, believing as he did that they had the capacity to acquire the medical qualifications necessary for practice. In 1867, under the patronage of a rich Indian gentleman, Corbyn founded in Bareilly the first female medical school in India and it appears to have trained staff successfully until 1876²⁶¹. At the end of 1878 he retired from the service after a

²⁵⁴ CC register 1910 p.263, Chronicle 10/4/1886 p.8, Gloucester Echo 14/1/1888 p.4 (rebuked by the Official Receiver for being "unjustifiably extravagant in living").

²⁵⁵ Littlebury's Directory of Herefordshire 1876/77, obituary Chronicle 3/3/1906 p.2. JBE's father died in January 1868 and JBE was the only son (Hereford Journal 10/10/1863 p.5 & see probate 1868).

²⁵⁶ Ladies College minute of meeting of shareholders 3/12/1879

²⁵⁷ Chronicle 3/3/1906 p.2, obituary

²⁵⁸ Email from Ladies' College Archivist 16/12/2014. Miss D Beale was one of the foremost educators of her time and founded St Hilda's College for women at Oxford University as well as heading Cheltenham Ladies College from 1858 until her death in 1906 (ODNB for DB 2014).

²⁵⁹ Ladies College "Chronicle" 1906 p.86/87, provided by Mrs R. Roberts, Archives, 16/12/2014

²⁶⁰ Obituaries Chronicle 26/10/1912 p.4, British Medical Journal 9/11/1912 p.1347. Morning Post 10/5/1879 p.3 – with the transfer of power from HEIC in 1858, JCC transferred to the Bengal Army.

²⁶¹ Chronicle 26/10/1912 p.4, JCC obituary. "Medical Women – A Thesis and a History", Sophia Jex-Blake MD, 1886, p.235: 'In 1870, Dr. Corbyn wrote as follows: "I am educating a number of native girls, and three have

varied and impressive career and was stepped up to the honorary rank of Deputy Surgeon-General²⁶². He had time to spare in Cheltenham.

The members of the management committee were advertised to the public prior to the tournament, along with details of time, place, prizes and entrance fees, and the likelihood is that the club chose to follow convention with a single sex committee to give the event as wide an appeal as possible²⁶³. If competitors from foreign parts expected control by male then they should have it. Contractors for the tournament also needed to be comfortable with the organisation. Abercrombie, Bowle-Evans and Corbyn all demonstrated a respect for women's ambitions beyond the home and it seems unlikely they would have denied them a formal role in the running of the tournament without good reason. Perhaps also the women – with the exception of Clara Hill - were happy to escape the burden of administrative work or preferred to remain in the background. Although the committee was to remain solidly male for years to come, Clara was given effective participation later as her husband William joined the ruling body in 1881 and was still in place in 1885 – his ear would have been bent on matters concerning his spouse²⁶⁴. Captain Hill had been on the local committee for the Grand National Archery meeting in August 1879²⁶⁵.

Entry fees for the tournament were 10 shillings per match for men and five shillings for women. The prize money for the winner of the men's singles was £15, ladies' singles £10, men's doubles winners £10 per player, women's doubles £5 per player²⁶⁶. Runner-ups also received cash prizes. Compared with the prizes for the national archery meeting in August – a national competition with a much larger entry – the prizes seem more than adequate²⁶⁷. Archers topping the scores, male and female, each received cash of £15 but there were cash awards for many others below them. Purchasing power then meant that in Cheltenham a lady winning £5 for the women's doubles could buy six good quality tennis rackets from James Lillywhite, or several tennis costumes from Cavendish House, or more than a dozen bottles of Moët & Chandon Champagne from wine merchant Felton - not bad for a novice amateur²⁶⁸. The tournament, advertised in the Field in mid-September, was to be played on the two Winter Garden covered courts over the period of a week starting on Monday 7th October. Matches were to be the best of three sets apart from the finals which were to be the best of five; AELTC rules were to apply²⁶⁹. Play would take place in two daily sessions of three hours between the hours of ten o'clock and one o'clock, and two and five. This amounted to very limited capacity for an event comprising two singles and two doubles competitions and the organisers found themselves obliged to make some use of the outdoor rink as well²⁷⁰. The capacity constraint probably explains the lack of a mixed doubles competition and here seemingly the women of the club had asserted themselves: if there were to be just four events their preference was for a ladies' doubles - they would have parity with their brothers. Whatever the thought process,

already passed as native doctors. They are of all castes - Christian, Mohammedans, and Hindoos. My school is divided into three classes. The first-class pupils can read and write English and Urdu with accuracy. They are taught medicine, surgery, midwifery, diseases of women and children (especially the latter two)....” In 1876 Dr Corbyn had to recommend the closure of the school because although trainees were perfectly competent, “native prejudices regarding the sex hamper them at every step” (Civil & Military Gazette 27/9/1876 p.8).

²⁶² Morning Post 10/5/1879 p.3, Roll of Indian Medical Service 1615 to 1930 Vol. 1 p.138.

²⁶³ Looker-on 20/9/1879 p.1

²⁶⁴ Field 5/3/1881 p.1 & 24/9/1881 p.461

²⁶⁵ Field 9/8/1879 p.194

²⁶⁶ Field 13/9/1879 p.1

²⁶⁷ Looker-on 9/8/1879 p.505 & 506.

²⁶⁸ Looker-on 16/3/1878 p.171, 25/5/1878 p.344, Mercury 2/2/1878 p.3

²⁶⁹ Looker-on 20/9/1879 p.1, Field 13/9/1879 p.1

²⁷⁰ Looker-on 11/10/1879 p.648 – men's doubles etc played on the “outer rink”; Field 11/10/1879 p.493: “...some of the best matches were played on the outside skating rink”.

the Cheltenham ladies' doubles of 1879 was the first reported open ladies doubles event in Britain and Ireland and reflected the strength of the club's female membership²⁷¹. The Fitzwilliam attempted to follow suit in 1880 but could raise only three women's pairs, and as one of these retired in the second round after receiving a bye in the first, the victors of the first round took first prize – the event was a washout²⁷². The Fitzwilliam's ladies' singles that year attracted just four players and in the face of such indifference, the club abandoned both singles and doubles in 1881²⁷³. Of other major venues, Edgbaston and Brighton established ladies doubles in 1881, Bath and the Northern in 1882, and Buxton's All England doubles first took place in 1885²⁷⁴. Cheltenham was leader of the pack.

Twenty-two players entered the men's singles event – as many as entered the first Wimbledon championships in 1877 and comfortably more than the fifteen who competed in the Fitzwilliam's inaugural men's event earlier in the year²⁷⁵. Eight of the competitors were from Cheltenham LTC but others travelled from clubs further afield in London, Dublin, Cumbria, Staffordshire, Cheshire and Hampshire. Some eight clubs were represented and there were two players who qualified through the army or university – Abercrombie's advertising had borne fruit²⁷⁶. Apart from Cheltenham's leading lights, the noteworthy players in the singles were Arthur Myers of the All England Club, Vere Gould of the Fitzwilliam, Herbert Gardner of Rugeley LTC and Aymer Ainslie of North Lonsdale. Gardner had been captain of the cricket team at Rugby in 1870, had won the public school rackets competition at Prince's the same year, and left his famous school that summer "with a reputation such as few public school boys carry with them into other spheres" (in the words of the Times); he was an exceptional sportsman²⁷⁷. Ainslie was rackets champion of Harrow in his time and was the leading rackets singles player at Cambridge University for an impressive three years to 1863²⁷⁸. Other talented sportsmen from the same stables were Ernest Burnett, who played first team cricket for Harrow for three years and first eleven football in 1862, and John Weston, who graced the Rugby cricket first eleven in 1871 and defeated Wellington at rackets at Prince's the same year²⁷⁹. Just four of the twenty-two had played at Wimbledon in the summer – Gould, Myers, Fortescue Porter and Medlycott – but in those days the fact of playing in the All England was not the badge of quality it was to become. At Wimbledon in July Hubert Medlycott went down with dignity against Cecil Parr in the second round but in Cheltenham he could take only three

²⁷¹ Field 11/10/1879 p.493: "Indeed such ladies' play is rarely seen....[Cheltenham] have at least half-a-dozen players that could hold their own against most clubs".

²⁷² Field 29/5/1880 p.685

²⁷³ Field 29/5/1880 p.684/5 & 5/6/1880 p.713, Treacy 1927 p.13. In 1881 a mixed doubles event was supported by seven pairs (Field 28/5/1881 p.732 & 3).

²⁷⁴ Edgbaston - Field 6/8/1881 p.210; Brighton - Field 16/10/1880 p.573 & 30/4/1881 p.595; Bath - Field 4/6/1881 p.764 & 3/6/1882 p.741 & 2; Northern - Field 17/6/1882 p.823; Buxton – Field 29/8/1885 p.334, Badminton Library 1903 p.438. In May 1879 at the Earlsfort-terrace tournament in Dublin, a mixed doubles event was staged (Freeman's Jnl 3/5/1879 p.3) & the Fitzwilliam followed suit in June (Freeman's Jnl 6/6/1879 p.6).

²⁷⁵ Irish: Field 14/6/1879 p.710; just 3 clubs were named: Fitzwilliam – 9 players; Dublin University – 2; Carlow LTC – 1. Freeman's Journal 7/6/1879 p.2 named just 12 players & omitted any reference to clubs.

²⁷⁶ AELTC (London), Fitzwilliam (Dublin), North Lonsdale LTC (Cumbria), Rugeley LTC (near Lichfield, Staffordshire), Hooton LTC (Cheshire), Bournemouth LTC (Hampshire). Newnham LTC – the 8th club – would have been Newnham-on-Severn in Gloucestershire, some twenty miles from Cheltenham. Medlycott was shown as "Cantab" in tournament reports, and he did graduate from Cambridge, but he was a leading player at Bournemouth LTC at least as early as 1878 (Field 1/6/1878 p.642).

²⁷⁷ Times obituary 9/12/1924 p.8, Rugby register 1902 p.268

²⁷⁸ Harrow register 1911 p.264, Cambridge alumni (ACU), Field 4/4/1863 p.322 etc.

²⁷⁹ Burnett: Harrow register 1911 p.321. Weston: Rugby register 1902 p.273; cricket – Field 24/6/1871 p.512; rackets – Field 15/4/1871 p.297.

games off Edgar Manning in a first round loss²⁸⁰. All told, the field was stronger than the Fitzwilliam's in May 1879 but considerably weaker than the All England's in July, which had Hartley, Erskine, Marshall and Lawford to keep company with Ireland's finest, Goold and Barry²⁸¹. The best at Cheltenham though, in the shape of Goold and William Renshaw, were of the top rank.

Goold was the clear pre-tournament favourite and the Looker-on felt licensed to refer to him as "the famous Irish Champion" in its tournament preview²⁸². He had the best track record and by far the most experience of match play, having competed in tournaments and club matches since 1878, won the Dublin Earlsfort Terrace tournament in April 1879, claimed the Irish singles title in the championships of June, and been runner-up to John Hartley at Wimbledon in July²⁸³. In the Irish Championships he had defeated a player of quality in Barry, who subsequently proved himself at Wimbledon by seeing off Arthur Myers with comparative ease and reaching the last six. At Wimbledon Goold was fortunate in that his side of the draw comprised just twelve players, in contrast to Hartley's thirty, but it included players of quality in Lawford, Lubbock, Alfred Mulholland and George Tabor²⁸⁴. The Renshaws were tournament novices in comparison with Goold, Myers and even Herbert Gardner of Rugeley LTC, but they enjoyed home advantage.

In the first round William brushed aside his veteran colleague Henry Porter 6-2, 6-2, and then in the second disposed of his elder brother Fortescue by the same score, showing no respect for his Wimbledon pedigree. Arnold of the Fitzwilliam offered no serious resistance in the third round and fell to him in straight sets²⁸⁵. Then in the semi-final William came up against Herbert Gardner. Gardner's tennis tournament experience consisted of the Lichfield tournaments of 1878 and 1879 (1878 a minor affair but match play nevertheless) and he had won the men's singles All Comers in 1879 - beating Ernest Burnett in the final - and the All-Comers men's doubles in both years playing with Burnett²⁸⁶. He was a talented sportsman and at Cheltenham he defeated Edgar Manning in the third round after Manning had himself dismissed Ernest Renshaw. (Ernest contrived to lose to the Old Cheltonian opera-singer who was destined to lead with the bat for D'Oyly Carte's *HMS Pinafore* cricket touring team²⁸⁷.) In the semi-final against William, he contested the first set well, but lost it 6-4, then apparently

²⁸⁰ Field 11/10/1879 p. 493. HJM played first team football for Harrow in 1860 and was one of the leading rackets players at Cambridge in 1862 (Cambridge Alumni [ACU], Harrow register 1911 p.268, Cambridge Indep Press 17/5/1862 p.8).

²⁸¹ Erskine: runner-up in AELTC All-Comers 1878, lost to Hartley in 5 sets in 1879, won the Oxford Doubles in 1879. Marshall: runner-up at AELTC 1877, lost to Hartley in 4 sets in 1879. Lawford: 3rd at AELTC 1878, lost to Lubbock at AELTC 1879, won 1879 Oxford Doubles. All experienced match players by the standards of the time.

²⁸² Looker-on 4/10/1879 p.632 (which also proudly listed 10 English counties whose tennis clubs were providing competitors alongside Gloucestershire and Dublin).

²⁸³ Chapter 6 above p.15 for 1878. The Earlsfort tournament was a small affair with just 5 entries for the men's singles (ten pairs in the mixed doubles), but it was significant in the context of the Cheltenham event because it was played on the asphalt of the Earlsfort Terrace skating rink - Cheltenham's rink asphalt was to be a reasonably familiar surface for Goold (Freeman's Jnl 29/4/1879 p.6 & 3/5/1879 p.3).

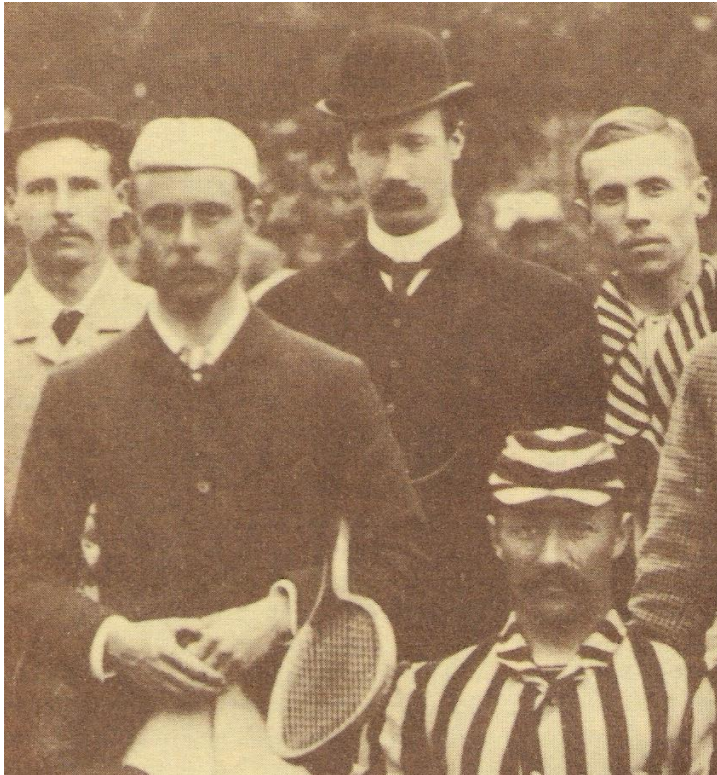
²⁸⁴ Todd 1979 p.221. Mulholland: in the Oxford Doubles May 1879 he lost to Lawford & Erskine in the 3rd round (Field 24/5/1879 p.614); at Hendon July 1879 he won through two rounds (Field 5/7/1879 p.19); at the Fitzwilliam 1880, he beat Ernest Renshaw in the singles 2nd round and partnered Lawford to win the men's doubles (Field 29/5/1880 p.684 & 5/6/1880 p.713). G Tabor: Wimbledon 1878 - lost to CG Hamilton 2nd round (Todd 1979 p.220); Oxford Doubles 1879 - lost to Lawford & Erskine in final (Field 24/5/1879 p.614); Wimbledon 1879 - beat Lubbock in 3rd round, lost to Goold in 4 sets in 4th (Todd 1979 p.221).

²⁸⁵ Field 11/10/1879 p.493

²⁸⁶ Lichfield Mercury: 2/8/1878 p.5 (8 pairs in open doubles) & 18/7/1879 p.5; Field 26/7/1879 p.120. The men's singles in 1878 was on a handicap basis. In 1879 there were 14 competitors in the open singles and 11 pairs in the doubles.

²⁸⁷ The Era 28/5/1881 p.15. See also Chapter 6 p.27 above ("In the October tournament...").

tired and William ran away with the second set 6-1 to qualify for the final against Goold²⁸⁸. The Irish champion in the meantime had survived a close encounter with Arthur Myers in the first round, coming through by two sets to one after edging the final set 6-4²⁸⁹, then in the following rounds disposed of Captain Maltby and Ernest Burnett in straight sets (Burnett 6-4, 6-2)²⁹⁰. As at Wimbledon, he collected a bye in the semi-final and on the Thursday morning was fresh and rested ready for his final with William.



9.3 Fitzwilliam tournament, 1883. Standing from right to left: Vere Goold, E Chatterton, E Renshaw; seated: HF Lawford²⁹¹

Looking back on his 1879 Wimbledon final, John Hartley observed that Goold was “a pretty player....a happy impetuous Irishman, the champion of his own country and all in all a fine player. He was given to volley more than any of the rest would, but there must have been something amiss with his game, for after a good night’s sleep I would beat him easily in three sets”²⁹². Charles Heathcote, who had lost to Hartley in the fourth round at Wimbledon in 1879, said of the final that “the showy and more attractive style of Mr Goold, with all its brilliancy, could achieve no success against the unfailing judgment which was the most conspicuous

²⁸⁸ Field 11/10/1879 p.493

²⁸⁹ Looker-on 11/10/1879 p.648, Field 11/10/1879 p.493

²⁹⁰ Field 11/10/1879 p.493

²⁹¹ This image is a reduced version of the picture on page 4 of “The Fitzwilliam Story”, O’Connor 1977, and is shown with the consent of the Archives Committee of Fitzwilliam LTC, 22/1/2020.

²⁹² “A pretty player” - Yorkshire Evening Post 16/11/1933 p.8; rest - O’Connor 1977 p.6. Over 25 years later the Irishman achieved notoriety as “Goold of Monte Carlo” after he and his wife killed a rich Danish woman in their flat in Monte Carlo, in what seems to have been a robbery that went wrong (Aberdeen Daily 5/12/1907 p.5). They were both sentenced to penal servitude for life and Goold died in 1909 at the French convict settlement of Cayenne – Devil’s Island (Freeman’s Jnl 9/9/1909 p.2).

characteristic of Mr Hartley's game"²⁹³. Hartley read the game better than anyone, was steady, safe and accurate, and that was enough to defeat the engaging, risk-taking Irishman. In the Cheltenham final Goold was up against a young, inexperienced player, more adventurous than Hartley and with the makings of a great attacking game, and the contest was much closer. The Looker-on gave a layman's description of the encounter²⁹⁴:

“The final games for the Championship were played on Thursday, Mr W. Renshaw meeting Mr St Leger [*Goold*] on the outer Court shortly after ten o'clock, and between that hour and noon there was a large concourse of Lawn Tennis players and their friends to witness the play. Mr Renshaw led off in the first games, and held his lead until the fourth set had been played, when the game stood at two sets each. In the fifth set the young Cheltonian played splendidly, and eventually defeated the Irish Champion by six games to four; the result being hailed with vociferous applause by Mr Renshaw's friends.”

The game was tight and William revealed a strong competitive temperament. He led from the start and established what must have seemed a match-winning lead of two sets to love, 6-4, 6-3, partly through Goold's unforced errors. Goold then raised his game and the gap between the players closed. The match became a close contest and in the third “intensely exciting” set “the players scored game about till each were five”; Goold then won the deciding game to take the set 6-5. The fourth set was similar, with the players levelling at 5-5 before Goold prevailed - after five deuces. William had been pegged back to two sets all and Goold then accelerated away to a lead of 4-1 in the final set. The cup seemed to have been dashed from William's lips but he kept up the fight, rallied and charged back to take five games in a row and secure the title²⁹⁵.

The Field's report of the tournament gave a cautious and curate's egg of an assessment of the young champion:

“Mr Renshaw is quite a young player, not more than 19 years old, we believe; but with more experience he will trouble the best players in the kingdom. He is most active in the court and seldom misses a return; but his stroke is not severe, and on a grass court he would scarcely beat the Irishman.”

It played down his achievement by suggesting that he was in better condition than Goold, who was “not in his best form”, and that his familiarity with the court gave him an advantage. As mentioned before, Goold had played on rink asphalt in Dublin and he may actually have played at the Winter Garden the previous January in the match between the Fitzwilliam and Cheltenham LTC²⁹⁶. The comment about Goold's superiority on grass was a hostage to fortune and proved embarrassingly wrong just over seven months later when William played the Irishman on grass in Fitzwilliam Square – home advantage to Goold – and beat him comprehensively 6-1, 6-4, 6-3²⁹⁷. By beating one of the kingdom's top three or so players in the final of an open tournament at the end of the 1879 season, William announced his arrival

²⁹³ Badminton Library 1903 p.149

²⁹⁴ Looker-on 11/10/1879 p.648

²⁹⁵ Field 11/10/1879 p.493. The set scores were 6-4, 6-3, 5-6, 5-6, 6-4. The Field set out the full scores for the 1st, 2nd & final sets and recorded the third & fourth sets as reaching 5-5 before Goold prevailed. At five all, the winner of the next game took the set (eg. Mardall v. Bradley, Field p.493, & Tabor v. Lubbock, Todd 1979 p.221).

²⁹⁶ See page 1 this chapter above (“The programme for the Winter Garden....”)

²⁹⁷ Field 29/5/1880 p.684 & 685. See also Charles Heathcote, Badminton Library 1903 p.151.

on the tournament circuit in dramatic style but it was to be 1881 before he put daylight between himself and the rest of the tournament pack.

If 1879 saw the flowering of William's talents as a singles player, it gave no hint of his future prowess in men's doubles in partnership with Ernest, and it was to be 1880 before the brothers hinted at their doubles potential. Eight pairs entered for the men's doubles and none of them had played in the May All England doubles in Oxford, which featured ten pairs with strong delegations from the Carlton Club (Lawford & Erskine), Oxford (Mulholland & Mulholland) and Cheam (Tabor & Durant)²⁹⁸. The stars in Cheltenham proved to be the men from Rugeley LTC – Herbert Gardner & Ernest Burnett. Gardner had shown his paces in the singles – winning third prize – and Burnett ranked as second best in their club and had partnered Gardner to win the Lichfield doubles for two years running²⁹⁹. The Rugeley pair had the toughest draw, though in the Field's view they "succeeded in beating the best local players without much difficulty"³⁰⁰. Their first round match was against the Fitzwilliam team of Goold & Arnold, and the Field viewed this as their hardest encounter³⁰¹. "Had Mr St Leger been in his best form the result might have been different, as Mr Arnold's quiet play at net was most effective", but Mr Burnett's "severe volleying" gave Rugeley the edge and victory in three sets 6-2, 5-6, 6-4³⁰². In the second round they met the Renshaws and won through 6-4, 6-4, without due hindrance in the opinion of the Field, whose sole observation was that "Mr Gardner and his partner were too much for the Renshaws". In the final Rugeley met the North Lonsdale club pairing of Weston & Ainslie, who had seen off Arthur Myers & partner in the first round and the Porter brothers (Fortescue & Atwell) in the second³⁰³.

Rugeley club was based in Cheshire, North Lonsdale club in Cumbria, but despite the distance between them of well over a hundred miles, there were strong old school links between the rival pairs. Gardner and Weston were much the same age and had been contemporaries at Rugby: both had played in the public schools rackets championships and then as old boys they had returned to the playing fields of their alma mater several times to play for the Rugby Past cricket team³⁰⁴. Ainslie and Burnett were both Old Harrovians but the age gap between them was three years and Burnett entered the school the term after Ainslie left, so the connection was much weaker. The atmosphere on court would have been relaxed, with banter aplenty, and the Field anticipated a close contest. Gardner & Burnett cruised into a two set lead then were pegged back as Ainslie & Weston recovered to take the third set 6-4. North Lonsdale had the momentum and appeared to the Field to be looking the stronger but inexplicably "they fell completely to pieces" and Rugeley swept them aside 6-0 in the fourth³⁰⁵. The Cheltenham Chronicle attributed their victory to superior coordination and the "very deadly" play of Mr Burnett at the net, echoing the Field's praise for Burnett's volleying prowess

²⁹⁸ Field 24/5/1879 p.614. Carlton beat Oxford in the semi-final and Cheam in the final, both close matches.

²⁹⁹ Gardner - Chronicle 14/10/1879 p.2; Lichfield event – see p.17 this chapter above ("Gardner's tennis tournament experience..."), footnote 286.

³⁰⁰ Field 18/10/1879 p.536

³⁰¹ The Field of 18/10/1879 p.536 reports Mr Arnold as 'Mr "Arnold"', and Vere Goold as 'Mr "St Leger"', suggesting that Arnold's was an assumed name like Goold's. Goold consistently referred to himself as "St Leger", one of his Christian names, and Arnold may have chosen to follow suit for his own amusement. This being the case, he may well be Arnold Felix Graves, a founding committee member of the Fitzwilliam (see p.2 this chapter above ("The third Fitzwilliam founder...").

³⁰² Field 18/10/1879 p.536

³⁰³ It seems surprising that Atwell rather than Henry partnered Fortescue. The Looker-on of 27/9/1879 p.617 records Atwell as an arrival "from Alikhel" at the Porter family home, heralding a return from India.

³⁰⁴ Field 19/6/1875 p.630 (The "old Rugbeians" "gave a grand dinner in the town hall on each day"). Weston & Ainslie were runners-up in the Northern open men's doubles of 1880 (Field 24/7/1880 p.140).

³⁰⁵ Field 18/10/1879 p.536

against the Fitzwilliam pair in the first round³⁰⁶. Deadly and severe – it’s reasonable to think that Burnett’s volleying made a lasting impression on William Renshaw.

The women’s competition at the Winter Garden broke new ground. It was the first major open women’s tournament in England and its women’s open doubles event was the first of its kind in both Britain and Ireland³⁰⁷. The tournament committee may have been all male but the women were given parity of events and the entry for their doubles was the same size as the men’s. In its June tournament the Fitzwilliam club had introduced a women’s singles event and also a mixed doubles, and there had been a take-up of 9 entries for the singles and 9 pairs for the mixed³⁰⁸. In Cheltenham the singles event attracted an entry of 16 and there were 8 pairs for the women’s doubles (Wimbledon welcomed just 12 ladies for its singles event when the national championships opened up to women in 1884)³⁰⁹. Between the singles and doubles, a total of eighteen women paraded their skills before the Winter Garden audience, and in the eyes of traditionalists cast decorum aside (in spite of garments stretching from neck to wrist and ankle, ample petticoats, waists tightly laced and hats firmly pinned³¹⁰).

Five clubs from five different counties were represented in the singles: Raglan – Monmouthshire, Lichfield – Staffordshire, Deddington – Oxfordshire, South Berkshire LTC (Caversham) and Cheltenham³¹¹. All the clubs were based within a radius of seventy-five miles. Sadly there were no entrants from Irish clubs, although they had promising young players, and it was not until 1881, when the Fitzwilliam temporarily abandoned its ladies’ singles, that Irish ambassadors arrived in the shape of the Misses Langrishe, Perry and Ritchie³¹². Cheltenham contributed nine competitors and the other four clubs seven between them. Despite good representation from neighbouring counties, the home team proved too strong and only one visitor survived to the second round – Miss Shand of Ragland LTC, who had defeated one of the South Berkshire contingent. Commenting on the dominance of the local club, the Field observed that “such ladies’ play is rarely seen” and it was to be hoped that the Cheltenham ladies would soon have the opportunity to try their strength against the ladies of the Fitzwilliam club, as they were keen to do; “They have at least half-a-dozen players that could hold their own against most clubs”³¹³. Although Cheltenham’s Miss Renshaw was a casualty of the first round, all the strongest players came through to the second – Abercrombie, Bradley, Florence Mardall, Ellen Maltby, Hill and Ramsay³¹⁴. The Looker-on reported that Abercrombie, Bradley and Maltby “played remarkably well and were frequently applauded”³¹⁵. The pecking order from the April tournament began to be upset in the second round, with Hill losing to Maltby, then in the semi-finals Abercrombie – supreme champion in

³⁰⁶ Chronicle 14/10/1879 p.2

³⁰⁷ Years in which other English majors-in-the-making started ladies’ singles events: Brighton 1880 (Field 9/10/1880 p.537), Bath 1881 (Field 4/6/1881 p.764), Edgbaston 1881, Exmouth 1881, Northern 1882. For ladies’ doubles, see this chapter page 16 above (“Of other major venues, Edgbaston....”).

³⁰⁸ Field 14/6/1879 p.711 (singles) & 7/6/1879 p.681 (mixed) – 7 of the players were common to mixed and singles, so altogether 11 ladies competed.

³⁰⁹ Field 11/10/1879 p.493 (singles) & 18/10/1879 p.536 (doubles); 19/7/1884 p.102 (Wimbledon – 13 entered, 12 played).

³¹⁰ “Some slight covering for the shoulder is demanded even in the hottest weather by La Mode” – Myra’s Journal of Dress and Fashion 1/7/1875 p.118.

³¹¹ Field 11/10/1879 p.493

³¹² Field 23/4/1881 p.562 (Williams, Kilkenny LTC) & 24/9/1881 p.461 (Perry & Ritchie). Perry, from Banagher LTC won through to the September final. Ritchie was from Belfast.

³¹³ Field 11/10/1879 p.493

³¹⁴ Miss Renshaw may not have ranked with the best of the Cheltenham ladies, but she took a set off Ellen Maltby in the singles, won a round of the ladies doubles 6-2, 6-1 playing with Ella Ramsay against a Raglan pair, and then went down in a close fought match against Hill & Mardall 6-5, 1-6, 4-6 (Field 11/10/1879 p.493 & 18/10/1879 p.536).

³¹⁵ Looker-on 11/10/1879 p.648

April - succumbed to her doubles partner Bradley, 6-3, 6-2; Mardall in the meantime despatched Maltby. The final was a close contest and Mardall prevailed over Bradley in five sets - 6-5, 6-4, 3-6, 5-6, 6-3 - and won the first prize of £10, a sum worth fighting for³¹⁶. The Field judged Bradley to be “the most brilliant player, her serve when it came off being very severe”, but in Mardall she met “a very strong opponent” who “was more certain in her returns”. In the fifth set Bradley “seemed to grow tired and placed several easy balls in the net, while Mardall played better than ever”³¹⁷. In a five set match, fitness would have been crucial and it is hard to believe either young woman would have been in training for five sets of singles; for Cheltenham’s second open, best of five was amended to best of three³¹⁸.

The women’s doubles was also one-sidedly Cheltonian with the Raglan, South Berkshire and Lichfield players departing in the first round³¹⁹. The surviving four pairs had an unexpected look in the local journals as Miss Mardall was shown to have joined forces with an accomplished player by the name of “Mrs Oakes”, seemingly a newcomer to the Cheltenham club. In the Looker-on and Chronicle reports of the singles, Mrs Oakes won in the first round but then metamorphosed into Mrs Hill in the second, where she lost to Ellen Maltby; in the doubles Mrs Oakes went all the way to the final and then beyond to the presentation of prizes by Dr Abercrombie, who named her as recipient of half the prize for second place (with a smile on his face?)³²⁰. For its part, the Field would have no truck with Clara’s alias and referred to her as *Mrs Hill* throughout its reports – “Oakes” was consigned to the cutting room floor³²¹. Marian Bradley & Mary Abercrombie formed the winning doubles partnership. After edging past the Maltby sisters 6-5, 6-5 in the first round, they coasted through a semi-final against Aylmer & Neate and then comfortably outplayed Hill & Mardall in the final 6-2, 6-3, 6-2³²². They were to win the doubles title again in April 1881 after seeing off the usual Cheltenham suspects (Mardall & Morris, Hill & Ramsay)³²³.

The final event of the tournament was an exhibition mixed doubles between the men’s singles finalists and the women’s doubles champions, with the men drawing lots for their partners. The prize was two tennis rackets worth three guineas each donated by the liquidator of the Winter Garden company, who was disposed to be grateful for any activity raising footfall in the complex³²⁴. William Renshaw drew Marian Bradley and once more faced off against Vere Gould, who was paired with Mary Abercrombie. Once again William came out on top in five sets and the Examiner described the match as “one of the most interesting and closely contested matches of the whole tournament”³²⁵.

Dr Abercrombie then addressed the throng to distribute the prizes, and the Chronicle reproduced his words to the best of its ability:

³¹⁶ Field 11/10/1879 p.493

³¹⁷ Field 11/10/1879 p.493

³¹⁸ Field 23/4/1881 p.562

³¹⁹ One of the surviving pairs comprised Mrs W. Aylmer of Cheltenham & “Miss B. Neat”, so that one visitor did make it through to the second round. However, as Miss Neat can be assumed to be Bertha Neat of Tavistock – Mrs Aylmer’s sister – she was home team really (census 1871 for Rev. John W Neat).

³²⁰ Looker-on 11/10/1879 p.649, Chronicle 14/10/1879 p.2 (Chronicle for prize-giving)

³²¹ Field 11/10/1879 p.493 & 18/10/1879 p.536 In her defamation case in 1889, Clara Hill confessed in court that she had played under assumed names twice in the past about eight years earlier, once in Cheltenham and once in Eastbourne; it seems possible this was the Cheltenham instance. Clara’s declared aim in 1888 was to avoid the mockery of her friends if she lost. See Chapter 8 page 11 above.

³²² Field 18/10/1879 p.536. The Maltby sisters were Ellen & Mary.

³²³ Field 23/4/1881 p.562

³²⁴ Examiner 15/10/1879 p.4– Edwin Lawrence was the liquidator

³²⁵ See also Field 18/10/1879 p.536 – “Miss Bradley’s service at times being too much even for Mr St Leger”.

Marian clearly had developed a strong overarm serve, a type of serve deployed for the first time at Wimbledon in 1878 by Arthur Myers (Badminton library 1903 p.289).

“Ladies and gentlemen, there now devolves upon me the very pleasant and agreeable duty of presenting the prizes on this our first Lawn Tennis Tournament, and I think you will all agree with me that it has been a perfect success. I feel much pleasure in giving the first prize for singles to our young champion Mr W. Renshaw, the second to him, Mr St Leger, the Irish Champion, and Mr W. Gardner the third, and Mr Manning winning Mr Lillywhite’s handsome prize Racquet for greatest number of aces³²⁶. We ought to think ourselves very fortunate to have such a rising player in our midst as Mr W. Renshaw. I have heard some remarks as to the advisability of giving our ladies their prizes in money, and certainly I felt some doubts myself, which, however, were dispelled on seeing the business-like manner in which matters were treated at the Archery Meeting on the College playground, where the young ladies held out their beautifully gloved hands without a blush to receive their bank notes, and I thought why should we not do the same. Miss Mardall is the lucky recipient of the first prize for singles, Miss Bradley second, Miss E. Maltby third. Miss M. Maltby a handsome lawn tennis Racquet given by Mr Lillywhite for greatest number of aces. For the doubles, Messrs Gardner and Burnett were the victors, and for their very excellent play we must thank them most heartily. Miss Bradley and Miss Abercrombie won the first ladies’ double and I feel much pleasure in congratulating them on their achievement. The second prize is taken by Mrs Oakes and Miss Mardall. Today there has been a final match played by Miss Mardall [*Bradley per Field*] and Mr W. Renshaw against Miss Abercrombie and Mr St Leger, and won by the former two, and I am pleased to present them with lawn tennis Racquets given by Mr E. Lawrence. It only remains for me now, ladies and gentlemen, to thank you all most heartily for the amusement you have afforded us, and to hope that you have found sufficient fun in our beautiful town to induce you to visit us again on some future occasion. (Loud cheers.)”³²⁷

It would have been helpful if the doctor had been less formal in his mode of address for people who were close acquaintances, or indeed blood relatives, but in those days Christian names were not to be bandied about and he needed to treat home team and visitors with an even hand. Nevertheless, it does seem over the top to call colleague Clara Hill “Mrs Oakes” and offer no clue to Miss Abercrombie’s parentage. His reference to “the first ladies’ double” suggests that he was well aware that his club had just staged the first open ladies’ doubles in the kingdom.

The Looker-on judged the tournament “quite the sensational event of the past week in Cheltenham” – a great success, with the Winter Garden “largely patronised each afternoon by the elite of fashionable society”³²⁸. The most popular matches attracted audiences of two to three hundred. The Examiner recorded a count of 3,000 through the turnstiles over the five day period and hailed the meeting as pleasant and successful in every respect³²⁹. The Chronicle joined the chorus of approval and added the observations that “all parties” were “pleased with the financial success” and much praise was due to the committee of

³²⁶ The nature of the “aces” competitions is far from clear, with newspaper accounts at odds but appearing to agree that those winning other prizes were excluded. The Field rather queers the pitch by referring to “games” in preference to “aces” (Field 18/10/1879 p.536). An “ace” in this context probably just means a point (see for example Badminton Library 1903 p.372 – “The service statistics...”).

³²⁷ Chronicle 14/10/1879 p.2

³²⁸ Looker-on 11/10/1879 p.648 & 649

³²⁹ Examiner 15/10/1879 p.4

management, especially Dr Abercrombie “who throughout was most assiduous in his exertions for the comfort and convenience of his visitors”³³⁰.

The Field’s view was that the venue worked well – there was good accommodation for spectators both inside and outside the building and the arrangements were admirably carried out by the committee and gave universal satisfaction; “If the club can only make certain of having the Imperial Gardens to play in, they may rest assured that the Cheltenham tournament will take a place among the lawn tennis fixtures second only perhaps to the All England meeting”³³¹. This was a generous assessment and although Cheltenham’s men’s singles was never likely to rival that of Wimbledon, it may be that at a time when the All England tournament consisted solely of a men’s singles event, and was showing no signs of broadening its approach, the Field’s correspondent felt that Cheltenham would achieve importance in the fixture calendar by virtue of its women’s events and men’s doubles. The reference to retaining the Winter Garden as a venue showed good local knowledge. No one then knew what the future held for the favoured indoor and hardcourt facility - regime change was imminent and the future was in the lap of the gods.

The club had proved its ability to stage a major open competition and shown that its leading players were of the highest calibre. Society had been entertained and – importantly - tradesmen and accountants had been left with smiles on their faces. The town could expect a repeat but the question would be where, and that would affect when.

After making his presence felt in Cheltenham, William Renshaw was next to attract attention in London, informally. Less than a week after Abercrombie’s distribution of prizes, Captain Meara and his family left Clarence House to make a new home in 19 Courtfield Gardens, off Cromwell Road in London, and the twins were detached from their ideal location in easy walking distance of tennis courts, the Lillywhite emporium and the sports facilities of Cheltenham College³³². The new premises were socially well placed but the Maida Vale indoor court was some two miles to the north, Prince’s Club was about a mile and a half to the east, and Wimbledon was south of the Thames and far away. By chance or not, Edward Meara’s brother George died “suddenly” in London on 20th October and the family may have been summoned to his sickbed just beforehand³³³. Edward was George’s family executor and the probate announcement of 8th November named 19 Courtfield Gardens as Edward’s address, confirming a permanent move out of Cheltenham and suggesting the property had been taken comfortably in advance as part of a planned relocation³³⁴. By the end of January 1880, Clarence House had been taken over by Francis Amiel and his family³³⁵.

The Renshaw twins made a first appearance at the Maida Vale court in London that autumn and caused a minor sensation if certain Victorian historians are to be believed. Writer Colonel Robert Osborn describes how one morning blasé habitués of the club idly watched the two strangers sparring together, judging initially from the ragged state of their tennis balls that they were misplaced vagrants but then becoming riveted by the speed and agility of their

³³⁰ Chronicle 14/10/1879 p.2

³³¹ Field 11/10/1879 p.493

³³² Looker-on 18/10/1879 p.666: “Departures....Capt. Meara, RN, Mrs Meara and family, Clarence House, for 19 Courtfield Gardens, Cromwell Road, London”. See also same entry in Chronicle 21/10/1879 p.2. It would have been more orthodox for them to record their move under “Removals” but the detail of the address would have told the story. The modern postcode for 19 Courtfield Gardens is SW5 0PD.

³³³ Looker-on 25/10/1879 p.682

³³⁴ By January 1880 Cheltenham journals were recording the movements of Amiel family members to and from Clarence House. Ellen Meara died at 19 Courtfield Gardens on 18/2/1881 and the 1881 census shows Mearas & Renshaws in residence there (ACU).

³³⁵ Amiel arrivals at Clarence House: Looker-on 17/1/1880 p.42 (Capt & Mrs) & 14/2/1880 p.107 (colonel); see also 20/3/1880 p.188 etc. Census 1881: Francis Amiel is head of household, Clarence House, brother Colonel Amiel in residence. Capt. Francis A died there in October 1883 (probate Nov. 1883, ACU).

play³³⁶: “.....when it was seen with what marvellous speed those ancient balls were driven to and fro across the net – with what dexterity they were picked up in remote corners of the court – with what precision they were returned - unconcern soon changed into a very lively interest...” A champion was then selected from amongst the watchers to test the Renshaw prowess and William proceeded to wipe the floor with him³³⁷. In 1879 a number of well-known players had taken over what had been the large and fashionable Maida Vale skating rink and converted it into a state-of-the-art tennis centre comprising “an excellent covered court and four full-sized open-air courts”³³⁸. Amongst the leading lights were Lawford and Erskine, who had won the Oxford Doubles in May that year when the club was called The Carlton³³⁹. Club members were therefore well used to play of the highest standard and bearing in mind that Ernest’s game was then nothing special, the Osborn anecdote may need to be treated more as entertaining legend than reliable history. In January 1880 the Field described William as one of the “best-known names” amongst the club members and word of his success in Cheltenham had caused more than a ripple of interest in the capital³⁴⁰.

In Cheltenham James Lillywhite bade a sad farewell to his neighbours and took on one of his boldest projects yet – he became lessee of the Winter Garden for a winter season of five months³⁴¹. At the beginning of November he reopened the Winter Garden for its usual business offering covered and outdoor skating rinks, unrivalled tennis courts, and reading and smoking rooms, all accompanied by a good band afternoon and evening, season tickets at a cost of one guinea. He publicly appealed to his “friends” to support him in his undertaking and to help him prove “that the Winter Garden (in the permanent success of which he has a considerable pecuniary interest) may be retained as a place of resort and amusement for the residents and visitors of the town, without having recourse to the Music Hall Caterers and Speculators, into whose hands it is in danger of falling”³⁴². The Chronicle gave his enterprise a ringing endorsement and expressed its confidence that his legion of friends would find plenty of amusement³⁴³. Soon after, James published a programme of entertainments and it was the familiar mix: a Chrysanthemum Show in November, followed in December by comical vocalist Mr Jolly Nash and his concert party, a Grand Military Assault at Arms, a return visit by Zazel the human cannonball, and a grand Christmas Festival; then after a gap of some months, a spring flower show in March of the new year³⁴⁴. He certainly showed nerve and, most importantly for Cheltenham’s tennis players, he kept the hardcourt facilities open through the winter.

1880: The club marks time, the Winter Garden wobbles, Renshaws advance

On 3rd January Cheltenham LTC celebrated the New Year with a mixed doubles competition indoors at the Winter Garden. Nearly all the leading ladies played but none of the

³³⁶ Pastime, 2 June 1886, p.367. Osborn retired from the Indian Army in 1879, arriving back in England in June. He published several books including in 1881 “Lawn Tennis: its players and how to play”. Judging by the views he expressed on female tennis players, he would have been tarred and feathered if he had set foot in Montpellier Gardens during the summer months (Clara Hill heading the posse). (UK arrival: Homeward Mail 31/5/1879 p.578; ladies’ tennis: Sheffield & Rotherham 1/12/1881 p.8; books: Times letter 27/4/1889 p.9 re. obituary 25/4/1889 p.7.)

³³⁷ Lawn Tennis Recollections, Herbert Chipp1898, p. 16

³³⁸ Field 24/1/1880 p.107

³³⁹ Field 22/5/1880 p.629 – letter of explanation from Herbert Lawford

³⁴⁰ Field 24/1/1880 p.107

³⁴¹ Looker-on 8/11/1879 p.711, 15/11/1879 p.722, & 3/4/1880 p.215/6 (duration)

³⁴² Chronicle 28/10/1879 p.4 col’n 2

³⁴³ Chronicle 28/10/1879, p.4 col’n 3

³⁴⁴ Chronicle 11/11/1879 p.4, Glamorgan Gazette 7/11/1879 p.3 (Jolly Nash)

leading men, so there were no Renshaws or Porters, no Edgar Manning, and no Percy Hattersley-Smith (Gloucestershire county cricketer and a housemaster of Cheltenham College), and the leading male player proved to be a visitor in Mr Myers (who, as he came out on top, can be presumed to be Arthur Myers on holiday with his mother at Brandon House, Painswick Road)³⁴⁵. There was an entry of thirteen pairs and the aim was social. Partners were changed each round within a knockout format: the winners in the first round went on to the second and drew for new partners, and so on until two chance pairings were left to contest the final. Myers was paired with Bradley in the first round, Abercrombie in the second, Lucy Morris in the third, and Bradley again in the final, so his emergence as victor with Bradley was less than surprising. The Looker-on faithfully reported that the “friendly tourney” was watched with much interest by the friends of the players. Although absent from this event in January, Ernest Renshaw returned to Cheltenham in February to attend the Gentleman’s Fancy Dress Ball and was joined in 1st Royal Lancashire livery by fellow-officer Alfred Rooke³⁴⁶.

Later in January rumours surfaced that buyers had been found for the Winter Garden – outsiders from London³⁴⁷ - and it seems that from this time the liquidator declined to accept commitments for the halls beyond the end of Lillywhite’s lease while a deal was under negotiation. Purchasers were evidently in place by the middle of March as the incomers began to advertise for lets of a month to a quarter beginning after easter³⁴⁸. The Looker-on reported that ownership was to pass on 5th April³⁴⁹. In June the Chronicle reported that the balance of the purchase price of £13,000 had been paid and Cheltenham held its breath for the plans of the new owners to be revealed³⁵⁰. The sale proceeds were applied immediately to pay off the bank and debenture holders and the trade creditors were left in suspense until the liquidator had resolved the company’s claim against one of its contractors and wrapped up its affairs ready for a final distribution³⁵¹. Fears of development were rekindled and it was said that a row of villas was to be erected in front of the building³⁵².

Little was said about the buyers. The press just offered two names - Mr Gethen of Kensington and Mr Radford of Bayswater³⁵³ - but these two may have been representing a larger group and certainly when the property was sold in 1895, another Londoner by the name of Cumming was stated to have been one of the original purchasers³⁵⁴. The professions of the three were varied: stockbroker, builder and silk merchant. Gethen seems to have been front man³⁵⁵ and he had something resembling a local connection as he was born and bred in Hereford, some thirty miles north-west of Cheltenham³⁵⁶. His full name was Harry Herbert Gethen and his father was a Hereford draper³⁵⁷. Educated at Hereford Cathedral School, he

³⁴⁵ Looker-on 10/1/1880 p.24. Hattersley-Smith: obituary Gloucester Echo 19/1/1918 p.4. Brandon House: census 1871 for Susan Myers & Looker-on 12/9/1896 p.815.

³⁴⁶ Looker-on 14/2/1880 p.106

³⁴⁷ Looker-on 17/1/1880 p.41 & see Chronicle 13/1/1880 p.4 - “Not a syllable has oozed out as to who is the purchaser, or to what purpose the building and grounds are to be devoted”.

³⁴⁸ Era 14/3/1880 p.22. Lillywhite had used the Era to advertise in February – 22/2/1880 p.22.

³⁴⁹ Looker-on 3/4/1880, p.215. See also Examiner 7/4/1880 p.8 when Lawrence advised shareholders of the sale.

³⁵⁰ Chronicle 16/6/1880 p.4

³⁵¹ Examiner 23/6/1880 p.8, Gloucester Journal 26/6/1880 p.5, & Looker-on 3/7/1880 p.424

³⁵² Chronicle 15/6/1880 p.4

³⁵³ Examiner 21/1/1880 p.4

³⁵⁴ Gloucestershire Echo 13/9/1895 p.3. Cumming’s full name was Charles Edward Durant Cumming. He was a silk merchant per census 1871, London & China Express 10/1/1890 p.52, The Standard 11/7/1898 p.9 etc.

³⁵⁵ Gloucestershire Echo: 5/2/1884 p.3 - HHG attends meeting of Cheltenham town council, possibly in the role of adviser to the finance committee; 27/1/1885 p.3 - HHG present at meeting convened by Mayor re. County Exhibition & offers support of Winter Garden owners.

³⁵⁶ Obituary Norwood News 26/6/1931 p.23

³⁵⁷ Census for Henry Gethen & HHG 1861

was drawn to the bright lights of the capital and in 1871 at the age of twenty had established himself as a Clerk on the London Stock Exchange³⁵⁸. He was admitted to membership of the Stock Exchange in 1876 and was still a member over forty years later³⁵⁹. Quite how he came up with the idea of acquiring the Winter Garden history does not relate, but he may have felt it could be a nice littler earner and talked a few clients into stumping up the readies.

Radford's profession was of particular significance. A builder, who was following his father's trade, William Radford became involved in the upmarket development of Courtfield Gardens, South Kensington when he was just twenty-three³⁶⁰. He took three houses on building leases in 1873 and was still building new houses there in the late seventies. By coincidence or not, the Meara/Renshaw family's new home was 19 Courtfield Gardens and it is possible it was built by the young developer. A row of villas for the well-to-do along the front of the Winter Garden – as mooted by the Chronicle – was exactly his line of business.

A few weeks after the Winter Garden changed hands, noticeboards appeared on the property advertising the availability of land on the Promenade frontage for building purposes and the Looker-on proclaimed the extinguishing of all hope that the Winter Garden would fulfil original intentions to preserve "Imperial Square from any further invasion of brick and mortar, and become an enduring ornament to the town as well as contributive to the health of its inhabitants"³⁶¹. While continuing to be available for hire³⁶², the building seems to have been closed to the public from the second quarter as the owners sought to develop "their scheme for its conversion", and it was not until October that the Looker-on could report that the facility was being reopened for public amusement³⁶³. During this time the plans of the new owners appear to have foundered and in an abrupt volte face they attempted to unload their investment - they invited the town council to take the property off their hands³⁶⁴. After due consideration the council declined the offer³⁶⁵.

The happy partnership of Lillywhite and Lawrence therefore came to an end and from April until early October Cheltenham LTC was deprived of its regular indoor and hard court facility. This, and uncertainties linked to the change of regime, could explain why in 1880 there was no repeat of the previous year's open tournament. Tennis continued as usual in Montpellier Gardens, where in May "numberless courts [*were*] marked off, reserved for parties subscribing for their exclusive use", but committing the gardens to a week's use for a large open event called for advance planning and a willingness on the part of the owning company that seems to have been absent at the time³⁶⁶. Club play would have continued in Montpellier Gardens during the spring/summer season and competition play would have continued with inter-club matches, although most of these would not have been reported in the press. Details of one match did appear in the Field. In mid-April Cheltenham sent a mixed team of 14 (8 men, 6 women) to Bournemouth to take on the local club at singles and doubles³⁶⁷. The plan was to devote the first day to doubles and the second to singles. In the event rain intervened on the second day and only the doubles were played. Bournemouth's men proved far too strong for Cheltenham's and won 13½ matches to 2½. The home team included three players who had

³⁵⁸ Census for HHG 1871

³⁵⁹ LSE form of admission 23/3/1876, with HJ Chinnery one of his two sureties. Chinnery was well known as a sportsman and well connected – see Chapter 4 page 18, footnote 214 above. HHG re-election form 1923 (ACU).

³⁶⁰ Census 1871 for William & Francis Radford (ACU); "The Gunter Estate" p.196–214, www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london, 17/9/2022

³⁶¹ Looker-on 3/7/1880 p.424

³⁶² Looker-on 3/7/1880 p.418

³⁶³ Looker-on 2/10/1880 p.632 & see 9/10/1880, p.642 & 649; Examiner 6/10/1880 p.4

³⁶⁴ Looker-on 9/10/1880 p.652, Mercury 9/10/1880 p.3

³⁶⁵ Chronicle 16/11/1880 p.2

³⁶⁶ Looker-on 15/5/1880 p.312

³⁶⁷ Field 24/4/1880 p.525

match experience from the Wimbledon Championships – Medlycott (1879), Brackenbury (1878 & 1879) and Hankey (1877) – and these three won all their doubles matches, Brackenbury and Medlycott teaming up as one of the pairs³⁶⁸. Cheltenham were without their Renshaw stars – possibly on militia duty - and only the pairing of Hattersley-Smith and A.A. Gardner tasted any success with two wins; Porter and Parry were left empty-handed along with the other men's pairs³⁶⁹. Cheltenham's women won their encounter by 5 matches to 4. The teams parted company with regret and expressed eager anticipation for a rematch in Cheltenham in the summer³⁷⁰.

Rain intervened in club competitions again at the beginning of June when the county fête tournament was washed out without a ball being served. It appears this would have been a handicap doubles competition for both sexes, but limited to Gloucestershire residents as in 1879³⁷¹. There were no further reports of club events until the Winter Garden returned to regular tennis use in October after the owners retreated from their plans for development³⁷². On Monday 11th October the crystal palace once more opened its doors to the public, with a new manager named George Adams in place to welcome back skaters and tennis players, and with a serenade of popular music³⁷³. The following Wednesday Cheltenham LTC returned to action under the dome running a club tournament and the boards once again rang to the athletic footfalls of William Renshaw, back in town for the event and fresh from sweeping up all the titles at the Sussex county tournament³⁷⁴.

At a national level, 1880 saw no increase in the number of major open tournaments available for women. The Sussex county tournament was launched in Brighton in October, with a small entry for the ladies' singles³⁷⁵, but the beacon of the Cheltenham tournament was temporarily extinguished. Part of the problem seems to have been a shortage of ladies willing to play in public and this was certainly the case in Dublin and Bournemouth (which launched its first open in October) and probably also London³⁷⁶. There was next to nothing to attract the Cheltenham ladies and persuade them to travel. The men's programme of tournaments, on the other hand, showed healthy development during the year. The Irish Championships in Dublin grew in stature as the majority of the leading English players made the sea crossing to enter the lists; the Oxford All England Doubles maintained its standing; Prince's Club in London laid on a singles event in June, effectively replacing the 1879 Hendon tournament, and succeeded in attracting an entry of over thirty which included nearly all the best English players³⁷⁷; Wimbledon flourished with a record entry; and the Northern tournament was

³⁶⁸ All England Championships: Todd 1979 p.219 – 222 etc. Hankey and Medlycott both played at Wimbledon in 1880. The three were all priests: Hankey (Eton & Cambridge) was rector of Maiden Newton (Dorset), Medlycott (Harrow & Cambridge) was vicar of Milborne Port (Somerset), and Brackenbury (Radley & Oxford) was curate of St Peter's Bournemouth (Hampshire) (per school registers & university "Alumni"; Brackenbury - Clergy List 1897). Hankey and Medlycott's livings were both within 35 miles of Bournemouth.

³⁶⁹ "AA Gardner" was most probably Arthur Agg-Gardner, brother of Cheltenham MP James Tynte Agg-Gardner (Harrow register 1910 p.434, Chronicle 11/8/1928 p.22 – obituary for JTA-G).

³⁷⁰ Field 24/4/1880 p.525

³⁷¹ Looker-on 29/5/1880 p.1 & 5/6/1880 p.360, Field 22/5/1880 p.629 (Fixtures), Examiner 2/6/1880 p.8

³⁷² Looker-on 9/10/1880 p.652

³⁷³ Looker-on 9/10/1880 p.642 & 649; George Adams: 23/7/1881 p.1 census 1881 etc.

³⁷⁴ Looker-on 16/10/1880 p.663 & 4, Field 16/10/1880 p.573. The Looker-on only named William as a competitor but his sister Edith may have played as well as Miss EA Renshaw and Mr Renshaw were both listed as Queen's Hotel Arrivals on p.665 of the Looker-on 16/10/1880.

³⁷⁵ Field 9/10/1880 p.537.

³⁷⁶ Bournemouth: Field 9/10/1880 p.537. There were no women's events in the Northern until 1882.

³⁷⁷ Field 26/6/1880 p.831. John Hartley did not play.

launched in July in Broughton, near Manchester and was well received in the locality³⁷⁸. These were to be the majors for the next three years together with London Athletic in 1882³⁷⁹.

In 1880 the Renshaw twins played in all these tournaments except the Northern and were Cheltenham LTC's only representatives, although it must be said that in the Oxford Doubles they played under the banner of the Maida Vale Club. They managed this despite extensive demands on their time from their militia regiment.

In their second full year with the Royal Lancashires the twins were called upon to assist in the induction training of three hundred new recruits. The training programme was to last eighty-three days beginning late in March and ending on 12th June and each of the two battalions fielded training teams of over thirty officers and men. William and Ernest were reported as present at inception, as was James Vyvyan, and the Lancaster Gazette's account of the concluding inspection parade in June described how during three months' training, the body of recruits had been "drilled in five companies under the command of Captain Whalley, Captain-Adjutant Stokes, and Lieutenants Renshaw (2), North, Vivian and Filosse"³⁸⁰. The regiment must have been willing to indulge Renshaw tennis ambitions as the young officers were permitted to compete in the Oxford Doubles early in May and the Irish Championships near the end of the month; two companies may have felt slight victims of neglect but there would have been NCO's on hand to step into the breach. As the brothers collected titles from both events, it seems their military commitments had little adverse effect on their tournament preparation and they were probably able to practise together in Lancaster³⁸¹.

Oxford hosted twelve pairs for their doubles tournament from seven different clubs: Maida Vale, County Down, West Middlesex (two pairs), Surbiton Island, Alresford, Cambridge University and Oxford University (five pairs)³⁸². It may have been described as an All England event, but the All England, Prince's, Fitzwilliam and Bournemouth clubs were notable absentees and the competition was not as strong as it might have been. There were really only two pairs of good standing apart from the Renshaws (Maida Vale): the County Down team of the Mulholland brothers (Alfred and Henry who had played together for Oxford in 1879) and Cole & Woodhouse of the West Middlesex in Hammersmith. Renshaws and Mulhollands met in the second round and in a good match the twins prevailed 7-5, 6-2, 6-3, 6-3 ("the volleying of the Messrs Renshaw was remarkably good, giving them many an ace"). Maida Vale met Hammersmith in the final and the Renshaws had a closer match but still won comfortably 6-1, 6-4, 6-0, 6-8, 6-3. The silverware was theirs but there were stronger pairs out there and the Irish Championships was to prove a sterner test.

In Dublin, Alfred Mulholland took revenge on Ernest Renshaw for his Oxford defeat twice over. In the second round of the singles he beat him comfortably 6-2, 6-5, 6-0 and then in the doubles he teamed up with Herbert Lawford to knock the Renshaw brothers out of the competition, again in the second round³⁸³. The doubles was a closer match but still straight sets, 6-4, 6-5, Lawford & Mulholland showing an impressive competitive spirit by winning the last four games in each set: At 5-2 up in the final set "the brothers appeared to play rather carelessly" and contrived to lose the set after being forty love up in the final game³⁸⁴.

William's progress in the singles was a different story and something of a triumphal march past high quality opposition³⁸⁵. In the first round he took five sets to edge past Richard

³⁷⁸ Field 24/7/1880 p.140

³⁷⁹ Field 17/6/1882 p.824

³⁸⁰ Lancaster Gazette 27/3/1880 p.5 & 12/6/1880 p.5

³⁸¹ A Lancaster combined cricket and tennis club was formed in April 1879 (Lancaster Gazette 26/4/1879 p.5 & 3/3/1880 p.4). The twins always had each other as hitting partners.

³⁸² Field 15/5/1880 p.611

³⁸³ Field 29/5/1880 p.684

³⁸⁴ Field 29/5/1880 p.685

³⁸⁵ Field 29/5/1880 p.684

Richardson of Hooton LTC, who was to win the inaugural Northern Tournament in July and take second prize in the Wimbledon All-Comers of 1881³⁸⁶; in the second round he claimed the notable scalp of Herbert Lawford, who was less than two months away from winning the Wimbledon All-Comers³⁸⁷; Ernest Browne of the Fitzwilliam was brushed aside in straight sets in the All-Comers final (6-3, 6-4, 6-3) and then in the Challenge Round Vere Goold was never in contention, securing just eight games in the three straight sets he lost³⁸⁸ - "His opponent played with wonderful brilliance and certainty, and the result was a victory.....in the commonest of canters"³⁸⁹. In its account of the game Ireland's Freeman's Journal gave a brief description of William's service action and suggested that he had yet to adopt the overarm action pioneered by Arthur Myers at Wimbledon in 1878: "Mr Renshaw's service is very peculiar – underhand and backhand with a short quick turn of the wrist that gives a most puzzling side to the ball". He had taken on Ireland's best and two of England's finest and was the player on form when he arrived in London for his next major open. The London pond, however, accommodated more big fish than Dublin, and Woodhouse, Lubbock and others were lying in wait while Lawford was hungry for revenge.

Prince's tournament fell in June, a week before the militia was to call up the brothers for annual training, and the William found himself amongst an entry of thirty-four from ten different clubs including the All England, Prince's, the MCC, West Middlesex and Bournemouth. The Fitzwilliam was absent, and John Hartley stayed in Yorkshire to tend to his parishioner flock, but London deployed in force. This was William's first appearance in the capital on a major stage and was an opportunity to show that his success in Dublin was no flash in the pan, to confirm his place as Britain's rising star. Sadly for him his hopes were dashed in the third round. A comfortable first round match was followed by "a remarkably pretty game" against Ernest in the second, which he won three sets to one, but then he hit the buffers in the shape of Herbert Lawford, Maida Vale colleague and victim in Dublin³⁹⁰. His start was promising – 6-2, 6-3 to open up a two set lead – but then Herbert fought back and levelled the match at two sets all (no one in the kingdom was more of a fighter). In the fifth set William fell behind 1-3 immediately, clawed his way back to 3-3, and then went game and game with Herbert to reach 5-5. A short sharp decider was then played - the Prince's version of a tie-break. As the Field put it: "The match now depended on one game, as advantage sets were only played in the final round for the cup". Serve was with Herbert and he won the game to love and the set 6-5³⁹¹. Herbert went on to claim the 1880 Prince's title and by winning the All-Comers at Wimbledon that July, at the end of the season he could reasonably claim to rank second in the land to John Hartley. But during the rest of the decade William never again lost to him in an open tournament.

The All England Championships was booked to begin two weeks after Prince's started, and the day appointed was 5th July. The regular annual training of the Lancashire regiment was booked to begin on 28th June and the Renshaws were candidates for twenty-seven days' square-bashing in Lancaster³⁹². The Lancaster Gazette listed them amongst those assembled for training on the Monday but they must have been given special leave of absence as a week later they made their debut on the lawns of Wimbledon³⁹³. It is right to consider this a historic day, given the great pioneering role played by the brothers, but few would have marked it down at the time as Otway Woodhouse had set them both free to return to Lancaster by close

³⁸⁶ Field 24/7/1880 p.140, Todd 1979 p.223

³⁸⁷ Todd 1979 p.222 – 14 July. WR beat Lawford 6-5, 3-6, 6-3, 6-3 (Field 29/5/1880 p.684).

³⁸⁸ Field 29/5/1880 p.685 – 6-1, 6-4, 6-3

³⁸⁹ Freeman's Jnl 29/5/1880 p.7

³⁹⁰ Field 26/6/1880 p.831

³⁹¹ Field 26/6/1880 p.831. HFL won 2-6, 3-6, 6-3, 6-5, 6-5.

³⁹² Lancaster Gazette 3/7/1880 p.5

³⁹³ Lancaster Gazette 3/7/1880 p.5

of play the following Monday. William was accounted for in the third round 6-5, 3-6, 3-6, 4-6, and then Ernest succumbed in the fourth round 3-6, 3-6, 6-3, 0-6³⁹⁴. Much had been expected of William and the Field reported “the astonishment of everyone” when Woodhouse held his own from the start and then proceeded to win quite comfortably, very strong on the volley. Tennis historian Herbert Chipp – then an aspiring player – had visited Wimbledon specifically to see William in action and his reaction was representative: he was left wondering why he had bothered – “I muttered to myself, but what came ye out for to see?”³⁹⁵ Ernest was defeated “with little difficulty” and seems to have given up the ghost in the final set, as he did against Alfred Mulholland in Dublin. Neither brother made their mark in the capital’s showcase tournaments and the springtime promise seemed to have come to nothing.

Soon afterwards they were back with their brothers-in-arms in Lancaster and amongst their luggage for the trip north they took the beginnings of what was to be an extensive silverware collection. At the end of training the regiment paraded (673 men of “smart and soldierly appearance”), the final inspection took place, and then there was a luncheon for a hundred and fifty invited guests. On display for the diners was the regimental plate and alongside presentation soup tureens, cups, embossed candelabras and a silver biscuit box in the shape of a drum on which a kneeling rifleman was taking aim, were “two lawn tennis silver challenge cups, both open to all England – one in the shape of a handsome claret jug, and the other a massive punch bowl – which had been won and were still held by Lieutenants W.C. and W.E. Renshaw”³⁹⁶. The claret jug was probably William’s trophy for the Irish singles and the punch bowl was presumably the Oxford Doubles trophy³⁹⁷. The regiment took pride in the sporting achievements of its officers and must have felt that its leave from training for the brothers had a just reward, Wimbledon apart. For their devotion to duty, at the end of August the Renshaws and Alfred Rooke were promoted from Second Lieutenant to Lieutenant³⁹⁸.

The first Sussex county tournament took place in Brighton at the beginning of October and Cheltenham carried off all the open titles, William defeating Ernest in the final of the men’s singles, the brothers winning the men’s doubles, William and Miss Davidson winning the mixed, and Ellen & Mary Maltby contesting the final of the ladies’ singles³⁹⁹. There were fourteen entrants for the men’s singles and although several different clubs were represented, including the All England and Oxford University, the Renshaws were the only heavyweights and their victories would have aroused little interest within the tennis community. Robert Braddell played but lost to William 6-2, 6-0 in the semi-finals - he was to raise his game in 1881⁴⁰⁰. The ladies singles was a low key affair with just eight entries and the Field made little comment except on the all-Maltby final, which it felt would have benefited from more in the way of attacking strokes: “Miss E. and Miss M. Maltby were very evenly matched, and some

³⁹⁴ Field 10/7/1880 p.74/75 & 17/7/1880 p.114

³⁹⁵ “Lawn Tennis Recollections”, 1898, p.16. Chipp took up lawn tennis in 1878 at the age of 28 (Pastime 28/7/1886 p.68/69)

³⁹⁶ Lancaster Gazette 24/7/1880 p.5

³⁹⁷ In his will, Herbert Lawford listed amongst his trophies a claret jug as the All Comers prize at the Irish Championships, which he won in 1881 & 1884; a “large jug Irish Championship” was also listed and this was probably the trophy he kept for being singles champion 1884-1886. The prize for the Cheltenham men’s singles in October 1879 seems to have been cash (Chronicle 14/10/1879 p.2).

³⁹⁸ Email from curator the King’s Own Royal Regiment Museum, 3/9/2013. See also Lancaster Gazette 4/9/1880 p.5

³⁹⁹ Field 9/10/1880 p.537 & 16/10/1880 p.573. The Maltby family probably left Cheltenham around December 1879 and were certainly gone by June 1880 (Looker-on: 29/11/1879 p.763 [Maltby Departure], 27/12/1879 p.826 [new family moves into Maltby house], 19/6/1880 p.397 [EM retires from CC Council, CC register 1910 p.18]).

⁴⁰⁰ Sporting Gazette 16/10/1880 p.1064. See page 56 below “Ernest Renshaw, Edgar Lubbock.....”.

good play was the result; neither of the ladies, however, showed much aptitude at placing the ball – a fact to which possibly some of the long rallies may in a measure be attributed⁴⁰¹.

Brighton signalled the end of the main tournament season and Cheltenham LTC and the Renshaws could view the year with a mixture of feelings⁴⁰². William had confirmed his prowess at singles in Dublin, but not London, and the Renshaw doubles pairing had flourished in Oxford but not Dublin. Cheltenham's ladies had been denied a showcase for their skills as the club had been unable to stage a follow-up to its 1879 open tournament. Generally the club's leading players and its energetic secretary carried unfulfilled ambitions into the new year.

1881: The club consolidates and William begins his six year reign

At the end of January 1881, Josiah Jessop, faithful secretary and manager of Montpellier Gardens for twenty years, died after being in failing health for some months, and an era in the management of the gardens came to an end⁴⁰³. The directors of the company were quick to react and they immediately advertised for a replacement manager or, alternatively, a lessee of the gardens⁴⁰⁴. James Lillywhite stepped forward and in partnership with estate agent Charles Sweeting, signed up for a lease of Montpellier Gardens that would start in April⁴⁰⁵. With John Abercrombie an influential director of the company (chairman by the end of the year), the winds had changed and the club was set fair for a full scale grass court tournament in the autumn⁴⁰⁶. At the beginning of May the Looker-on reported that the lessees were appropriating “nearly the whole of the lawns at their disposal” for lawn tennis⁴⁰⁷. Meanwhile the new owners of the Winter Garden were stuck in the doldrums - development plans stalled, town council unwilling to relieve them of their burden - and the leisure centre reverted to its original programme of activities with an expansion of tennis facilities. Instead of erecting a row of elegant villas along its Promenade frontage it converted the lawns on the Promenade side to tennis courts and advertised them for daily hire, installing hoardings along the border “for the privacy of ladies” in play⁴⁰⁸. (The hoardings were generally denounced as a disfigurement of the Promenade and after they were let for billposting, the Chronicle condemned them as an eyesore and monstrous advertising station⁴⁰⁹.) Cheltenham LTC's cup ran over, its indoor and hard court facilities reinstated, its grass court facilities extended, and James Lillywhite in place to provide a first class venue for a major tournament on grass.

An addition to their membership at the beginning of the season was a further cause for celebration. John Charles Kay, an experienced first team member of Leamington Spa LTC, moved to Cheltenham around the autumn of 1880 and transferred his allegiance to the local club⁴¹⁰. Introduced to ball games during two years at Harrow in his early teens, he had moved

⁴⁰¹ Field 16/10/1880 p.573

⁴⁰² Field 11/9/1880 p.426

⁴⁰³ Chronicle 1/2/1881 p.5 & 6/1/1880 p.6

⁴⁰⁴ Gloucester Journal 5/2/1881 p. 4

⁴⁰⁵ Looker-on 26/3/1881 p.200 & Chronicle 19/4/1881 p.8

⁴⁰⁶ JA chairman: Examiner Almanac 4/1/1882 p.1

⁴⁰⁷ Looker-on 7/5/1881 p.296

⁴⁰⁸ Looker-on 28/5/1881 p.1 & p.344/345, Chronicle 19/7/1881 p.4

⁴⁰⁹ Looker-on 16/7/1881 p.457, Chronicle 19/7/1881 p.4

⁴¹⁰ JCK attended 4 Cheltenham balls in February 1881 and was listed as one of the 18 or so hosts for the Bachelors' Ball. Originally a freemason of the Bolton le Moors lodge, he was a “visitor” at a meeting of Cheltenham's lodge at Masonic Hall, Cheltenham on 27/12/1880 (register for Anchor & Hope Lodge p.34 where he was a member 1876 - 1880 [ACU], Examiner 29/12/1880 p.4)

to Leamington in 1877 and taken up the new game of lawn tennis⁴¹¹. Cricket and football had been his first loves and on leaving school he became the driving force behind the formation of Turton Football Club, near the family home just north of Bolton⁴¹². As joint founder of the club in 1871 he introduced the Harrow rules and while still a teenager took on the role of Club Captain. Within a few years an offshoot of the club developed into the famous Bolton Wanderers, whose first members went to the Turton club to learn the game, and historians were to acclaim him as the originator of Association Football in the north of England⁴¹³. He was a precocious and dynamic young man and later in the eighties he was to shoulder management duties at Cheltenham LTC on top of his match play⁴¹⁴. Leamington LTC may have been the oldest lawn tennis club in the world through Harry Gem's development of his own version of lawn tennis before 1874, but its ambitions were limited and its membership was restricted to just fifty in 1875 and remained at this level until as late as 1882⁴¹⁵. The smallness of its grounds was perhaps a major constraint and when it finally staged an open tournament in 1882, the early rounds were played using the nearby Jephson Gardens⁴¹⁶. However small the scale of the club and its aspirations in those early days, its core membership was experienced and enthusiastic and in 1879 it ventured beyond the town boundaries to test its men's pairs against the rest of the nation. In May it entered the pairing of Doctors Shapley and Tomkins for the first All England Oxford Doubles - one of just four clubs to arrive and play apart from Oxford and Cambridge Universities - and they won through a round against Oxford opposition before having to scratch, presumably because of the doctors' professional commitments⁴¹⁷. Later in the season several men's doubles club matches were played and Kay saw action against Oxford University in June playing as first pair⁴¹⁸ and against the Edgbaston and Witney clubs in August⁴¹⁹. Leamington won against Edgbaston and lost the other two but its two leading pairs were generally in contention.

Although he was never to make a name for himself at singles, finding his level in the tier of players below the likes of Ernest Browne, Grinstead and Stewart⁴²⁰, Kay competed enthusiastically on the emerging tennis circuit for more than a decade and added his name to the roll of national champions by winning the All England mixed doubles twice - in 1889 with Lottie Dodd (defeating Ernest Renshaw and Mrs Hillyard in the Challenge Round) and in 1891 with Miss Jackson⁴²¹. After a move to Liverpool in the late eighties, he became tournament secretary of the Northern Tournament and was later captain of the Lancashire tennis team⁴²². As a teenager at Turton FC he was described as "full of athletic fire" and when he first took on

⁴¹¹ Chronicle obituary 12/1/1929 p.6, Harrow register 1911 p.422

⁴¹² Histories of Turton FC: www.turtonhistory.com 2022 (Turton Local History Society), Old Boltonians AFC website 2014 (quotations from WT Dixon's "History of Turton Football Club", 1909) etc.

⁴¹³ Chronicle 12/1/1929 p.6

⁴¹⁴ Field 13/6/1885 p.791, Looker-on 6/6/1885 p.361.

⁴¹⁵ "The Seeds of Lawn Tennis", WG Gibbons, Jones-Sands, 1986, p.1-5 & p.11: a Leamington club was said to have been formed in the summer of 1872 to play Harry Gem & Augurio Perera's version of lawn tennis (dating from c.1860) and in 1874 the club was named Leamington Lawn Rackets Club (Leamington Spa Courier 24/7/1875 p.4). Membership numbers: 1875 - Gibbons 1986 p.5; 1882: Leamington Spa Courier 5/8/1882 p.4.

⁴¹⁶ Field 5/8/1882 p.205

⁴¹⁷ Leamington Courier 24/5/1879 p.4. Dr Tomkins was one of the 4 founder members of the club (Gibbons 1986 p.2). The 6 clubs that entered and played in Oxford were Oxford & Cambridge Universities, Cheam, Carlton/Maida Vale, West Middlesex and Leamington (Field 24/5/1879 p.614).

⁴¹⁸ Leamington Courier 21/6/1879 p.4

⁴¹⁹ Leamington Courier 9/8/1879 p.4.

⁴²⁰ Badminton Library 1903 p.167

⁴²¹ Field 29/6/1889 p.935, Badminton Library 1903 p.439; "Wimbledon of the North", Allaby, Morten 1981, p.17.

⁴²² Tournament secretary: Manchester Courier 19/6/1888 p.7; Allaby 1981 p.17. Obituary in the Cheltenham Chronicle 12/1/1929 p.6. A second son was born to the Kays in Cheltenham in November 1886 and a third in Liverpool in June 1888 (Looker on 20/11/1886 p.762 & 16/6/1888 p.399).

the organisation of Cheltenham's open tournament in 1883, he was judged able, thorough and "extremely popular with the players" – "the right man in the right place"⁴²³; when he took over the Northern in 1888, the Field expressed much the same sentiments and declared that the tournament committee could not have appointed a better secretary⁴²⁴. He attended the first general meeting of the Lawn Tennis Association in April 1888, was appointed to the council, and in 1893 was elected a vice president⁴²⁵.

Reports of the main elements of Cheltenham's winter season of balls at the beginning of 1881 portrayed Kay as well established within polite society. His name adorned the guest lists of four February dances - the New Club Ball, Ladies' Fancy Dress, Ladies' Hunt and the Bachelors' Ball. For the Bachelors' he was marked as one of the eighteen or so single men who gave the entertainment⁴²⁶. The company on each occasion included a good number of potential mixed doubles partners but there was one in particular who would have claimed his attention. The young Beatrice Mardall – aged nineteen - was a decorative presence at all four events and she would have been a flame to the Kay moth⁴²⁷. In fact in all probability they were already engaged as a month or two after the Bachelors' ball they visited Winchester to stay with one of Beatrice's aunts – for them to sleep under the same roof, propriety would have required betrothal at the least⁴²⁸. The two tennis enthusiasts were married in August at All Saints, Cheltenham and some three and a half years later a son John was born to them at their house in Imperial Square⁴²⁹.

The year may have begun well for Cheltenham LTC but for the Renshaws the early months were cast into gloom by family sickness and bereavement. Their mother was taken ill in 1880 near the end of the year – apparently from disease of the liver linked with diabetes – and she died at 19 Courtfield Gardens on 18th February, aged forty-two⁴³⁰. The household of three Renshaws, three Mearas and their servants was plunged into mourning⁴³¹. Aged just twenty, the twins had lost both their parents and their stepfather Edward Meara was left with two young daughters to raise – Ida, the eldest aged nine, and Nellie, just five⁴³². There would have been no question of the twins entering into the spirit of Cheltenham's social season and their names were notably absent from the guest lists of the usual balls. Edward Meara was to survive Ellen by no more than five years and after his death the indications are that Edith and Ernest Renshaw maintained a London home for Ida and Nellie, safeguarding them into adulthood and beyond. From the late nineties they also took accommodation in Waltham St Lawrence near Meara close relatives in Maidenhead⁴³³. William, for his part, from the mid-

⁴²³ Athletic fire at Turton FC: quotation from WT Dixon's "History of Turton Football Club", 1909, Old Boltonians AFC website 2014; Cheltenham tournament: Field 16/6/1883 p.809

⁴²⁴ Field 23/6/1888 p.909

⁴²⁵ At the first general meeting of the LTA JCK was representing Rock Ferry (near Liverpool) (Field 28/4/1888 p.589, London Evening Standard 26/4/1888 p.3.). Vice president: Standard 26/1/1893 p.3 (JCK Liverpool).

⁴²⁶ Looker-on 26/2/1881 p.139 (asterisk indicates "bachelor by whom the entertainment was given...")

⁴²⁷ Looker-on 12/2/1881 p.105 New Club Ball, p.107 Ladies Fancy Dress Ball; Looker-on 26/2/1881 p.137 Ladies Hunt Ball, p.139 Bachelors' Ball.

⁴²⁸ The census of 1881 places JCK and Beatrice in the house of Frances Goodrich Lawson (née Barr) – sister to Mrs Margaret Mardall (marriage registers 27/11/1858 [Margaret], 23/8/1855 [Frances][ACU]). The other occupants apart from the aunt were another niece & 2 servants.

⁴²⁹ Parish register of marriages 25/8/1881 (ACU), Mercury 16/5/1885 p1.

⁴³⁰ Death certificate, Kensington, Brompton, 7/11/2022; the Cause of Death includes the word "uncertain" and refers to Diabetes, Enlarged liver (2 months) & Jaundice (1 month). See also Looker-on 26/2/1881 p.140.

⁴³¹ Census 1881 for Edward S Meara.

⁴³² Census 1881; Chronicle 25/7/1871 p.5 (Ida, 15 July), & 8/6/1875 p.5 (Nellie, 30 May)

⁴³³ Edward died on 15 June 1886 (per Probate 21/9/1886 [ACU]) when Ida was rising 15 and Nellie just 11. London home: census 1891 for ER, Edith & Nellie (143 Cromwell Road), probate for ER 18/12/1899 (143 Cr' Rd), marriage register Ida 27/6/1901 (resident 143 Cr' Rd), census 1911 for Edith & Ida (Waltham St L). Edward's brother Henry was vicar of St Luke's, Maidenhead from 1890 to 1914 (Cambridge Alumni).

eighties onwards seems to have occupied rooms in Piccadilly when his sporting travels left him time for life in London⁴³⁴. The passing of Ellen Renshaw evidently had no lasting impact on the twins' enthusiasm for tennis, fortunately, and when spring came William began his ascent to the pinnacle of the game while Ernest climbed the lower slopes, enhancing his reputation but coming up short against the top singles players⁴³⁵.

As in 1880, spring saw the new recruits of the 1st Royal Lancashire assemble for eighty-three days' training in Lancaster⁴³⁶. Four hundred new recruits arrived to start their training on 2nd May and the intention was that they should link up with the rest of the regiment when they gathered for their usual annual training late in June⁴³⁷. This gave a continuous training period of nearly three months ending on 23rd July and the regular annual training clashed with Wimbledon once again. This time the two Renshaw lieutenants were absent (no doubt with leave) from the list of officers reported in July as having assisted with training⁴³⁸. It seems their military commitments now had little or no adverse impact on their tennis programmes but the continuing clash of dates may have persuaded them the time had come to bid the military farewell. Their friends Alfred Rooke and James Vyvyan had made career moves to regular regiments earlier in 1881 and William elected to retire in August while Ernest chose to leave eight months later in May 1882⁴³⁹.

At the beginning of March, Cheltenham LTC relaunched its open tournament with an advertisement in the Field for a Covered Court Championship to start on 19th April in the Winter Garden, and this was to kick off the English tournament season⁴⁴⁰. As in October 1879 play was limited to two indoor courts – one wood, one asphalt - and the events were the same except that a mixed doubles was added and there was talk of a handicap event if time permitted. Dr Abercrombie was once again in the saddle as tournament secretary but the committee of nine featured only one other survivor from 1879 in the shape of the ever-present Henry Porter⁴⁴¹. The Renshaws were gone, now non-resident. John Agg-Gardner – late MP for Cheltenham - now lent his august presence as President and he was accompanied by his brother Arthur, who was keen enough on the game to play in the match against Bournemouth in 1880 but opted out of tournament play⁴⁴². Predictably only one sex was represented but Major Hill had been added to the team and this gave a voice to spouse Clara. The other notable new member was Percy Hattersley-Smith, who ranked in the top six of the club's players (inclusive of the Renshaws) and was an experienced county cricketer who had played for Gloucestershire for several years. A housemaster at Cheltenham College, he was an energetic promoter of sports in general at the school and of club cricket in the town⁴⁴³.

With five events to be completed and just the two indoor courts available for play, there was no scope for an entry for the men's singles on a par with the London and Dublin events and Cheltenham limited itself to just 12 competitors, some distance behind the Fitzwilliam on 22 in May, Prince's on 20 in June, and Wimbledon on 44 in July. Four of Britain's top ten players were in town for the tournament – the Renshaws, Otway Woodhouse and Ernest Browne – but William Renshaw and Woodhouse stood back from the singles and restricted themselves to the doubles. Other leading players such as Lawford, Richardson, Lubbock and

⁴³⁴ Electoral rolls & directories per ACU 1885 to 1897 etc; census 1901.

⁴³⁵ Ernest lost to Lawford in the Irish, RT Richardson at Wimbledon, and scratched to William at Prince's.

⁴³⁶ Lancaster Gazette 19/3/1881 p.5

⁴³⁷ Lancaster Gazette 4/5/1881 p.2

⁴³⁸ Lancaster Gazette 23/7/1881 p.8

⁴³⁹ Rooke & Vyvyan: email from curator King's Own RR Museum 24 & 27/11/2014; William & Ernest: curator 3/9/2013.

⁴⁴⁰ Field 5/3/1881 p.1 & 26/3/1881 p.410

⁴⁴¹ Field 5/3/1881 p.1, Looker-on 9/4/1881 p.1

⁴⁴² Field 24/4/1880 p.525

⁴⁴³ Obituary, Gloucester Echo 19/1/1918 p.4, CC register 1910 p.39, census 1881.

Alfred Mulholland stayed away, perhaps preferring to keep their powder dry for the grass court season - the wood of the dome court may have been a deterrent for some. Browne's local connections are well known and Woodhouse had close links to the family of General John Mackenzie, a distinguished infantryman who had set up home in Cheltenham after retiring in 1875 (- Otway's brother Alfred was to marry one of the general's daughters in Madras that May and OEW was booked to be best man at the wedding of the general's eldest son in Cheltenham that July)⁴⁴⁴. The obvious favourites for the singles title were the two Ernests and the supporting cast included George Butterworth of Clifton LTC, and for Cheltenham John Kay, Henry Porter and Percy Hattersley-Smith. Porter disposed of Kay in the first round then fell to Browne in the second, while Hattersley-Smith in the first round "had no chance with Mr E. Renshaw who took three sets running"⁴⁴⁵.

Butterworth, a former rackets player at Marlborough College who was a finalist in the public schools tournament of 1877, had made his mark at Wimbledon in 1880 by progressing to a semi-final with Lawford, but had then lost in straight sets⁴⁴⁶. He ran up against Browne in the first round at Cheltenham and came off worst 2-6, 6-2, 2-6, 1-6 – a creditable win for the Fitzwilliam player. By luck or good judgment, Renshaw and Browne were at opposite ends of the draw and the two Old Cheltonians duly met in the final for "a capital struggle". Ernest prevailed 6-2, 3-6, 6-1, 6-5 but in the fourth set Browne twice had advantage point in the deciding game and the set could have gone the other way⁴⁴⁷. At the Fitzwilliam the previous year Browne had won through to the final of the All Comers, easily defeating Alfred Mulholland in the third round after the latter had comfortably seen off Ernest in the second⁴⁴⁸. His scalp would have been a prized trophy for the twin, although it was taken on the home surface of wood, and perhaps the most important aspect was that in a tight final set Ernest made it across the finishing line to secure his first singles title.

In contrast to the singles event, Cheltenham's second open men's doubles was at least as strong as the first but there was a shortage of established club pairs and several pairings had an improvised feel to them. The Fitzwilliam's Browne teamed up with Cheltenham's Hattersley-Smith (fellow cricketers long known to each other as pupil and master at the College); Woodhouse of the West Middlesex was partnered by Henry Goodeve of Limerick LTC (one of England's best paired with a tournament journeyman); and Butterworth of Clifton played with George Harrison of Oxford University (- Harrison was a cricket dark blue in 1880 and 1881 but unknown as a tennis match player)⁴⁴⁹. Cheltenham's newcomer John Kay was well matched with Henry Porter but after a bye in the first round they lost easily to the Renshaws in the second⁴⁵⁰. Nine pairs entered including representatives from seven different clubs and of the eighteen players just five were from Cheltenham LTC. The Renshaws had played together in several tournaments and by the standards of those early days were a well-established pair. Although they had lost to Lawford & Mulholland in the second round of the Irish in 1880, they were holders of the Oxford All England title and were poised to retain their crown, then claim their first Fitzwilliam title⁴⁵¹. Ranged against them at Cheltenham were some

⁴⁴⁴ Mackenzie: obituary *Army & Navy Gazette* 11/8/1894 p.664, census 1881, probate 1894 (ACU). July wedding: *Looker-on* 23/7/1881 p.472 & 474 (3 Woodhouses were at the wedding breakfast), marriage register entry (ACU); May wedding: *Chronicle* 7/6/1881 p.5.

⁴⁴⁵ *Field* 23/4/1881 p.562

⁴⁴⁶ *Marlborough register* 1904; Todd 1979 p.222; *Roll of Champions, public schools*. In 1882, GMB was to claim the West of England singles title in Bath (*Field* 3/6/1882 p.742).

⁴⁴⁷ *Field* 23/4/1881 p.562

⁴⁴⁸ *Field* 29/5/1880 p.684

⁴⁴⁹ *Field* 23/4/1881 p.562. Goodeve: Major Goodeve, RA (*Field* 27/8/1881 p.307 & 12/8/1882 p.240, *Naval & Military Gazette* 1/1/1879 p.16 etc); Harrison: *Malvern College register* 1904 p.43, *Wisden* obituary 1900 etc.

⁴⁵⁰ *Field* 23/4/1881 p.562, *Looker-on* 23/4/1881 p.265

⁴⁵¹ *Field* 28/5/1881 p.733

strong individuals but no partnerships of note and in a canter to the title the twins seem to have encountered little by way of serious opposition, even in the final against Butterworth & Harrison. The title game was hailed as “a close contest” by the Looker-on but the Field begged to differ and labelled the straight sets win an “easy victory” for the Cheltenham pair – the score of 6-0, 6-3, 6-4 would support that view⁴⁵². As if recognising the missed opportunity in the pairings, the club then staged an exhibition match of the four cracks: the Renshaws versus Browne & Woodhouse, best of seven sets with no advantage sets. This was a fight between heavyweights – the final that should have been - and a memorable struggle ensued. Given that Browne and Woodhouse were unfamiliar partners, it is no surprise that the Renshaws won the first two sets comfortably but the outsiders settled down together and fought back to win the next three sets, 6-5, 6-5, 6-2. The brothers then rallied, reasserted themselves and closed out the match 6-2, 6-3, winning by four sets to three⁴⁵³.

There was a strong entry for the tournament’s new event, the open mixed doubles. Ten pairs signed up and with the exception of Ernest Renshaw, the best players of both sexes threw their hats into the ring⁴⁵⁴. William played with Marian Bradley and the other leading home club pairs were Henry Porter & Florence Mardall and John Kay & Mary Abercrombie. Kay’s fiancée Beatrice Mardall was left on the sidelines while Ella Ramsay succumbed to the charms of a visitor from London and paired up with Otway Woodhouse⁴⁵⁵. Ireland fielded a strong pair in Browne of the Fitzwilliam & “Miss B. Williams, Kilkenny LTC” and Butterworth of Clifton played with one of his sisters (- probably the youngest, Frances aged twenty-one and based in the family home in Deerhurst, near Tewkesbury)⁴⁵⁶. The Field referred to Browne’s partner throughout its reports as Miss Williams but the Looker-on begged to differ and named her “Miss Langrish” of the Fitzwilliam. In this instance, judgment falls in favour of the Cheltenham journal, though why the Field should be fed an alias is hard to fathom (shyness of national coverage possibly)⁴⁵⁷. “Miss Williams” was most likely May Langrishe, who played in the Fitzwilliam tournaments of 1879 and 1880 and partnered Browne in the 1880 mixed doubles⁴⁵⁸.

The leading males all survived the first round, but Woodhouse and Butterworth went out in the second. A third round encounter between Renshaw & Bradley and Browne & Langrishe featured the two strongest pairs and would have been the ideal final. The Field judged it a close contest and commented that the English pair fell short of their potential: “Miss Bradley and Mr W. Renshaw did not show the same form as in the preceding rounds, though at one time it looked as though they would win the second set” – they lost 3-6, 5-6⁴⁵⁹. Porter & Mardall took on the Irish in the final and went down predictably but with dignity, 5-6, 3-6. Henry Porter must have been well pleased to win through against two good pairs to make the final⁴⁶⁰.

The Ladies singles event was in many ways a replica of 1879 and the home team dominated once again. Total entries were down slightly at fourteen from six different clubs and

⁴⁵² Field 30/4/1881 p.595, Looker-on 30/4/1881 p280

⁴⁵³ Field 30/4/1881 p.595. The Renshaw’s full winning score was 6-2, 6-0, 5-6, 5-6, 2-6, 6-2, 6-3.

⁴⁵⁴ Field 23/4/1881 p.562 & 30/4/1881 p.595

⁴⁵⁵ Clara Hill played with Harrison & Fanny Morris with WL Rocke, a Sandhurst cadet and former Cheltenham College day boy (CC register 1910 p.445).

⁴⁵⁶ Censuses for family of George Butterworth senior, vicar of Deerhurst, 1861 & 1881, marriage of Frances 1884, Examiner 20/2/1884 p.5

⁴⁵⁷ Looker-on 23/4/1881 p.265 & 266, 30/4/1881 p.280.

⁴⁵⁸ Field 29/5/1880 p.684. In its report of the tournament of 30/4/1881 p.595, the Field states that Browne and Williams “have both played in the Dublin tournaments”: there is no mention of a Miss Williams in the Fitzwilliam reports of 1879 & 1880 (or indeed in any Field reports of Irish tournaments for the years 1879 - 1881).

⁴⁵⁹ Field 30/4/1881 p.595

⁴⁶⁰ Hill & Harrison and the Butterworths - Field 30/4/1881 p.595 & Looker-on 30/4/1881 p.266

only Cheltenham players survived into the second round⁴⁶¹. The strongest outsider was probably the putative May Langrishe – who won the singles title at the Irish championships in 1879 but was a first round loser the following year - and she went down to Mary Abercrombie 1-6, 4-6, making “a good struggle” of the second set⁴⁶². Thereafter, Abercrombie, Florence Mardall and Bradley again won through to the semi-finals while Ella Ramsay claimed the fourth place in the absence of Ellen Maltby. Bradley then once again conquered Abercrombie and Mardall clinched the easier match against Ramsay to produce a repeat of the 1879 final. This time though roles were reversed and Bradley came out on top, dropping the first set 3-6 but cruising through the next two sets 6-2, 6-2: time after time she “scored by her well-delivered overhand service” and once she identified her opponent’s “weak spot (the far corner of the right-hand court)”, she exploited it with strokes of great precision⁴⁶³.

The entry for the ladies doubles was up from eight pairs in 1879 to nine in 1881 but, as before, there were no strong visiting pairs and the locals were the only players in contention. The principal contenders were Abercrombie & Bradley (winners in 1879), Hill & Ramsay, and Florence Mardall & Fanny Morris. Abercrombie & Bradley knocked out Mardall & Morris in the second round in a close contest, two sets to one, then disposed of Hill & Ramsay in the final (5-6, 6-2, 6-2) to retain their title⁴⁶⁴. The Field praised the losing finalists for their fighting spirit in the first set but judged them outclassed in the final two - “decidedly over-matched”; their opponents had “the great advantage of being able to serve overhand, whilst their placing was remarkably good”. The Looker-on reported a large attendance of spectators on the Friday and - perhaps surprisingly – that the ladies’ matches on the indoor rink proved a bigger draw than men’s doubles featuring the Renshaws. The rink “was thronged from end to end during the afternoon” for two well contested ladies’ doubles⁴⁶⁵.

The Field pronounced the tournament a success in every way and Cheltenham’s Chronicle reported that during tournament week the Winter Gardens had been crowded throughout each day by spectators and participants and “had presented somewhat the appearance of old... on the whole the tournament seems to have been a great and well deserved success”⁴⁶⁶. Despite the cost of the indoor venue, the event was also a financial success and in presenting the prizes the Vice-President of the club, Spencer Lynne, declared that the results would probably enable the committee to stage a similar event in the autumn; he was a cautious man but it is safe to say that if he had thought otherwise he would quickly have become Ex-Vice-President⁴⁶⁷.

[Abercrombie & Bradley](#)

Mary Abercrombie and Marian Bradley have a place in history as the winners of Britain’s first open ladies doubles tournament in 1879. The Cheltenham event was advertised nationally in the Field and with eight pairs made up from players from five different English clubs, it bears comparison with the men’s first “All England” doubles competition of May 1879 in Oxford, which featured ten pairs from six different English clubs (including five Oxford pairs)⁴⁶⁸. Cheltenham’s field was not as broad as Oxford’s but arguably it would have encompassed just as high a proportion of the leading match players of the time.

⁴⁶¹ Field 23/4/1881 p.562

⁴⁶² May Langrishe: Field 14/6/1879 p.711 & 5/6/1880 p.713.

⁴⁶³ Field 23/4/1881 p.562

⁴⁶⁴ Field 23/4/1881 p.562

⁴⁶⁵ Looker-on 23/4/1881 p.265

⁴⁶⁶ Field 30/4/1881 p.595, Chronicle 26/4/1881 p.4

⁴⁶⁷ Looker-on 30/4/1881 p.280

⁴⁶⁸ Advertisement: Field 13/9/1879 p.1 & see 14/6/1879 p.710 for Dr A’s inquiry addressed to clubs in general.

Mary and Marian were each other's preferred partners for ladies doubles and they played as a pair from the time of Cheltenham's first open tournament in 1879 until they retired from competitive play in the spring of 1883. After they won the April 1881 doubles, the Field recorded that they had never been defeated as a pair, and the record would have embraced inter-club matches as well as tournaments⁴⁶⁹. Though there was an age gap between them of seven years – Mary being the youngest at twenty-one in 1881 – they had both grown up in Cheltenham, had interests in common beyond their favoured sport, and were singletons in a close-knit social group. They were their club's leading female doubles players and also numbered amongst the best at singles. Marian was William Renshaw's first choice partner in competition mixed doubles from 1878 until late 1882, while Mary, for her part, partnered William in the Irish Championships of 1881 in Marian's absence and collected the mixed title⁴⁷⁰.

William's preference in partners may have had more to it than just compatibility on the tennis court. Writing in the Times in 1939, Marian's half-nephew Arthur Bradley gave this youthful reminiscence of his aunt in her Cheltenham days⁴⁷¹:

"I have the most vivid recollection of Marian....when she was a young girl in her early teens, slightly my junior. She was not only extremely pretty, but the most graceful creature I ever saw. Her cricket at 14 years was not that of the average girl of that day, which was generally hopeless, but she handled her bat like a well-taught public school boy, cut, drove, and hit to leg in admirable style. There were no girl cricketers, as now, in those days. Some aged Cheltonians recalled to me the other day her batting rather later at a pitch in her father's garden at Cheltenham, when her brother Andrew's friends in the college XI used to go and bowl at her. Lawn tennis was then in the far future....."⁴⁷²

If Arthur found her so attractive, then so might William but she was a young woman with a formidable intellect and considerable artistic talents, and the twins would have been too young for her in both mind and body. Her father, absentee vicar of Glasbury near Hay-on-Wye, demonstrated a belief in the education of women by becoming a shareholder in Cheltenham Ladies College in its earliest days (by 1856) and it seems possible that Marian was at least partly educated there⁴⁷³. She contributed a lengthy literary essay to the College magazine in 1880 and a poem in 1881, and both would have been subject to the eagle-eyed scrutiny of Dorothea Beale, editor and school principal⁴⁷⁴. Apart from her sports activities she was heavily involved in local charity work⁴⁷⁵, pursued an interest in painting at Cheltenham's Fine Art Society in company with Mary⁴⁷⁶, acted in local amateur dramatics⁴⁷⁷, wrote the libretto for an

⁴⁶⁹ Field 30/4/1881 p.595, & see 24/9/1881 p.462 for their first defeat after 3 or so years.

⁴⁷⁰ Reported tournaments in which Marian partnered William: 1878 - December, Cheltenham club mixed; 1879 - October, Cheltenham open, exhibition match against Gould & Abercrombie; 1881 - April, Cheltenham open; 1881 - December, Cheltenham club mixed; 1882 - May, Irish Championships, Dublin.

⁴⁷¹ Times 20/4/1939 p.19. Arthur, an author, was the son of George Granville Bradley, Marian's half-brother; GGB was headmaster of Marlborough College 1858 – 1870 and later Dean of Westminster (Cambridge Alumni 2015 for AGB [ACU], Marlborough register 1905 p.157 for AGB).

⁴⁷² Andrew Bradley was two years older than Marian and played in the Cheltenham College cricket XI in 1869 at the same time as Arthur Myers – both day boys (CC register 1910 p.277 & 261).

⁴⁷³ Looker-on 16/2/1856 p.158 & p.161 – Rev Charles Bradley was a proprietor at the second Ladies College AGM. The College archives have no record of Marian's attendance but records for those early days are patchy. See Dictionary of National Biography for Charles Bradley (1789 – 1871) p.1073/4.

⁴⁷⁴ Email from Ladies College archivist 16/2/2023. The essay, headed "Tree Life", was over 5,000 words long and quoted or referred to Ruskin, Homer, Wordsworth, Mrs Browning, Tennyson, Lowell, Dante & Keats.

⁴⁷⁵ Examiner 7/11/1883 p.8

⁴⁷⁶ Looker-on 11/2/1882 p.88

amateur operetta performed in Cheltenham in 1880⁴⁷⁸, and in 1882 had a long short story – “Pentock” - serialised in Blackwood’s Magazine⁴⁷⁹. The heroine of Pentock was the daughter of an elderly Cornish fisherman, the prettiest lass in all the village blessed with “the unusual beauty of a lithe active figure”, who had been “bred up hardy with the boys”. She was the apple of her father’s eye and he had taught her to row, swim (to something like Olympic standard judging by her exploits in the story), and manage the family’s fishing boat. When he is struck down by rheumatism she mans the boat with her brother and is readily accepted by the men of the fishing fleet, who believe she brings good luck and who enjoy her snatches of song echoing along the water when her spirits are raised. The author’s sentiments on a woman’s place are crystal clear, as are her views on the importance of education, and there were perhaps some tongue-in-cheek parallels with her own upbringing and profile.

Marian was married in Cheltenham in 1883 and in reporting on the ceremony, the Looker-on noted the presence of a large congregation and attributed it to the fact that she had “long moved in the most fashionable circles of Cheltenham Society, wherein her amiable disposition and varied accomplishments had rendered her an especial favourite”⁴⁸⁰. If she had been of the opposite sex, she would have been called a Renaissance man. Many years later in 1939 when she died in Kensington at the ripe old age of eighty-five, her death was marked by a Times obituary, and although it was prompted primarily by what the Times referred to as her interesting link with the past through a family eminent during the last century for their services to the Church, education and literature, she was acknowledged as “a woman of remarkable culture and literary judgment” and the newspaper harked back to her prowess on the tennis court in her youth:

“.....60 years ago she was a first-class lawn tennis player. Living in Cheltenham, she had the opportunity to practise with the famous brothers Renshaw. There was no ladies’ singles competition until 1884, but before that date she was the champion’s partner in mixed doubles at many tournaments”⁴⁸¹.

The Times was well informed.

Like Marian, Mary had a father with a strong belief in formal education and she too had brothers who were day boys at Cheltenham College, four in her case against Marian’s two⁴⁸². John, the most cerebral of her brothers, was much the same age as Marian’s brother Andrew and they were contemporaries at the school from 1864 to 1868 (- while Andrew wielded a bat in the College cricket eleven, John shouldered a rifle for the school shooting team). Dr Abercrombie’s belief in proper schooling was not restricted to his sons and Mary’s higher education was evidently placed in the hands of a tutor based some twenty miles north of Cheltenham. At the age of sixteen Mary and several fellow girl pupils of a Quinton teacher sat the Cambridge University Local Examinations at a centre in Malvern and she passed with

⁴⁷⁷ Looker-on 25/2/1882 p.121. Miss Bradley exhibited “an amount of histrionic talent rarely met with in amateurs”.

⁴⁷⁸ Looker-on 4/12/1880 p.784 – Edgar Manning was in the cast.

⁴⁷⁹ Tales from Blackwood, Third Series, Vol. III, Pentock by Miss Marian Bradley (Magazine, February – March 1882) [online October 2014]. Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals, 1824 to 1900, Vol 5 p.96: “Bibliographies of Contributors....Bradley, Marian, sister of Andrew Cecil Bradley, Pentock, Bk 5711-5716 (2), Feb-Mar82”. References: Illustrated London News 11/2/1882 p.138, Galloway Gazette 11/2/1882 p.4 (“a charming prose idyll”) etc.

⁴⁸⁰ Looker-on 10/11/1883 p.713

⁴⁸¹ Times 17/4/1939 p.19 for Mrs Ernest De Glehn

⁴⁸² CC register 1910: Abercrombies - p.242 (Alexander), 264 (John), 305 (Francis & George); Bradleys - p.277 (Andrew) & 191 (Francis).

Class III honours⁴⁸³. The exams were stringent. Of 16 “senior” girls who sat the papers in Malvern, 6 failed, 7 “Satisfied examiners” and 3 passed with honours⁴⁸⁴. Just over half of her group were from Malvern schools and tutors. Of 14 senior boys also examined at the centre 4 failed, 3 satisfied examiners and 7 passed with honours (3 Class I, 2 Class II and 2 Class III); nearly all of the boys were from grammar schools in the area and can be expected to have been particularly well prepared.

Finished with school, Mary took to the pursuit of her interests and social life, aided and abetted by her father. Apart from taking upon himself the development of Cheltenham LTC, the doctor opened doors into society for his family, participating wholeheartedly in social events and organising private balls in 1880 (over 150 guests at the Assembly Rooms) and 1882 (over 200 guests at the Rotunda)⁴⁸⁵. In this he was acting for the benefit of his wider family as he had three Abercrombie nieces living locally and eligible for marriage: Wilhelmina (Minnie), Gertrude and Jane, orphaned daughters of his brother Alexander. Their ages ranged from nineteen to twenty-six in 1881 and they lived with his aged mother in Charlton Kings⁴⁸⁶. If he was hoping that his daughter would marry, and marry well, he was to be disappointed as while all three nieces eventually found partners, Mary avoided domestic entanglement and over a period of years turned a fine art hobby into a professional occupation. In May 1880, the Cheltenham Fine Art Society put on its second exhibition at 385 the High Street, beside the Plough Hotel, and the display included pictures by Mary and other local members and associates, most of them priced up for sale⁴⁸⁷. Reporting on the oil paintings on view, the Examiner named four artists who provided works of particular note (“two gems by Claude Lorraine”) and placed Mary amongst a short list of others who had provided “copies of merit”⁴⁸⁸; she was to improve on that in the future. In 1881 she was attending classes at the Cheltenham School of Art⁴⁸⁹ and in its review of the Fine Art Society’s exhibition for the year, the Looker-on admired the “fidelity of *Sambo* by Miss Abercrombie” (which sounds like a portrait) and considered that “*The Winning Chariot* by Miss Abercrombie, with some half-a-dozen others, may fairly challenge even fastidious criticism”⁴⁹⁰. In February 1882 she again exhibited with the Society and the Examiner drew attention to her progress: “*Nasturtiums* (Miss Abercrombie) is far superior to anything we have before seen from her pencil”⁴⁹¹. She went on to be amongst local prize-winners twice in the year at the School of Art but then in 1883 her studies were interrupted by deaths in the family and a move to London⁴⁹². Lost to Cheltenham, she must have received further tuition in London as by early 1885 she had secured a studentship at the Royal Academy on the basis of a drawing of the Venus de Milo. This drawing was proudly exhibited by her home town’s school of art in its March 1885 exhibition and this time she was a star of the show. The Looker-on praised her “exquisitely finished

⁴⁸³ Worcester Chronicle 10/3/1877 p.7: Quinton teacher: Mary’s school was labelled “Private, Quinton” & it is possible she was tutored by a cleric based in the parish of Quinton, Glos (near Evesham). Miss EC Kembal, a fellow “Quinton” pupil, was a resident of Cradley, a few miles from Malvern; another, ES Kendrick, was from Coddington near Malvern (Malvern Advertiser 10/3/1877 p.5). See also Chronicle 13/3/1877 p.5.

⁴⁸⁴ Worcester Chronicle 10/3/1877 p.7

⁴⁸⁵ Looker-on 31/1/1880 p.71, 4/2/1882 p.71

⁴⁸⁶ Censuses for Wilhelmina Abercrombie (b.1890) 1861, 1871, 1881 (ACU); Mercury 17/2/1877 p.4, Looker-on 27/1/1883 p.58, & other newspaper refs etc. His brother Alexander died in 1873 and Jane, his first wife, had died in 1862. In 1881, Minnie was 26, Gertrude 20, and Jane 18 (census 1881 etc).

⁴⁸⁷ Chronicle 11/5/1880 p.4

⁴⁸⁸ Examiner 12/5/1880 p.4

⁴⁸⁹ Examiner 1/3/1882 p.2 – MCA was a “local” prize-winner at the school on 25/2/1882.

⁴⁹⁰ Looker-on 19/3/1881 p.184

⁴⁹¹ Examiner 8/2/1882 p.4

⁴⁹² Chronicle 28/2/1882 p.5 (ref to “Miss C Abercrombie”) & 19/12/1882 p.5 (ref to “Mary Abercrombie”)

study....the gem of the Collection”⁴⁹³; the Examiner considered the picture “beautifully executed”, the result of the school’s good teaching, and congratulated Mary on her studentship⁴⁹⁴; further afield the Gloucester Citizen labelled the drawing “cleverly executed” and related how it had won Mary her place at the Royal Academy schools⁴⁹⁵. Two years later the art student was awarded a second silver medal for painting by the Academy and in the years that followed she progressed to be a commissioned artist, exhibiting in London, Birmingham and Liverpool and with both the Society of Portrait Painters and the Royal Institute of Painters in Watercolours⁴⁹⁶. She became an accomplished professional artist⁴⁹⁷.

Marian and Mary were clever, disciplined, competitive and creative. Their style of play would have been original and probably influenced by the leading men of their club in the formative years but the influence could have been two-way. Just as Bradley would have learnt from William Renshaw, so might her own ideas have found their way into William’s game, heresy as that might seem. Sadly the commentaries of the time tell us little about how they played. The Field reports that by April 1881 both Marian and Mary were serving “overhand” and in this they were up-to-the-moment as it was only in 1881 that over-arm serves came into general use in men’s match play⁴⁹⁸. The implication of the Field report is that their opponents were still serving underarm and it is noteworthy that as late as 1890 Lottie Dod (Wimbledon champion 1887 & 1888 etc) saw fit to caution that only “exceptionally good” ladies should serve over-arm as for most of their sex it was “a great waste of strength”⁴⁹⁹. The strength of Marian’s serve was remarked upon as early as 1879 in the Cheltenham open and the Field described her then as “the most brilliant player” amongst the ladies in the singles, but one who lost in the final to a player (Florence Mardall) who was “more certain in her returns” and had greater stamina, maintaining consistently good play in the deciding fifth set when Marian tired and slipped into error⁵⁰⁰. In April 1881 when Marian turned the tables on Florence in Cheltenham playing the best of three sets, the Field commented on the intelligence of her play, the accuracy of her placing, “her fine backhand strokes”, the quality of her retrieving and the damage inflicted by her service⁵⁰¹. The impression is of a thoughtful, enterprising player who played attacking tennis but was more prone to error than some of her rivals (more Renshaw than Hartley, unsurprisingly). In those first years, Mary was less successful at singles – she lost to Marian consistently in the open tournaments - and less was written about her. Of volleying, little was said about the two. For the ladies’ doubles in 1879 the Field observed that “wisely” “the ladies did not attempt volleying at the net”, and it was not until the Irish in June 1882 that the journal made a comment of any sort on their use of the volley, and

⁴⁹³ Looker-on 28/3/1885 p.200/1

⁴⁹⁴ Examiner 1/4/1885 p.8

⁴⁹⁵ Gloucester Citizen 27/3/1885 p.4 (Miss MC Abercrombie)

⁴⁹⁶ Silver medal: Illustrated London News 17/12/1887 p.708; “first silver medal” would be a higher award. Exhibiting: Society of Portrait Painters – Daily Telegraph 30/6/1892 p.2, Queen 2/7/1892 p.369; Royal Institute of Painters in Water Colours – John Bull 2/5/1891 p.283, Times 14/3/1891. Commissioned: “Dictionary of Portrait Painters in Britain up to 1920”, pub. Antique Collectors Club 1997, p.65 (MCA entry); artists had to have been commissioned. Exhibited in Birmingham, Liverpool & London: per CO, Group Head of Pictures, Bonhams of London, email 22/6/2015.

⁴⁹⁷ There are no readily available pictures or photos of Abercrombie & Bradley and while we have one comment from a contemporary on Marian’s physical appearance, all we have for Mary are details from a passenger manifest of 25/5/1907 for a sailing from Southampton to New York when she was 47: 5 feet 6 inches in height, fair complexion, grey hair, brown eyes (ACU).

⁴⁹⁸ Field 23/4/1881 p.562 & Badminton Library 1903 p.289 (general use)

⁴⁹⁹ Badminton Library 1903 p.313: “In the majority of cases [ladies] expend a good deal of strength without making the service more difficult than the ordinary under-hand”. Dod’s advice to women also included the nugget that “Ladies should learn to run, and run their hardest, too, not merely stride” (p.311).

⁵⁰⁰ Field 11/10/1879 p.493. Mardall won 6-5, 6-4, 3-6, 5-6, 6-3.

⁵⁰¹ Field 23/4/1881 p.562

then it was a broad generalisation. A ladies singles event dominated by Marian and Mary attracted a schoolmasterly report of mild encouragement - "a distinct improvement both in steadiness of return and severity of stroke" could be observed, and "we are glad to notice the increased attention paid to placing and volleying"⁵⁰². A report on the Field's commentaries might say "more detail needed - room for improvement". By contrast Freeman's Journal (Dublin) could enthuse about Miss Perry's "fine volleying" in one set when reporting the mixed final of Browne & Perry versus Renshaw & Bradley, but it was a win for Ireland and the journal was in partisan mood⁵⁰³.

The 1881 main tournament season

Writing in 1890 for the Badminton Library volume on lawn tennis, Spencer Gore described 1881 as the year of change for lawn tennis, the year when the tournament game came of age⁵⁰⁴. Gore was well informed on the subject. An Old Harrovian, who had played rackets for his school and captained the cricket team, he won the first All England Championships in 1877 then played again in 1878, losing in the challenge round⁵⁰⁵. He was a member of the All England Club and although he competed in no further reported open tournaments after 1878, he represented the club in a match against Oxford University in 1879, playing alongside the Marshalls, Erskine and Myers, and was a steward at the championships for every year from 1879 to 1887 apart from 1884⁵⁰⁶. In 1880 he acted as linesman for the challenge round between Hartley and Lawford and witnessed at first hand what was to be the last hurrah of the old school as Hartley's "certainty of return" won him the blue riband for a second year⁵⁰⁷. Gore's knowledge of the tournament game in 1881 was up to the minute and he offered his insights as part of a reminiscence of the first fifteen years of lawn tennis in the Badminton volume.

In Gore's opinion, one of the main causes of improvement in 1881 was simply the increase in the number of tournaments over the years. Players were devoting more time to formal competition and match play and becoming accustomed to playing in public, so losing their nervousness in open competition and doing full justice to themselves. The most promising competitors were confronting each other more frequently, learning from each other and absorbing new ideas. The style of tennis changed:

"...it soon became apparent that the very 'safe' style must give way to the more slashing style of the present day. The final blow to the 'pat-ball' game was given by the brothers Renshaw when they discovered that they could stand back at the service-line, and, while covering the whole court, could volley with almost the same severity and precision as when close to the net. Their antagonists soon found out that it was perfectly useless to hit a ball gently to them when they were standing in this position. The ball must be hit hard, and in order to hit it hard enough it must be hit close to the top of the net, or it would go out of court. But with this hard and low hitting there is necessarily a greater risk of sending the

⁵⁰² Field 18/10/1879 p.536 (Cheltenham), 3/6/1882 p.741 (Dublin)

⁵⁰³ Freeman's Jnl 29/5/1882 p.7

⁵⁰⁴ Badminton Library 1903 p.285 to 290, part of Chapter XIV "A reminiscence of fifteen years of lawn tennis"

⁵⁰⁵ Harrow register 1911 p.366, Todd 1979 p.219 & p.220.

⁵⁰⁶ Match: Field 5/7/1879 p.19. Steward: Field reports of Championships 1879 to 1890, first pages. SWG was also a member of the MCC, like Julian Marshall and the Heathcote brothers (per MCC register of members 1877); he was a surveyor and land agent by profession (Census 1881, Harrow register etc).

⁵⁰⁷ Sportsman 16/7/1880 p.3. Charles Heathcote observed: "In this match...the great length of the rests elicited an admiration not altogether unalloyed by weariness..."(Badminton Library 1903 p.153)

ball into the net; and no sooner did this become the prevailing style than the rests became shorter and the play proportionately faster and more brilliant".⁵⁰⁸

Gore highlights the role of the Renshaws in taking the game forward and driving the development of stroke-play that was distinct from that of rackets and real tennis, forcing the abandonment of strokes of cut and twist which slowed the ball at the bounce. Pace was now a priority and that came best from a flat racket impact. For the serve, pace was best generated by an "over-head" action and in Gore's view it was in 1881 that the over-arm service came into general use in match play⁵⁰⁹. The brothers were the great innovators and William's tactic of volleying from the service line attracted a wide following as he established himself as the nation's leading player – success bred imitation. In 1881 the net was 4ft at the posts and 3ft at the centre, topspin had yet to be developed, and passing shots down the line were played more in hope than expectation⁵¹⁰. The Renshaw style was to dominate in singles for several years before baseline play staged a comeback and the all-court game was developed - then the Renshaws in their turn had to adapt, but adapt they did.

As the open tournament fixture list expanded, the members of Cheltenham LTC spread their wings and lent their support to a greatly increased number of outside tournaments. The programme of the Renshaws was much the same as in 1880 - the Oxford Doubles, the Irish Championships, Prince's and the All England Championships - but they added handicaps in London (Prince's), Waterford and Limerick. Other club members ventured outside the local boundaries for the first time. Mary Abercrombie played at Brighton (along with Percy Hattersley-Smith) and at the Irish Championships in Dublin. John Kay and Henry Porter competed in the Oxford Doubles and the inaugural West of England tournament in Bath before Henry ventured north on a scouting expedition to the Liverpool Cricket Club and Northern tournaments; then returned south for his one and only appearance at Wimbledon. And Clara Hill, Florence Mardall and Beatrice Mardall all played in the West of England at Bath. The club was represented by ten players at different times at some eleven outside tournaments – a record probably unrivalled at the time:-

⁵⁰⁸ Badminton Library 1903 p.285/6

⁵⁰⁹ Badminton Library 1903 p.289

⁵¹⁰ As part of a response to what was perceived to be the excessive dominance of volleying, in 1882 the net was lowered at the posts by 6ins to 3ft 6ins (Field 20/5/1882 p.678). In the years after 1882, Herbert Lawford developed the weaponry of the baseline game, including topspin, and he won the All-Comers at Wimbledon 4 years running from 1884, supplanting William Renshaw as Champion in 1887.

Cheltenham players in outside tournaments, 1881⁵¹¹

<u>Date</u>	<u>Tournament</u>	<u>Event</u>	<u>Cheltenham LTC competitors</u> <i>(Italics & blue print for non-CLTC partners)</i>
25-Apr (Mon)	Brighton, Hove rink (not the county tournament)	Men's singles Women's singles Mixed doubles	P Hattersley-Smith (handicap event) M Abercrombie P Hattersley-Smith & M Abercrombie
10-May (Tues)	All England doubles (Oxford)	Men's doubles	W & E Renshaw (for Maida Vale) JC Kay & HB Porter (for CLTC)
23-May (Mon)	Irish Championships (Dublin)	Men's singles Men's doubles Mixed doubles	W and E Renshaw W & E Renshaw W Renshaw & M Abercrombie
01-Jun (Weds)	West of England (1 st year) (Bath)	Men's singles Women's singles Mixed doubles	JC Kay, HB Porter, RL Townsend ⁵¹² C Hill, F Mardall JC Kay & B Mardall, HBP & F Mardall, C Hill & <i>EK Stow (of Clifton LTC)</i>
04-Jun (Sat)	Prince's club (2 nd year) (London)	Men's singles	W and E Renshaw
13-Jun (Mon)	Prince's open handicap (London)	Men's singles	W and E Renshaw
16-Jun (Thurs)	Liverpool cricket club (1 st year)	Men's singles	"Mr H "Blane" (of CLTC, so HB Porter) ⁵¹³
18-Jun (Sat)	Northern (2 nd year) (Manchester)	Men's singles	"Mr H "Blane" (of CLTC, so HB Porter)
02-Jul (Sat)	All England Championships (Wimbledon)	Men's singles	W and E Renshaw, HB Porter
02-Aug (Tues)	Waterford open handicap	Men's doubles Mixed doubles	WR & <i>HR Langrishe</i> , ER & <i>Capt Glascott</i> WR & <i>B Langrishe</i> , ER & <i>M Langrishe</i>
16-Aug (Tues)	Limerick open handicap	Men's singles Men's doubles	W Renshaw W Renshaw & <i>HR Langrishe</i>

In May 1881, William launched his campaign to capture all the major men's titles for the year – from Oxford to Dublin to London – and fittingly it was to end early in July at the fount of lawn tennis in Wimbledon. It was to be a triumphal progress.

The Oxford Doubles of 1881 was an even more modest affair than in 1880 and it was lent standing only by the presence of the Renshaws. In its third year eight pairs entered from just five clubs – four if the cloak of Maida Vale was stripped from the Renshaws – and Oxford, Cambridge, West Middlesex and Cheltenham LTC formed rather less than a quorum for what purported to be a national club competition. The All England Club, Prince's and the Fitzwilliam again stayed away and most of the top players were notable for their absence – Hartley, Lawford, Richardson, Mulholland, Browne, Lubbock, Woodhouse⁵¹⁴. Henry Porter and John

⁵¹¹ Table sourced from Field reports of the tournaments

⁵¹² Robert Lawrence Townsend, aged 43 (census 1881). Not one of Cheltenham LTC's leading lights - Clara Hill seems to have preferred to play in the mixed with a Clifton LTC member.

⁵¹³ Manchester Times 18/6/1881 p.6: in a report of the draw, a first round match is described as "J.H. Brand against Henry Blane". The Field (18/6/1881 p.847) referred to him as "Mr H. 'Blane', Cheltenham LTC". Blane was HBP's second name – why he should use an alias is anyone's guess.

⁵¹⁴ All these players apart from Hartley and Lubbock entered the 1881 Fitzwilliam men's doubles, which was won by the Renshaws (Field 28/5/1881 p.732/3). Lubbock played for Prince's (& had a scratch handicap in Prince's June tournament along with Lawford & William Renshaw - Ernest R was on 2 bisques [Field 18/6/1881 p.847]).

Kay made a first appearance, repeating their April Cheltenham partnership, but lost in the first round to the West Middlesex pairing of C.J. Cole and Donald Stewart after a good tussle⁵¹⁵. Porter mustered “some steady play”, Kay showed impressive effort – he “played hard to avoid defeat” – and they went down in four sets pride intact 6-2, 1-6, 1-6, 4-6⁵¹⁶. The Renshaws had an easy run to the final where “playing in the very best form” they trounced the surviving Oxford pair 6-0, 6-0, 6-4⁵¹⁷.

The Irish Championships came next and the men’s challenge rounds were very much a Renshaw/Lawford affair. William Renshaw held the singles title and awaited the challenge of the winner of the All Comers, which turned out to be Herbert Lawford, while Lawford & Mulholland held the doubles title and in due course found themselves challenged by the twins. The outcome of both final contests left the Lawford family with nothing to celebrate. In the singles, Herbert put in a sterling performance in the All Comers seeing off nearly all the major contenders. He defeated Browne in the second round (although it must be said that the Fitzwilliam man fell heavily at the end of the third set and retired with his racket arm injured⁵¹⁸), Ernest Renshaw in the third round (three sets to one, 6-4 in the fourth)⁵¹⁹, and Richard Richardson in a titanic five set struggle in the final of the All Comers⁵²⁰. Herbert went 0-4 down to Richardson in their fifth set and in the words of the Freeman’s Journal, looked like a “gone coon”, but he pulled back to level at 5-5 and eventually won 9-7 after driving his rival to exhaustion⁵²¹. The challenge round system tended to load the dice in favour of the reigning champion as on the day of battle, Achilles could emerge from his tent fresh, relaxed and fighting fit, while the challenger might be jaded and carrying wounds from earlier conflicts. Herbert played Richardson on the Thursday and William on the Saturday, so although he played four sets of doubles against the Renshaws on the Friday, he could be said to have enjoyed some recovery time; nevertheless, it is hard to believe that the gruelling five set match did not hand William a significant advantage in the challenge round. In a four set match with William Herbert’s performance declined as the game wore on and he yielded 6-1, 4-6, 3-6, 1-6, proof perhaps that the system had worked against him⁵²². The Field reported that after the first set William played better and better “and his volleys, which in the first set had rather failed him, were now remarkably successful in adding to his score, his placing also being very good”. Freeman’s Journal attributed William’s dominance in the fourth set to his “terrific volleying” and it seems the new Renshaw method was applied to effect⁵²³. Charles Heathcote observed in the Badminton Library volume in 1890 that at this stage the twins were still to some extent experimenting: “They both indulged in the volley and in the smash to which they gave their name, to an extent frequently excessive and occasionally reckless, and their back play had not the severity which it has since acquired”; hence in the run-up to Wimbledon it was still considered by some that the play of Lawford, Richardson and even Hartley could prevail

⁵¹⁵ Morning Post 11/5/1881 p.3

⁵¹⁶ Jackson’s Oxford Journal 14/5/1881 p.5, Field 14/5/1881 p.668

⁵¹⁷ The Field 14/5/1881 p.668

⁵¹⁸ Field 28/5/1881 p.732, Freeman’s Jnl 24/5/1881 p3. Browne’s fall came with Herbert 8-7 up in the 3rd set and on duce in the next game. Sportingly Browne played on left-handed to finish the set but retired with the score 3-6, 6-3, 7-9.

⁵¹⁹ Field 28/5/1881 p.732, Freeman’s Jnl 25/5/1881, p7. HFL won 6-0, 0-6, 9-7, 6-4.

⁵²⁰ Field 28/5/1881 p.732; HFL won 5-7, 7-5, 3-6, 6-4, 9-7 – “one of the most closely contested matches that has ever taken place in any tournament”.

⁵²¹ Freeman’s Jnl 27/5/1881 p7. “Gone coon” seems to have been a familiar enough term in those days, albeit American of origin, and meant a dead duck or “goner”.

⁵²² Field 4/6/1881 p.763

⁵²³ Freeman’s Jnl 30/5/1881p.6

against “the brilliant but sometimes erratic power of the young aspirant”⁵²⁴. After all, the Irish title in 1880 had proved to be a false dawn for William.

Fifteen pairs competed in the men’s doubles and represented the strongest field for any tournament in 1881 - at the time it was Britain’s leading doubles event. While Hartley and Lubbock were absent, and Browne hors de combat, nearly all the best of England and Ireland were there. In the first round the Renshaws met one of the strongest pairs - Woodhouse & Richardson – and were able to see them off comfortably enough 6-3, 7-5 (“a very good contest throughout” according to the Field)⁵²⁵. In the second and third rounds they worked through the Irish opposition (dropping a set on the way against Maul & Aungier) before confronting Lawford & Mulholland in the challenge round⁵²⁶. Here they were face to face with their conquerors from the 1880 second round and they turned the tables, exacting revenge in four sets 6-2, 3-6, 6-2, 6-3⁵²⁷. The win was decisive but the crowd were entertained by a spirited engagement in the final set when Lawford was 0-4 down and once again resembling a gone coon. His fighting instincts roused, “Lawford warmed up in splendid form, and kept the company in good humour by his inspiriting war cries to his partner”⁵²⁸. The London club pair fought back to take the next three games and the gap was closed to 3-4; this, however, was as far as they went. The Renshaws moved ahead to 3-5 and the match came to a fine climax. In the ninth game, the pairs matched point with point and there were three deuces, the holders “gaining vantage” first. The challengers saved game point against them, then gained and lost their first match point, then won their second - “Renshaw by savage volley gained the sett with 6 games to 3”⁵²⁹.

Mary Abercrombie was in Dublin at the time of the championships and she teamed up with William for the mixed doubles, the only women’s event in the tournament’s programme. Her sister Clara O’Brien Kennedy lived at 86 Lower Leeson Street, a convenient short walk away from Fitzwilliam Square, and no doubt she was well looked after there⁵³⁰. Clara had been resident in Dublin for some seven years and was mother to three children with another on the way. Mary had visited Dublin before and in company with Clara may well have been the Miss Abercrombie who was “presented” at the Vice-Regal Court at Dublin Castle in 1878 (dressed for the occasion in presentation train, headdress, Court plume and all)⁵³¹. The O’Brien Kennedys look to have been solidly Protestant establishment⁵³².

There were seven entries initially for the mixed and few of the leading men chose to play, possibly partly because of a dearth of willing and able partners. William, Alfred Mulholland and Vere Goold were the only big names to take to the floor as Browne – listed to partner Miss Percival – dropped out through injury and reduced the contest to six pairs; even the Fitzwilliam’s Peter Aungier failed to sign up⁵³³. The three Langrishe sisters were absent but

⁵²⁴ Badminton Library 1903 p.156/7

⁵²⁵ Field 28/5/1881 p.732

⁵²⁶ Field 28/5/1881 p.732/3

⁵²⁷ Field 4/6/1881 p.763; 1880: 29/5/1880 p.685.

⁵²⁸ Freeman’s Jnl 28/5/1881 p.7

⁵²⁹ Freeman’s Jnl 28/5/1881 p.7. The twin in question was not identified by the journal.

⁵³⁰ Newspaper birth announcements for children 1874, 1877, 1880 & 1881 etc. (eg. Belfast Newsletter 8/11/1881 p.1, Irish Times 31/1/1878 p.6).

⁵³¹ Irish Times 31/1/1878 p.6. Clara and “Miss Abercrombie” were presented by “Mrs Wilson” – Miss A’s address given as 85 Lower Leeson Street. Inter alia Mary visited Dublin in 1880, Looker-on 7/2/1880 p.89.

⁵³² In his 1977 history of the Fitzwilliam Club, Ulick O’Connor described the background of the founders of the Fitzwilliam as “Anglo-Irish and Protestant, drawn mainly from the Dublin professional classes” (page 1). Clara’s husband George was a solicitor and his wife and children were all Church of Ireland (census 1901[ACU]).

⁵³³ Field 28/5/1881 p.732. Aungier defeated Woodhouse in the singles (6-8, 4-6, 6-3, 6-3, 6-4) and with Maul played first pair for Ireland in their “International match” against England (Field 4/6/1881 p.763). See also Peter A. v. RTR, Freeman’s Jnl 26/5/1881 p.7.

despite this William & Mary had some close sets in winning their first two matches and dropped a set in the final against Mr Maul and Miss Costello. They took the title with a comfortable win 6-3, 5-7, 6-2, 6-3 and Freeman's Journal attributed their victory to a combination of William's fierce serving and Miss Costello's tendency "to take a little more than her share of the play", in contrast to Mary's happy acceptance of a back seat⁵³⁴.

Cheltenham LTC players had made a clean sweep of the open titles and William had performed a hat-trick. In its account of play on the final day, Freeman's Journal opined that the secret of the Renshaws' success was "perseverance and perpetual practice": "All through the week, when not engaged in matches, they were practising, and even on Saturday, when the prizes had been distributed, and all was over, they took off their coats to practise again, and were at it still when we left. This is 'working all the time', as Sara Bernhardt says, with a vengeance..."⁵³⁵. The journal was misguided in its explanation of their success but its report throws a light onto the way the brothers worked on their game together and how they were preparing themselves for the climax of the tournament season, determined to succeed where they had failed in 1880. At a time when there was no such thing as an experienced tennis coach, and support teams were around a century away, the Renshaws had a unique advantage over their rivals in the form of each other: they took with them to each major tournament a top quality sparring partner, an informed critic, a regular doubles partner and a congenial travelling companion.

From Dublin the main action moved to London and William was back on home territory for the next major – the Prince's men's singles which began in Hans Place, Belgravia on 4th June just a week after the Fitzwilliam ended. The timing was unfortunate in one respect as the event overlapped with the new West of England tournament in Bath - a major in the making which began on 1st June - and Cheltenham LTC divided its forces, the B team of Porter and Kay committing to the shorter commute to Somerset⁵³⁶. The entry for Prince's was similar in size and quality to that of the Fitzwilliam as although the leading Irish players stayed away (Browne, Aungier, Goad), Edgar Lubbock of Prince's joined the cast of Englishmen⁵³⁷. This time William had to play through all the rounds like any other competitor as Prince's wisely shunned the challenge round system, and in any case Herbert Lawford was title holder. The draw and results pitted William against the three other main contenders – Lawford, Richardson and Mulholland. Lubbock fell to Richardson, Woodhouse to Mulholland, and Ernest Renshaw was drawn against William in the second round but scratched rather than cross swords with his brother (- the Field passed no comment and reported simply "Mr W. Renshaw had a bye, Mr E. Renshaw being absent"). After benefiting from this fraternal leg-up, William had to overcome tough opposition in Richardson and he came through 6-5, 6-4, 4-6, 2-6, 6-4⁵³⁸. In the fourth round William ran up against Herbert Lawford and this time they had a closer encounter than in Dublin. While Herbert now lost in four sets 5-6, 6-3, 4-6, 5-6, he was in contention in every set and according to the Field lost the final two points of the match to bad bounces – "a piece of very bad luck for Mr Lawford"⁵³⁹. Mulholland was easier meat in the final and William seems to have had a straightforward win 7-5, 4-6, 6-0, 6-3⁵⁴⁰. These three matches showed William's strength as a competitor but the closeness of his encounters with Richardson and Lawford suggest no particular superiority of technique and tactics – he had yet to show clear water between himself and the best of the rest.

⁵³⁴ Field 28/5/1881 p.732/3, Freeman's Jnl 27/5/1881 p.7

⁵³⁵ Freeman's Jnl 30/5/1881 p.6

⁵³⁶ Field 4/6/1881 p.764 & 11/6/1881 p.810

⁵³⁷ Field 11/6/1881 p.810

⁵³⁸ Field 11/6/1881 p.810

⁵³⁹ Field 11/6/1881 p.810. Referring to the final set, Sporting Life (14/6/1881 p.1) reported that at 5-5, William "aided by some good luck, secured the odd game".

⁵⁴⁰ Field 18/6/1881 p.847

The main Prince's tournament was followed immediately by the club's handicap singles, beginning on Monday 13th June, and the Renshaws, Lawford and Lubbock returned to the fray⁵⁴¹. The entry of twenty eight was large but Richardson, Mulholland and Woodhouse were absent and top billing with scratch handicaps was given just to William, Lawford and Lubbock (and if Lubbock's high standing might seem questionable, in defence it should be said that in 1880 at Prince's he beat Woodhouse and then took Lawford to five sets in the final, and at Prince's in 1881 he lost to Richardson in five sets)⁵⁴². Ernest was rated below these three and given a handicap of two bisques, which proved enough to enable him to score victories against both Lawford and his brother⁵⁴³. In a rain-affected match with Ernest, Lawford distinguished himself by wearing spiked shoes contrary to regulations and was called upon to remove them when he was ahead after ten games. The intervention would have dented his concentration and provided a boost to Ernest's morale, sufficient perhaps to tip the balance of the match⁵⁴⁴. William and Ernest were at opposite ends of the draw and when they found themselves sole survivors in the final, they appealed to the organisers to allow them to divide the trophy, Ernest demonstrating his usual reluctance to face his brother across the net. The powers that be ruled the proposal "utterly impracticable" and the contest went ahead⁵⁴⁵. Exchanging set for set, the brothers arrived at two sets all and then swapped games to arrive at 6-6 in the fifth; Ernest edged ahead to lead 7-6, thirty love, claimed his two bisque points and so won the game and the match⁵⁴⁶.

By the time the All England Championships began on 2nd July the main potential challengers to champion Hartley – the Renshaws, Lawford, Richardson and Woodhouse – had all played two major tournaments in the previous six weeks, the Renshaws and Lawford had also competed in the Prince's handicap, and Richardson had entered and won the Liverpool Cricket and Northern tournaments⁵⁴⁷. John Hartley's preparation was devoid of singles tournament play, such were the demands of his religious calling and the remoteness of his workplace, and at Wimbledon the workings of the challenge round system denied him the possibility of playing himself in against cannon-fodder in the early rounds. His plans to practise directly beforehand in Cheam with the Tabor brothers – Wimbledon veterans of 1878 to 1880 – were largely thwarted by illness on his side⁵⁴⁸. He was out of touch with the development of tournament play and arguably would have lost to any one of the five principal pretenders to his throne even if he had been physically fit. For William the tournament offered a fine test of his skill against the best in Britain, as Lubbock was there as well as Hartley, and only Alfred Mulholland and Ernest Browne were absent. The publication of the draw must have drawn a sigh of relief from Ernest Renshaw as the brothers were placed in opposite halves, and in the event Ernest fell to Richardson in the third round in four sets. William was able to play five leading names in succession without the distraction of a family encounter.

⁵⁴¹ Field 18/6/1881 p.847

⁵⁴² Lubbock: Field 3/7/1880 p.15 (v. HFL: 7-5, 7-5, 3-6, 0-6, 6-8) & 11/6/1881 p.810.

⁵⁴³ Field 18/6/1881 p.847 & 25/6/1881 p.877. In Real Tennis a bisque was one stroke which could be claimed at any time during a set. The concept was borrowed for lawn tennis handicapping but was never popular and was abolished in 1890 (Badminton Library 1903 p.180/1).

⁵⁴⁴ Morning Post 18/6/1881 p.6, Badminton Library p.158. Field 18/6/1881 p.847: ER won 8-6, 6-2, 7-5.

⁵⁴⁵ London Evening Standard 22/6/1881 p.3, Morning Post 22/6/1881 p.3

⁵⁴⁶ Field 25/6/1881 p.877

⁵⁴⁷ Liverpool: Field 25/6/1881 p.877; Northern: Field 2/7/1881 p.11.

⁵⁴⁸ The Complete Lawn Tennis Player, Wallis Myers, 1st edition 1908, revised 1912, p.15. Tabor brothers George (Old Harrovian) and Arthur (Old Etonian) competed at Wimbledon 1878, 1879 & 1880 (Todd 1979 p.220 – 222, census 1881 for GET, school registers etc).

William defeated Edgar Lubbock in the third round in straight sets, Woodhouse in the fourth in four sets, and then Lawford in the fifth⁵⁴⁹. William's third match of the year against Herbert ran to five sets and was their closest, William coming through 1-6, 6-3, 6-2, 5-6, 6-3⁵⁵⁰. Charles Heathcote in the Badminton volume observed that Herbert "made an excellent fight and was beaten only by the odd set" and it was calculated that by the end of the match William had won only two more points in aggregate than his adversary⁵⁵¹. It was William's only close contest in the tournament as Richardson, who had disposed of Ernest, went down in straight sets in the final of the All-Comers offering only "feeble resistance" in Heathcote's opinion⁵⁵². The challenge round with John Hartley was a fiasco and the spectators were probably as embarrassed as Hartley. The champion was both out of condition and out of practice and he collected just two games from William in an encounter that lasted thirty seven minutes (0-6, 1-6, 1-6)⁵⁵³. Heathcote's verdict was that because of Hartley's illness the game was "an utterly inconclusive test of the merits of the two styles" of the players, but he rather contradicted himself by adding that anyone who saw the game would agree "that the back play of that date had had its day, and that victory rested with the species of volley adopted by the winner"⁵⁵⁴. The Field was quite clear that even if the champion had been on his best form, he would have lost as the contest was a battle of different styles, and "the one style was vastly superior to the other as a winning game". With the new style a player strove "to keep his opponent as far back in the court as possible, and then, having him at a disadvantage, gradually [worked] his way up to the net in order to kill the ball...with a good volley. This mode of play has been brought nearly to perfection by Mr W. Renshaw...."⁵⁵⁵.

William was now holder of all Britain's major singles and men's doubles titles – he was the champion of all he surveyed and famous in the sporting world. His choice of the next two events to showcase his talents was therefore a surprising one – two low-key handicaps in the south of Ireland. The Waterford open handicap at the beginning of August enjoyed a large entry and a few Fitzwilliam players entered, but the likes of Ernest Browne and Peter Aungier passed it by and the Renshaws were the only leading English players to play⁵⁵⁶. The Langrishe family paraded in strength – Hercules of the Fitzwilliam together with his three sisters Constance, May and Beatrice⁵⁵⁷ – and it may be that they had cajoled the Renshaws into playing as William was to be found partnering Hercules in the handicap men's doubles and Beatrice in the mixed, and Ernest teamed up with May for the mixed. May had played at Cheltenham in April. The Langrishe connection apart, Waterford was home territory to Edward Meara, the Renshaws' stepfather, and it is possible that the Meara/Renshaw household were on holiday there from London, staying with Edward's widowed stepmother at the old family home of May Park, Ballynakill nearby⁵⁵⁸. May Park – a small estate with a ten bedroom

⁵⁴⁹ Todd 1979 p.223. Lubbock was "decidedly overmatched by the splendid volleying of [WR].....though at times [he] placed his returns well along the side lines out of Mr Renshaw's reach" (Field 9/7/1881 p.68).

⁵⁵⁰ Field 16/7/1881 p.104

⁵⁵¹ Badminton Library 1903 p.157; points: Field 16/7/1881 p.104

⁵⁵² Badminton Library 1903 p.157. Set score: 6-4, 6-2, 6-3.

⁵⁵³ Field 16/7/1881 p.104, Badminton Library 1903 p.157. Reminiscing c.1908 Hartley wrote: "Coming up to Cheam to stay with the Tabors and to get a little practice, I started an attack of English cholera, which went on until after the championship, reduced me a stone in weight and made me very weak as well as stopping almost all practice. So my game with W. Renshaw was a farce. I ought not to have played at all". (Wallis Myers 1908 p.15). Hartley was vicar of Burneston, near Bedale, North Yorkshire (Harrow register 1911).

⁵⁵⁴ Badminton Library p.157

⁵⁵⁵ Field 16/7/1881 p.104

⁵⁵⁶ Field 13/8/1881 p.236

⁵⁵⁷ Hercules seems also to have been a member of Kilkenny LTC (Field 28/5/1881 p.732 [Fitzwilliam], 13/8/1881 p.236 [Kilkenny])

⁵⁵⁸ Waterford Mail 12/6/1830 p.1, CC register 1910 p.92; obituary of father: Kilkenny Moderator 2/7/1853 p.3

mansion - had been Edward's home from the time of his birth and should have been well able to accommodate an entourage of six or more⁵⁵⁹. Three Mearas from May Park - including apparently Edward's half-brother Henry - were reported to be part of "the large and fashionable party" assembled to watch the first day's play and a Miss Meara graced the mixed, going out in the first round with the consolation of one set won⁵⁶⁰. The Langrishe family home of Knocktopher Abbey was some twenty miles north of Waterford⁵⁶¹.

The open at Limerick followed on 16th August and this was billed by the Field as a tournament which ranked second only to the Irish Championship (on the Emerald Isle)⁵⁶². If it did rank second then it was surprisingly overlooked by the leading Fitzwilliam players – Browne, Aungier and Goold – and in fact the only familiar names in the draw for the open men's singles were Edmund Brackenbury and Hercules Langrishe. Brackenbury of Bournemouth LTC had won the tournament for the past two years and awaited the challenge round to take on the winner of the All Comers. Langrishe gave a walk-over to his first round opponent but appeared for the handicap singles and partnered William Renshaw in the handicap doubles⁵⁶³. William played the handicap singles as well as the men's doubles, and won both but scratched from the handicap mixed. Ernest gave the tournament a miss as did the Langrishe sisters. Why the champion of England and Ireland should participate in such a minor event so far from home is something of a mystery, but friendship with Hercules may have been at the root and this may be seen as an early example of his willingness to act as an ambassador for the game⁵⁶⁴. The Bassett Chronicle of Limerick gave advance publicity to William's presence and invited "anybody wishing to see how the game should really be played" to attend, for "Mr Renshaw excels as much in the lawn tennis line as Mr W.G. Grace does in cricket"⁵⁶⁵.

While the Renshaws were winning majors, Henry Porter and John Kay were also active in tournaments outside Cheltenham, most notably supporting the newer ventures. Henry made his one appearance at Wimbledon, losing in the first round, and Porter & Kay were defeated by West Middlesex in the first round of the Oxford doubles. In between, they played in the inaugural West of England championships in Bath and Henry travelled north to play in the Liverpool Cricket Club tournament and the Northern Championship. By this time Henry evidently had left his role as a teacher at Cheltenham Proprietary School and reduced his educational labours to tutoring pupils for entry into public school⁵⁶⁶.

At the beginning of June, Bath's two tennis clubs came together to arrange a first open West of England Championships, to follow directly after a competition for local club members⁵⁶⁷. There were three open events – men's singles, women's singles and mixed doubles – and the tournament was well supported by outside clubs, most notably Cheltenham, Clifton and the West Middlesex. Cheltenham fielded a team of six – Florence and Beatrice Mardall, Clara Hill, John Kay, Henry Porter and Robert Townsend.

⁵⁵⁹ Waterford Standard 2/9/1882 p.2 – 10 bedrooms, 5 servants rooms etc; ordnance survey map 1836 - 1846.

⁵⁶⁰ Kilkenny Moderator 6/8/1881 p.3: "Mr, Miss and the Rev. Mr O'Meara, Maypark"; Miss was perhaps his half-sister Elizabeth. Edward's stepmother Elizabeth was still living in May Park (probate Sept. 1882 [ACU]) and as his father remarried when he was 5 years old, she would have been the woman he knew as his mother. Field 13/8/1881 p.236.

⁵⁶¹ Malvern register 1905 p.59, entry for Hercules Langrishe. Obituary for Sir James Langrishe, Kilkenny Moderator 24/8/1910 p.2

⁵⁶² Field 27/8/1881 p.307

⁵⁶³ Field 27/8/1881 p.307

⁵⁶⁴ Hercules was much the same age as William. Educated at Malvern College he was the eldest son of Sir James Langrishe of Knocktopher Abbey, some 20 miles north of Waterford (Malvern register 1905 p.59).

⁵⁶⁵ Bassett's Chronicle 17/8/1881 p.3

⁵⁶⁶ Looker-on 3/1/1880 p.2 (Cheltenham Proprietary School) & 21/7/1883 p.450 etc, Census for HBP 1881

⁵⁶⁷ Field 4/6/1881 p.764

In the men's singles, there was an entry of seventeen and the West Middlesex, like Cheltenham, fielded a B-team. Cheltenham's Townsend was knocked out in the first round. Porter won through to the third round but seems to have had to play three matches in one day and "was too fatigued to win against Mr Barry", his final adversary. The Field thought him "very unlucky" as otherwise "he would have had a good chance for the first prize". Kay, meanwhile, progressed to a final against Pelham Von Donop of Bath where he lost a close encounter 6-5, 5-6, 3-6⁵⁶⁸. Von Donop was a lieutenant of the Royal Engineers, new to tournament tennis but a high achiever in association football having represented England in their match against Scotland in 1875 and that same year played in the RE team that won the FA Cup⁵⁶⁹.

Of the ten players in the women's singles, only two were from the Bath clubs and Cheltenham matched that number with Florence Mardall and Clara Hill; the West Middlesex and Clifton LTC were unrepresented⁵⁷⁰. Florence was Cheltenham's strongest entry and she lost out in the second round to the eventual winner, Gertrude Gibbs of Cirencester, 2-6, 3-6. Cheltenham had two-and-a-half pairs out of thirteen in the mixed as Kay teamed up with his fiancée Beatrice, Porter played with Florence, and Clara – not to be left out - joined forces with a Clifton LTC player named E. Kenyon-Stow. All three pairs survived the first round but then family came up against family and Beatrice faced off against Florence. The result was "a capital match" in which Florence edged through in a deciding third set 6-5. In the semi-finals Clara & partner went down 5-6 in a final set to Gibbs & Bush-Salmon but were avenged in the final when Porter & Florence despatched their conquerors 6-0, 8-6 - doubly satisfying for Cheltenham after Florence's loss to Gibbs in the singles⁵⁷¹. The Field judged that the tournament had been so successful in every way "that it is sure to become an annual event", and it was right. The tournament was to become particularly important as a major with a strong women's entry⁵⁷².

Later in June Henry Porter travelled north to sample the tournaments there and his first stop was Liverpool where the cricket club had perceived the need for a local competition and decided to organise an open tournament. The club had a link to Cheltenham through Henry Parr who as a pupil at Cheltenham College had played first eleven cricket for two years in the 1860's⁵⁷³. Parr was a steward for the Liverpool tournament and also the Northern in Manchester directly afterwards, and he played in the Liverpool event⁵⁷⁴. His main summer sport was cricket and just before the first tournament he played for Liverpool in a match against the college in Cheltenham – and perhaps took the opportunity to make contact with Cheltenham LTC to drum up custom for the northern events⁵⁷⁵. Richard Richardson played at Liverpool but there was no representation from London clubs or indeed Ireland and there was little tournament experience to be found within quite a large entry. "Mr H. 'Blane' Cheltenham LTC" defeated two opponents to arrive at the semi-finals and was then demolished by Richardson 6-1, 6-0⁵⁷⁶. The final itself was another demolition by Richardson except that this time he won without losing a game – the Field described him as "a Triton amongst minnows"⁵⁷⁷. Why Porter should use an alias is unknown.

⁵⁶⁸ Field 4/6/1881 p.764

⁵⁶⁹ Census for PGD 1881 (ACU), Field 13/3/1875 p.248 & 20/3/1875 p.276, Service record (ACU). In November 1881 PGD acted as godfather to PG Wodehouse and was the source of his first name but not the second. Von Donop was Pelham George, PG Wodehouse was Pelham Grenville.

⁵⁷⁰ Field 4/6/1881 p.764

⁵⁷¹ Field 11/6/1881 p.810

⁵⁷² Field 11/6/1881 p.810 & 3/6/1882 p.741/2 etc

⁵⁷³ CC register 1910 p.212

⁵⁷⁴ Liverpool Mercury 17/6/1881 p.6, Field 18/6/1881 p.847 & 25/6/1881 p.876

⁵⁷⁵ Field 25/6/1881 p.890 – the match was played on 10 & 11 June, the tournament started on 16 June.

⁵⁷⁶ Field 18/6/1881 p.847 & 25/6/1881 p.877

⁵⁷⁷ Field 25/6/1881 p.877

In its second year, the Northern had a good size of entry for the men's singles at twenty-one but, like Liverpool, the quality was indifferent as London and Irish clubs gave it the cold shoulder. Porter had a bye in the first round and went out in the second to Mark Fenwick of Bournemouth LTC in four sets, a close contest at the end⁵⁷⁸. Aged twenty, Fenwick was an Old Harrovian from a Bournemouth family who was training as a banker in Newcastle - in July he was to progress to the third round at Wimbledon, neither winning nor losing against any notables⁵⁷⁹. Richardson played just the challenge round and again totally outclassed his opponent to retain his title 6-1, 6-1, 6-0⁵⁸⁰. There were no women's events. Reporting back to Cheltenham LTC, Porter would have been hard pressed to suggest there were competitions to be found in the north worthy of top ten players, but the facilities and administration of the Northern must have impressed him as in 1882 Cheltenham and the Fitzwilliam sent up their best – the Renshaws were coming.

Montpellier Gardens hosts Cheltenham's first open grass court championships

In 1881, the men's open tournament circuit was showing healthy growth but for women an open circuit was more idea than reality. Wimbledon, Prince's and the Northern were men only, the Fitzwilliam's women's events had shrunk to just a mixed and Brighton and Edgbaston were trying to establish singles and doubles events but their entries tended to be local, small and lacking strength in any depth. For the best Cheltenham ladies the only outside tournament offering the prospect of serious competition was the West of England in Bath and its organisers were feeling their way (no ladies' doubles in its first year)⁵⁸¹. The Cheltenham open tournaments – featuring singles and doubles and a good pool of experienced players – were the leading women's tournaments of 1881.

In mid-September James Lillywhite laid out six tennis courts in Montpellier Gardens, five on the archery lawn and one on the old bowling green, and screened them from public gaze with canvas ready for Cheltenham's first major open grass court championships⁵⁸². Advertised well in advance, and with John Abercrombie in his usual place at the helm, the tournament commenced on Monday 19th September⁵⁸³. The managing committee was the same as in April except that Arthur Agg-Gardner had dropped out and Major-General Charles Cookes (Indian Army artilleryman just retired, veteran of the Indian Mutiny) had stepped in – it was as masculine as ever⁵⁸⁴. The events scheduled were the same as in April with the addition of a so-called Gloucestershire Championship for men residing within fifty miles of Cheltenham.

The entry for the women's singles at thirteen was down by one on the April tournament - the Looker-on suggested that the "known superiority" of Abercrombie and Bradley had been a deterrent to some - but seven different clubs were represented, two of them Irish, and all told

⁵⁷⁸ Field 25/6/1881 p.876/7

⁵⁷⁹ Harrow register 1911 p.498, census for MF 1881; Wimbledon: Field 9/7/1881 p.68

⁵⁸⁰ Field 2/7/1881 p.11

⁵⁸¹ For the Bath open singles there was an entry of entry of 10 from 9 different clubs – an impressive number of clubs (Field 4/6/1881 p.764). At the first Edgbaston tournament at the end of July, 9 played in the singles and there were 5 pairs for the doubles (Field 6/8/1881 p.210 – the report did not record players' clubs); the Watson sisters, in their first appearance in a club open tournament, won through to play each other in the singles final and won the doubles - Berkswell, their home, was local to Edgbaston.

⁵⁸² Looker-on 24/9/1881 p.615

⁵⁸³ Field 30/7/1881 p.162 (Lawn Tennis Fixtures) & 27/8/1881 p.1 (tournament advertisement)

⁵⁸⁴ Field 24/9/1881 p.461. Cookes served in India from 1844 to 1878 and was severely injured during the mutiny (obituary Civil & Military Gazette 17/11/1890 p.5 etc); his son was educated at Cheltenham College from 1874 to 1879 (CC register 1910 p.391).

it was the strongest field of any women's event in 1881 by some distance⁵⁸⁵. All Cheltenham's leading players were present, apart from Fanny Morris, and they were joined in the lists by two strong outsiders, Miss Perry of Ireland and Gertrude Gibbs, the winner in June of the West of England singles (a title Fanny was to claim in 1882). Gibbs' home turf was Cirencester some fourteen miles from Cheltenham: aged twenty-one, she was the daughter of the rector of a nearby village called Coates⁵⁸⁶. Perry is hard to pin down with certainty. The Field gave her background as Banagher LTC and knew enough to say she came with "a great reputation", while the Looker-on unhelpfully labelled her "Galway", some distance to the west and still further from Dublin⁵⁸⁷. However, as she played with Browne in the mixed doubles in Dublin in 1882, and was described by several newspapers as being part of a "Dublin" pairing, she is most likely the Miss Perry who won the Earlsfort Terrace tournament in Dublin in 1879 and came with Dublin credentials⁵⁸⁸. Several of the children of William Perry of Ardlui, Blackrock (near Dublin) played in tournaments in the early 1880's and she is possibly Charlotte, the eldest aged twenty in 1881⁵⁸⁹. In the Fitzwilliam tournament of May 1882 "Miss Perry" was described by the media as the most accomplished of all the Irish players, ahead of the Langrishe sisters⁵⁹⁰.

When play began, Gibbs and Perry showed no respect for local reputations and ploughed through the Cheltenham opposition to arrive in the final and stage a showdown of visitors. The locals all survived into the second round but then began to fall by the wayside. Abercrombie unfortunately ran into Bradley and lost out 5-6, 5-6 in a "wonderfully close contest" (words of the Field). Ella Ramsay drew blood against Perry but eventually went down 6-2, 1-6, 2-6, while Florence Mardall succumbed to Gibbs 2-6, 1-6 in a surprisingly one-sided encounter. Clara Hill had a bye through to the semi-finals and there gave Gibbs a run for her money losing 3-6, 6-2, 3-6 – "a capital contest". In the other semi-final between Bradley and Perry, there was nothing to please the home crowd as Bradley was brushed aside 2-6, 0-6. The rout of the home team was complete and curiously it was Ramsay and Hill – considered to be Cheltenham's secondary singles players – who had provided the stiffest opposition to the outsiders. In the final, England confronted Ireland and the audience was served a well-balanced match which Gibbs won 6-4, 6-4 after scores of four all in both sets. The Field judged her a rather dull player – "a Hadow sort" who retrieved everything her opponent threw at her, was careful and economic of effort – and offered the view that if Perry had not played the final just after defeating Bradley, the result would have been reversed as she was undoubtedly the better player; Gibbs was fresh and they met on unequal terms. As if to put the Field's judgment to the test, a rematch between the two was organised for the Saturday - "an extemporised match outside the tournament" with a gold locket to play for - and the result was

⁵⁸⁵ Looker-on 24/9/1881 p.615. Cheltenham's April event would have ranked second and Bath third (Gibbs played at Bath but Abercrombie, Bradley, Morris & Ramsay were all absent). Fanny Morris played in April and lost to Ella Ramsay.

⁵⁸⁶ Field 24/9/1881 p.461 & 11/6/1881 p.810 (Coates), Wilts & Glos Standard 11/6/1881 p.5 (daughter of). Census 1881 for Rev TC Gibbs. Cirencester may or may not have had a formally constituted tennis club at this time. A tournament was held in Oakley Park (courtesy of Earl Bathurst) at the beginning of August and GBG won the ladies' singles (Field 13/8/1881 p.236); no Cheltenham LTC players identified.

⁵⁸⁷ Field 24/9/1881 p.461, Looker-on 24/9/1881 p.615.

⁵⁸⁸ Field 27/5/1882 p.711, Sport (Dublin) 3/6/1882 p.4, Belfast Newsletter 25/5/1882 p.8 ("of Dublin"), Freeman's Jnl 2/5/1879 p.7 (Earlsfort)

⁵⁸⁹ AW Perry played in the 1880, 1881 & 1883 Irish championships and this may have been the brother of Charlotte named Alfred William, aged c.19 in 1881 (Charterhouse register). A "W. Perry, Ardlui" & Miss G. Perry competed in the 1882 Irish as well as "Miss Perry"; Charlotte had a sister named Gertrude (17 in 1881, see engagement Freeman's Jnl 7/10/1898 p.7). Ardlui was the home of William James Perry from c.1873 until his death in 1891 and "Charlotte Elizabeth Perry of Ardlui" was one of his executors (Probate 1892, ACU).

⁵⁹⁰ Sport (Dublin) 3/6/1882 p.4, Freeman's Jnl 2/6/1882 p.7

a fine match that went the way of Ireland 4-6, 6-1, 6-3⁵⁹¹. Although the result accorded with the Field's stated opinion, the journal considered itself proved wrong and confessed to "having underrated [the] lady's play" – "though beaten, Miss Gibbs showed capital form...Miss Perry is decidedly the better in her backhand returns and this gives her a great advantage in many of the rallies".

Of seven pairs entered for the women's doubles, there were three that had the look of potential finalists and if there had been seeding on form to date it would have been: 1st Abercrombie & Bradley, 2nd Mardall & Perry, 3rd Hill & Ramsay. (None of the others had the appearance of established club pairings and Gibbs was a non-participant⁵⁹².) However, form was to be confounded and the outcome was this seeding in reverse. Abercrombie & Bradley ran into the ad hoc pairing of Mardall & Perry in the first round and lost 6-5, 3-6, 4-6, "principally owing to the splendid playing of Miss Perry"⁵⁹³. This was their first ever defeat in a ladies' doubles and it would have been some consolation to know it was a fine match, appreciated by the audience, and that their record fell in part to a close colleague. Hill & Ramsay took on the Anglo-Irish pair in the second round and continuing the good form they had shown in the singles, managed to defy the odds and prevail "in a splendid contest" 6-4, 3-6, 6-5. At five all in the third set the match teetered on deuce in the decider but the Cheltenham pair kept their cool, snatched the next two points and clinched victory⁵⁹⁴. In the final, Cheltenham's B team came up against the pairing of a lady from Worcester playing under the alias "Mrs Dark", and a Miss Jones of Cheltenham LTC, and swept them aside 6-1, 6-3.

The mixed doubles had been planned for the final day of the tournament, and twelve couples had entered, but rain intervened and the event was washed out⁵⁹⁵.

The format for the men's singles was a novel one incorporating two tiers and a handicap in the top tier for four English players. The top tier competition was open to all comers in the orthodox sense but "The first three winners of the All Comers' prizes at Wimbledon, and the first at the Cheltenham in April last", if they entered, were to start at "15 behind scratch". The Renshaws, Lawford and Richardson were apparently considered to be the top dogs, and needing to be handicapped, and John Hartley was yesterday's man (all in all a fair judgment)⁵⁹⁶. The second tier competition, called the Gloucestershire Championship, was open to men residing within fifty miles of Cheltenham and its title was something of a misnomer as the boundary reached into well over half-a-dozen counties - entrants from Oxford University and Edgbaston LTC were welcomed but left out in the cold were Cambridge University players, Londoners and the Irish⁵⁹⁷. There seems no doubt that the presence of top flight players in a draw acted as a deterrent to the less confident and this format proved highly successful. Between the two tiers there was an entry of thirty-two players – larger than all the majors except Wimbledon – and competitors came from some sixteen different clubs from as far afield as Tenby, Bournemouth, London, Doncaster, Dublin and Cork⁵⁹⁸. The fifty mile restriction for the Gloucestershire Championship meant the exclusion of the top ten British players.

⁵⁹¹ Looker-on 1/10/1881 p.631/2, Field 1/10/1881 p.483

⁵⁹² Of the other pairs, the Misses Wilkins were evidently daughters of Cheltenham resident Mr GD Wilkins (census 1881 for GDW etc).

⁵⁹³ Field 24/9/1881 p.462

⁵⁹⁴ Field 1/10/1881 p.483

⁵⁹⁵ Field 1/10/1881 p.483

⁵⁹⁶ Field 27/8/1881 p.1. The wording is imprecise but seems to mean the three All Comers prize-winners at Wimbledon 1881 - William Renshaw 1st, Richardson 2nd, Lawford 3rd (Todd 1979 p.223) - and Ernest Renshaw for the Cheltenham All-Comers.

⁵⁹⁷ Field 27/8/1881 p.1

⁵⁹⁸ Field 24/9/1881 p.461

Ernest Renshaw, Edgar Lubbock and Ernest Browne were the best prospects to win the first tier competition and the supporting cast of twelve included strong second rank players in Pelham Von Donop (Bath), George Butterworth (Clifton) and Robert Braddell (West Middlesex)⁵⁹⁹. Renshaw was handicapped Owe 15, as the reigning Cheltenham champion, and after putting paid to Von Donop in the second round in five sets (despite “the Bath champion playing in splendid form”), he came up against Browne in the third⁶⁰⁰. Here in the Field’s opinion the handicap was decisive as he lost to the Irishman in four sets 0-6, 6-5, 5-6, 1-6 playing on the asphalt court⁶⁰¹. Browne in the meantime had done well in putting out Lubbock in five sets in the first round⁶⁰² (evidence of an absolute lack of seeding), and after Braddell had eliminated Butterworth in the second round in five sets, he and Browne navigated their way into the final where the Fitzwilliam Club comfortably saw off the West Middlesex in four sets, the fourth a love set⁶⁰³.

Just five players who played in the open were eligible to play in the Gloucestershire Championship and of these four chose to enter: Henry Porter, Von Donop, George Butterworth and Griffiths of Edgbaston. John Kay was a surprise absence from all the events in Montpellier Gardens and Porter was obliged to find a replacement partner for the open men’s doubles: John had married his Beatrice three and a half weeks before the tournament began and nuptials, nestbuilding and honeymoon may have claimed too much of his time. The second tier competition attracted twenty-one entries, including ten from Cheltenham⁶⁰⁴ and three from Edgbaston, and was won by George Butterworth of Clifton. On paper, Von Donop – winner of the West of England men’s singles - was the principal obstacle in George’s path and he was overcome by George 6-3, 6-0, 6-5 in the first round. Henry Porter lost in the first round to fellow club member Charles Tillard, a young master at Cheltenham College who had played cricket for Cambridge University in his time⁶⁰⁵. George’s elder brother Alexander, a member of the All England Club who must have qualified through local family connections, progressed to the final after a semi-final win over John G. Chamberlain (Edgbaston LTC) and there conceded to his brother without hitting a ball, “as it was well known which was the better player”⁶⁰⁶. The tournament committee must have been less than pleased but Ernest Renshaw would have been in full sympathy.

The Cheltenham audience might have expected to witness the magic of William Renshaw in the men’s doubles but William chose to rest on his April laurels and on this occasion they were denied the opportunity to see him in serious competition. In his absence, Ernest teamed up with Ernest Browne and in a field of eight pairs they were favourites for the title. In the first round they eased past the Chamberlain brothers of Edgbaston (an experienced pair who had played together in club matches as early as 1879), then they received a bye into a semi-final against Lubbock & Braddell, and there came unstuck⁶⁰⁷. The London pair were on

⁵⁹⁹ Robert Braddell was singles champion of Oxford University (Field 21/5/1881 p.700) and an experienced men’s doubles player who had played in the Oxford Doubles & won the Northern Doubles of 1880 and 1881 (Allaby 1981 p.158, Field 14/5/1881 p.668). In September 1882 Braddell was to win all three Cheltenham events, taking the men’s doubles with Erskine Watson & the mixed with Maud (Field 30/9/1882 p.484).

⁶⁰⁰ Field 24/9/1881 p.461/2. Renshaw beat Von Donop 5-6, 4-6, 6-2, 6-0, 6-4.

⁶⁰¹ Field 24/9/1881 p.462

⁶⁰² Field 24/9/1881 p.461: 6-4, 1-6, 5-6, 6-2, 6-3 (45 games in total)

⁶⁰³ Field 1/10/1881 p.482/3: 6-3, 6-3, 3-6, 6-0

⁶⁰⁴ Cheltenham LTC contributed 7, Montpellier Club 3 (Edward Cotes’ group)

⁶⁰⁵ Cambridge Alumni 2023 (ACU) – Cambridge cricket XI 1873/74

⁶⁰⁶ Field 1/10/1881 p.482. Alexander represented Marlborough in the public school rackets competitions of 1873 & 1874 (beating Eton in 1874 before losing to Harrow [Field 11/4/1874 p.353]); he graduated in law at London University and trained as a barrister in London (Marlborough Register 1905 p.219).

⁶⁰⁷ Score v. Chamberlains: 6-1, 6-3, 6-2 (Field 24/9/1881 p.462). Chamberlains John G (27) & Walter W (20) had won the doubles at the Edgbaston LTC open tournament in July (Field 6/8/1881 p.210). In 1879 they played

song and they won the match decisively 6-3, 6-2, 6-3. The Field was shocked but appreciative: it was “a great surprise...but their play was simply perfect...such back play as was shown by Mr Lubbock has never been seen in a double match before”⁶⁰⁸. Braddell was well-known for his volleying powers so theirs would have been a formidable combination⁶⁰⁹. In the final London was confronted by Cheltenham in the shape of Henry Porter and partner A. Taylor, who had set a record of sorts by navigating their way into the final without playing a single match (- a path had been cleared successively by absentee opponents, a bye, and a withdrawal through injury). They were lambs released into an arena with lions on the prowl, and were duly devoured 6-0, 6-0, 6-2⁶¹⁰.

Rain intervened on the final day of the tournament programme and the prize-giving was hurriedly relocated from Montpellier Gardens to the shelter of the Winter Garden, losing most of its audience in the process. No more than a hundred spectators made the transfer even though the British champion had declared an intention to participate in a “special” match and the skills of both Renshaws were to be paraded⁶¹¹. James Tynte Agg-Gardner did the honours as President of Cheltenham LTC and then, as a finale, William took to the stage with brother Ernest to play an exhibition doubles against Ernest Browne and George Butterworth – “for their own and the company’s amusement” - and they “showed some fine play”⁶¹². Thus was Cheltenham’s first major grass court open brought to a successful if damp conclusion.

The tournament season was virtually over but Cheltenham LTC staged one final event in December – a handicap mixed doubles, partly it would seem as a replacement for the mixed event cancelled for bad weather in September, and partly perhaps to provide a public vote of confidence in new technology retailed by a member of the West Middlesex Club. At the end of November Otway Woodhouse, civil engineer, had arrived in Cheltenham to fulfil a contract to light the Winter Garden “experimentally” using electric light systems sold by his company⁶¹³. Messrs Woodhouse and Rawson of London were aiming to demonstrate the effectiveness of their lighting equipment in the locality and drum up custom for products designed, so they said, to meet the needs of any type of building - “mills, factories, offices, shops, public halls, private houses, clubs etc”⁶¹⁴. On 1st December tennis players were drafted in to act as guinea pigs from late afternoon but there were teething problems and their session was delayed until nine o’clock in the evening. The next day the system performed to design and they were able to play on both courts from five o’clock “under as powerful and effective illumination as they could well desire”⁶¹⁵. The main beneficiary of the lighting was due to be the *Fancy Fayre* - a charity bazaar in the Winter Garden which ran for nearly a week from 5th December – but the apparatus was kept in place afterwards and demonstrated to the members of the town corporation and dignitaries just before Christmas⁶¹⁶.

together in a match against Leamington LTC (Field 4/10/1879 p.453). They had two younger brothers boarding at Cheltenham College in 1881 – Charles & Ernest (CC register 1910 p.463).

⁶⁰⁸ Field 24/9/1881 p.462

⁶⁰⁹ Field 1/10/1881 p.482

⁶¹⁰ Field 24/9/1881 p.462

⁶¹¹ Looker-on 24/9/1881 p.616

⁶¹² Looker-on 1/10/1881 p.632 (Field 1/10/1881 p.483)

⁶¹³ Examiner 23/11/1881 p.8, Looker-on 26/11/1881 p.766 & 24/12/1881 p.827. OEW was educated at Marlborough & King’s College, London before training as an engineer and entering employment with the Great Eastern Railway Company in 1877 (obituary 1/1/1888 Institution of Civil Engineers, Minutes Vol 91 1888). As mentioned earlier, his family had close links to the Mackenzies of Cheltenham and in July he had acted as best man at a Mackenzie wedding in Cheltenham (p.36 above – “Browne’s local connections are...”).

⁶¹⁴ Looker-on 3/12/1881 p.784

⁶¹⁵ Looker-on 3/12/1881 p.781

⁶¹⁶ Demonstration: Looker-on 24/12/1881 p.827; Fayre: Chronicle 1/11/1881 p.4. The Looker-on of 10/12/1881 (p.798) applauded “the introduction of The Electric Light, which each day from dusk to the close of the Fayre

The mixed tournament started on 13th December and William Renshaw was in town for the event. Eight couples entered and the leading males falling in behind William were Henry Porter and Otway Woodhouse, electrical contractor in temporary residence⁶¹⁷. Two of the April tournament partnerships were repeated – William played with Marian Bradley, Otway with Ella Ramsay – and Henry Porter teamed up with Fanny Morris in the absence of Florence Mardall⁶¹⁸. Illumination for the three day event was faithfully by electric light. Porter & Morris put out Woodhouse & Ramsay in the first round and progressed at the expense of Clara Hill & partner to a final against Renshaw & Bradley. Here the club's leading mixed pair were shackled with a handicap of Owe 30 but nevertheless they came through to win and the champion of England and Ireland ended the year with yet another victory. The Field reported the event but its main interest was in tennis by electric light and it gave no scores: "The well-known court at the Winter Garden was well lit up with lights on the Brush system, the contractors being Messrs Woodhouse and Rawson"⁶¹⁹. Some sense of history here but little in the way of enthusiasm.

1882/3: Maud Watson makes her presence felt and joins up, the guard begins to change

For Cheltenham LTC the omens for the 1882 season were all favourable. John Abercrombie remained at the heart of the club and had stepped up to be chairman of the Montpellier Gardens Company⁶²⁰. With James Lillywhite and estate agent Charles Sweeting in place as lessees of Montpellier Gardens, facilities for the club were safeguarded and the grounds were assured of maintenance to a high standard⁶²¹. Continuing as club President, James Agg-Gardner provided a useful figurehead and patron, with tentacles in Cheltenham's social, political and commercial spheres as Lord of the Manor, local MP in waiting and a leading brewer⁶²². The owners and management of the Winter Garden seemed to be settled at least for the immediate future – same owners, same manager, same activities, same inability to dispose of the property at an acceptable price – and the club's covered court facility was to be available when needed, event bookings permitting⁶²³. Despite their family home in the capital, the Renshaw twins continued to be members of the club and their success on the circuit in club colours enhanced its standing.

While the participation of the Renshaws in any tournament pulled in the crowds, if they both entered the singles they brought a potential problem for organisers – Ernest's reluctance to play his brother. At the Prince's open in 1881 Ernest scratched when confronted by William in the second round and then in the final of the Prince's handicap a week later, the brothers appealed to the committee to allow them to share the title; they were rebuffed and reluctantly

effectually lit up every portion of the Winter Gardens, shedding a brilliant light upon every object contained therein, and bringing out the blended colours of the numberless articles in the stalls with wonderful clearness".

⁶¹⁷ Looker-on 17/12/1881 p.812/3. Mary Abercrombie and Clara Hill both played but John & Beatrice Kay were absent.

⁶¹⁸ The Miss Morris listed in the reports is assumed to be Fanny, as the leading Morris, but she had an unmarried elder sister named Edith.

⁶¹⁹ Field 31/12/1881 p.948. Charles Heathcote, in his review of the year in the Badminton Library, noted "the spirited attempt...to play the game by electric light at Cheltenham" and commented favourably, but added that subsequent attempts met with little success (Badminton Library 1903 p.158).

⁶²⁰ JA chairman: Examiner Almanac 4/1/1882 p.1

⁶²¹ Examiner Almanack 4/1/1882, Chronicle 19/4/1881 p.8

⁶²² ODNB for JTAG 2015, obituary Sir JT Agg-Gardner Chronicle 11/8/1928 p.2.

⁶²³ Owners: Examiner 3/1/1883 Almanack, Gloucestershire Echo 13/9/1895 p.3. Activities: Examiner 3/5/1882 p.4, Looker-on 7/10/1882 p.626 etc. Offer to sell to Cheltenham town council: Looker-on 12/8/1882 p.507, Chronicle 15/8/1882 p.2.

took arms against each other⁶²⁴. In May 1882 at the Irish a fraternal clash occurred once again. Ernest won the All-Comers and was then called upon to play William in the challenge round⁶²⁵. He refused and the Fitzwilliam committee was at a loss what to do. There were those who counselled that another challenger should be nominated in Ernest's place, but the committee, after due consideration, concluded this was outside their powers and opted to leave things as they stood. William therefore remained Champion of Ireland and as it was his third consecutive year as title holder, the trophy became his to keep – "rather hard lines on the committee as they lost the cup without a match being played"⁶²⁶. The All England Club took note. Concerned at the possibility of a recurrence at Wimbledon, they were spurred into action and quickly added a warning for refuseniks to their Field advertisement for the July Championships. A week after the Field's report of events in Dublin, the All England decreed:

"The winner of the [All Comers] Gold Prize will be called on to play Mr W. Renshaw, the present holder of the Champion Cup. In the event of his refusing to do so, the Gold Prize will be withheld."⁶²⁷

Ernest was on notice. Quite what passed between the brothers on the subject is unknown, but the outcome of their deliberations is clear enough: William absented himself from the Prince's tournament scheduled to begin on 19th June along with the handicap competition that followed, and ceased to play in any open singles events other than Wimbledon⁶²⁸. In 1882 he played just one open singles match – the All England Challenge Round – and that was the pattern for years to come as he continued to shrug off Wimbledon challengers until 1887. He never played in the Northern singles and he next played in the Irish singles in 1889⁶²⁹.

If 1881 saw William's progress to supreme status as the Achilles of the tennis world, 1882 witnessed Ernest's less spectacular rise to the role of Ajax, the next best thing. In 1882 he lost only to William at Wimbledon and Richardson in the Northern Tournament, if we disregard a lapse under a small handicap to a youthful Edward Williams in the Devonshire Park tournament⁶³⁰. In Dublin, he defeated the best Ireland had to offer in the shape of Ernest Browne and Peter Aungier. In the Northern he beat the same two Irishmen again followed by Robert Braddell, but conceded to Richardson in the challenge round after a tremendous tussle over five sets, 9-11 in the fifth. At Prince's his victims were Lawford (in five sets, 6-4 in the fifth), Browne and Aungier yet again, and then Edgar Lubbock in straight sets. At Wimbledon in the semi-final of the All-Comers he again beat Lawford in five sets, and then in the final had the sweetest revenge against Richardson, winning in four sets, 6-3 in the fourth. He won all the major All-Comers titles – the Irish, the Northern and Wimbledon – and was crowned Champion of Prince's. Of the major singles titles, only Champion of the Northern escaped the clutches of the twins.

The men's doubles in 1882 was a mixed bag for the brothers and rather a different story, far from a tale of Renshaw supremacy. In Dublin, the Fitzwilliam pair of Ernest Browne and Peter Aungier cruised to a win in the All Comers and then came up against the Cheltenham title-holders in the challenge round. The game seesawed between Ireland and

⁶²⁴ 1881 open: Field 11/6/1881 p.810; 1881 handicap: see page 49 above – "The powers that be ruled...."

⁶²⁵ Field 3/6/1882 p.741

⁶²⁶ Treacy 1927 p.13

⁶²⁷ Field 10/6/1882 p.1. The message was repeated in the Field advertisement of 17/6/1882 p.1.

⁶²⁸ Field 24/6/1882 p.864 (open) & 8/7/1882 p.55 (handicap). WR was handicapped Owe 15 but failed to put in an appearance.

⁶²⁹ Field 26/5/1888 p.746 & 25/5/1889 p.740

⁶³⁰ Field 2/9/1882 p.356 – Edward Lake Williams was 16 at the time (see Pastime 16/6/1886 p.415/6)

England but in the end the Fitzwilliam pair won convincingly 6-4, 1-6, 2-6, 6-0, 6-3⁶³¹. The Field attributed their victory to “the admirable way in which they worked together” and judged them the best “matched” pair the Renshaws had encountered. In fact Browne was almost certainly as good a doubles player as either of the brothers and he made this abundantly clear by defeating William in the final of the mixed. Worse was to come for the Cheltenham pair in Oxford some two weeks later. The Northern Lawn Tennis Association had decided that the All England doubles offered the opportunity for them to make their mark down south and they chose as their flag-bearers two of Britain’s top ten, John Hartley & Richard Richardson. North met south in the second round and much to everyone’s surprise the Renshaws were routed 6-3, 6-5, 6-2⁶³². The Field judged the north to be on their form and the south off theirs:

“Mr Hartley at the back of the court was wonderfully certain, while Mr Richardson volleyed extremely well. The play of the brothers Renshaw was nothing like up to their usual form, indeed, it was decidedly bad, hardly a single first service getting over the net, while their judgment as to balls going out of court was more than once at fault ”.

Charles Heathcote in the Badminton Library volume concluded that the Renshaw defeats could be attributed at least in part to an official change to the height of the net put into effect just before the Irish Championships. The height of the net at the posts was reduced from 4 feet to 3 feet six, while the centre height was kept at 3 feet, and Heathcote observed that this provided a “decided check to the service-line position” favoured by the Renshaws; “the back player [found] his position strengthened by the increased facility of playing down the side-lines”⁶³³. The Renshaw approach was to have both players “camping on the service line”⁶³⁴.

The Renshaws had lost the two principal national doubles titles but they found a degree of redemption at the Northern tournament in Manchester the following week. The tournament dates clashed with those of the London Athletic Club, and Lawford, Lubbock and Woodhouse preferred to play at home, while the Renshaws lent their presence to the Northern for the first time as did Browne and Aungier of the Fitzwilliam. John Hartley was back ministering to his parishioners and in his absence for the men’s doubles, Richardson partnered Liverpool club fellow member T.R. Hunt. The Liverpool pair came up against Browne & Aungier in the first round and provided no more than a warm-up, securing just three games in total from the three sets, Hunt no substitute for Hartley⁶³⁵. The Renshaws also benefited from an easy first round and the Cheltenham and Fitzwilliam pairs strolled through weak opposition in the ensuing rounds to meet in the final for a repeat of the Dublin challenge round. Here the brothers turned the tables on the Irish pair and took their revenge in “an extremely hard contest” 6-3, 11-9, 7-5. Browne was in “grand form” but this time his efforts were to no avail⁶³⁶.

While the Renshaws ploughed their furrow at the majors, the other team players of Cheltenham LTC were increasing their presence in secondary open tournaments and playing more in the way of inter-club matches. At the beginning of March, a men’s team which included John Kay, Henry Porter, Percy Hattersley-Smith and Charles Tillard, played a three-pair match against an Oxford University team in the Winter Garden and lost out seven matches to two; the Field judged the contest a good one and Oxford were to be congratulated on a “fair victory over worthy opponents” - the light was very good, the wood court played

⁶³¹ Field 3/6/1882 p.741

⁶³² Field 10/6/1882 p.801

⁶³³ Badminton Library 1903 p.159/160, Field 20/5/1882 p.678. In 1878, the net had been lowered to 4ft 9ins at the posts, 3ft at the centre (Badminton p.146); in 1880, 4ft at the posts (Badminton p.151).

⁶³⁴ Wallis Myers in “Fifty Years of Wimbledon”, 1926, p.18

⁶³⁵ Field 17/6/1882 p.823/4

⁶³⁶ Field 24/6/1882 p.863

splendidly and “some good form and close contests resulted”⁶³⁷. This was followed in early May by a match against Clifton LTC in which each club fielded two pairs of each sex, and it was played on Clifton’s new asphalt courts⁶³⁸. Kay & Porter again led for Cheltenham’s men, with Hattersley-Smith & Rocke supporting, while Abercrombie & Bradley led Cheltenham’s women with Hill & Ramsay as second string⁶³⁹. “The visitors were most kindly welcomed and hospitably entertained by the home team”. The men’s match was a well-balanced contest which resulted in a draw - Kay & Porter won both their matches and Smith & Rocke lost both theirs (- Von Donop played for Clifton as well as “Mr Sweet”, who would have been Charles Lacy-Sweet, later a frequent tournament player and close friend of the Renshaws⁶⁴⁰). In the ladies’ match Clifton were thoroughly outgunned by Cheltenham, whose experienced pairs - perhaps unsurprisingly - won through without losing a set. Just over a week later Cheltenham took on Bath LTC at the Bath club’s grounds in the same team format and they fielded similar men’s pairs (Charles Tillard replacing Rocke in partnership with Smith) while in the women’s pairs Florence Mardall filled the shoes of Marian Bradley⁶⁴¹. Again, the Cheltenham ladies won all their matches but this time they met stiffer resistance and both pairs dropped a set to Clifton’s Mrs Bagnall-Wild & Miss Pope. Cheltenham’s men prevailed on their side but the match came close to being drawn as Smith & Tillard lost to Bath’s first pair, Dudley Pontifex & Von Donop (of multiple club loyalties), and Kay & Porter scraped a win over the same pair 5-6, 6-5, 7-5, somehow coming back from the near hopeless deficit of 0-5 in the third set⁶⁴².

In 1881, Cheltenham LTC had staged an open covered court tournament in April as well as a grass court championships in September and the management committee must have given some consideration to a repetition in 1882. For whatever reason, though, it was not to be and in 1882 the club staged just a grass court event in September⁶⁴³. The decision of the committee may have been influenced by a significant increase in the number and quality of open tournaments available to women. A programme of outside events worthy of the best players was beginning to take shape and there was less need for another home fixture.

The Cheltenham ladies’ cadre gave full support to four outside tournaments: a team of three made the crossing to Dublin in May to help resuscitate the Fitzwilliam’s women’s events; four played in Bath’s second West of England tournament in June; three supported the inaugural Leamington Spa tournament in August; and two ventured to Edgbaston in September to bolster the club’s tournament in its second year⁶⁴⁴. They passed up the Northern’s inaugural women’s events in June but the tournament followed soon after Bath and the sisters Constance and May Langrishe had been persuaded to join the Renshaws, Browne

⁶³⁷ Field 11/3/1882 p.325

⁶³⁸ Field 13/5/1882 p.638

⁶³⁹ “Rocke” would probably have been Walter L Rocke, aged 20, who played in the April 1881 Cheltenham open partnering Oswald Smith in the men’s doubles & Fanny Morris in the mixed. Formerly a day boy at Cheltenham College with parental home in Cheltenham. Left the College in 1880, RMA Sandhurst 1881, army Lieutenant in 1882 (CC register 1910 p.445, census for Emily Rocke 1881, Field 23/4/1881 p.562 etc).

⁶⁴⁰ Field 13/5/1882 p.638: Sweet’s full initials – CLS – shown in match report for Clifton v. Bath directly before Cheltenham match. Renshaw connection: HS Scrivener in “Lawn Tennis At Home & Abroad”, 1903, p.61 re. 1887 match; Western Daily Press 3/11/1892 p.5 (CLS obituary), 7/11/1892 p.3 (ER at his funeral); census 1891 for ER & CLS. CLS reached the Wimbledon singles semi-final in 1887 and scratched to ER.

⁶⁴¹ Field 20/5/1882 p.678

⁶⁴² DD Pontifex was a lawyer in training and had played county cricket for Surrey – a strong all round sportsman. Cambridge Alumni 2023 (ACU), census for DDP 1881, obituary Bath Chronicle 6/10/1934 p.1.

⁶⁴³ Field 23/9/1882 p.460

⁶⁴⁴ Field 9/9/1882 p.384: refers to 1882 as Edgbaston’s “first open tournament” as well as the second year of its tournament; the 1881 event seems to be being treated as local (see also Field 6/8/1881 p.210). Birmingham Post 23/8/1883 p.5 refers to 1883 as the 2nd year).

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and Aungier in Liverpool⁶⁴⁵; the Irish sisters brought a leavening of international quality to the women's ranks and in due course May claimed all the titles on offer – ladies' singles, ladies' doubles with sister Constance, and mixed with William Renshaw⁶⁴⁶.

During the 1882 season, the club was represented at ten tournaments outside Cheltenham including all the majors. Four men and seven women were the club ambassadors:

Cheltenham players in outside tournaments, 1882⁶⁴⁷

<u>Date</u>	<u>Tournament</u>	<u>Event</u>	<u>Cheltenham LTC competitors</u>
22-May (Mon)	Irish Championships (Dublin)	Men's singles Men's doubles Women's singles Mixed doubles	W and E Renshaw W & E Renshaw E Ramsay, M Bradley, M Abercrombie WR & Bradley, ER & Ramsay, Abercrombie & ANO ⁶⁴⁸
30-May (Tues)	West of England (2nd year) (Bath)	Men's singles Men's doubles Women's singles Women's doubles Mixed doubles	JC Kay, HB Porter JC Kay & HB Porter C Hill, F Mardall, F Morris Hill & Morris, Mardall & Mrs B Kay Hill & D Stewart (not CLTC), and 3 others ⁶⁴⁹
06-Jun (Tues)	All England doubles (Oxford)	Men's doubles	W & E Renshaw (for Maida Vale LTC)
10-Jun (Sat)	Northern (Liverpool)	Men's singles Men's doubles Mixed doubles	E Renshaw W & E Renshaw W Renshaw & M Langrishe (not CLTC)
19-Jun (Mon)	Prince's club (London)	Men's singles	E Renshaw
08-Jul (Sat)	All England Championships (Wimbledon)	Men's singles	W and E Renshaw
01-Aug (Tues)	Leamington LTC (1st year) (Warwickshire)	Men's singles Men's doubles Women's doubles Mixed doubles	JC Kay, HB Porter JC Kay & HB Porter F Mardall & B Kay, C Hill & ANO JC & B Kay, HBP & F Mardall, C Hill & ANO
21-Aug (Mon)	Teignmouth LTC (Devon)	Men's singles Men's doubles Mixed doubles	HB Porter HBP & JW Copeland (not CLTC) ⁶⁵⁰ HBP & Miss Davies (probably not CLTC)
28-Aug (Mon)	Devonshire Park Open (Eastbourne)	Men's singles	E Renshaw (handicapped)
05-Sep (Tues)	Edgbaston Cricket & LTC	Women's singles Women's doubles Mixed doubles	C Hill C Hill & M Bradley M Bradley & WH Rawlinson (not CLTC)

In Dublin, the Fitzwilliam committee revived the ladies singles and the presence of three of Cheltenham LTC's best women proved vital to the viability of both the singles and the mixed. Shyness was once again pervasive amongst the Irish ladies. Just four played in the

⁶⁴⁵ Bath ended on Saturday 3rd June, Northern began on 10th June.

⁶⁴⁶ Field 17/6/1882 p.823 & 24/6/1882 p.863

⁶⁴⁷ Table sourced from Field reports of the tournaments

⁶⁴⁸ ANO indicates a partner who was not a CLTC member

⁶⁴⁹ The mixed doubles was a "scratch" event – there was a draw for partners. The 3 others were John and Beatrice Kay and Fanny Morris. There were 32 pairs in all – a hugely popular event.

⁶⁵⁰ JW Copeland was a member of Teignmouth LTC (Field 2/9/1882 p.355)

singles and in the mixed their representation sank to two. The Langrishe sisters declined to enter and the Field suggests that possibly two of them attended the singles final as spectators: “The competition for the Ladies’ Championship promised to be of unusual interest, but lost much of its international character by the presence on the ground, as spectators only, of three of the best players in Ireland”⁶⁵¹. The sisters seemed happy enough to play in Waterford (1881), Liverpool and Cheltenham (1882) but perhaps they found the arena of a capital city more intimidating. Miss Perry was indisposed for the singles event, much to the disappointment of the home crowd, and she too would have been numbered amongst the spectators. Of the four Irish ladies only Miss G. Perry (presumed to be a younger sister of the indisposed Perry) survived to the second round and there fell to Marian Bradley⁶⁵². With a field of just seven, there was only one other second round match and that saw Mary Abercrombie pitted against compatriot Ella Ramsay. Ella obeyed the club pecking order and Mary went through to a final against Marian, where she proved best on the day 6-4, 6-1 (“a comparatively easy victory” according to the Field)⁶⁵³. Irish sentiment was that though the Cheltonians impressed, if Miss Perry had been able to play “she could scarcely have been defeated and would have kept the gold bracelets in Ireland”⁶⁵⁴. The elder Perry never did make her mark in the Fitzwilliam singles – absent in both 1883 and 1884 – and the faith of the home crowd was never put to the test.

Just five pairs played in the mixed doubles and it was essentially Cheltenham LTC versus the Fitzwilliam as each club fielded two strong pairs⁶⁵⁵. William Renshaw entered with his usual partner, Marian Bradley, Ernest Renshaw partnered Ella Ramsay, and, with no more Cheltonians to hand, Mary Abercrombie was twinned with Orlando Coote of Roscommon Club, sometime resident of Tunbridge Wells⁶⁵⁶. The Fitzwilliam was represented by Ernest Browne in harness with Miss Perry, and two Aungiers, Peter Aungier playing with a Miss, perhaps his sister Mary⁶⁵⁷. Abercrombie & Coote were put out by the Aungiers, Ramsay & Ernest Renshaw lost to Browne & Perry, and in the second round William Renshaw & Bradley slipped past the Aungiers to meet with Browne & Perry in the final. Here the two clubs provided a feast for spectators and a happy result for the hosts. The Fitzwilliam galloped into a two set lead, 6-1, 6-0, but then Browne’s form dipped – the Field perceived that at one point he tried to turn the game into a single with William – and Cheltenham hit back 6-4, 6-1 to level the match⁶⁵⁸. The Fitzwilliam then rediscovered its magic touch – Perry “quite surpassing herself” according to Freeman’s Journal – and they clinched the fifth set 6-3 to win the match⁶⁵⁹.

The Irish Championships ended after the West of England Championships began and none of Cheltenham’s five Dublin representatives were available to show their paces in Bath. Nonetheless, Cheltenham LTC fielded a team of six in Bath demonstrating its strength in depth. The men’s events were supported by a strong cast of clubs with representatives from the “locals” of Bath, Clifton and Cheltenham and the Londoners of Maida Vale, West Middlesex and the All England amongst others⁶⁶⁰. None of the men’s top ten put in an

⁶⁵¹ Field 3/6/1882 p.741

⁶⁵² For the Perry sisters Gertrude & Charlotte see p.54 above, “Perry is hard to pin...”; also the Perrys of Ardlui House in “Lesser Houses” of County Laois, Leinster Province, <https://laoishouses.wordpress.com>, 20/5/2016.

⁶⁵³ Field 3/6/1882 p.741

⁶⁵⁴ Freeman’s Jnl 2/6/1882 p.7

⁶⁵⁵ Field 3/6/1882 p.741

⁶⁵⁶ Census 1871 for OR Coote, son of Rev. Sir Algernon Coote, Bart. Aged 27 in 1882. Educated at Malvern College & Brasenose College, Oxford; Football XI and President of Athletics at Malvern; won university swimming championship 1875 (Malvern register 1905 p.43, Oxford Alumni p.295 [ACU]).

⁶⁵⁷ “Tennis Archives” on Peter Aungier, online 27/3/2023

⁶⁵⁸ Field 3/6/1882 p.741

⁶⁵⁹ Freeman’s Jnl 29/5/1882 p.7

⁶⁶⁰ Field 3/6/1882 p.742

appearance but the second rank came forward in strength with Donald Stewart, Von Donop, the Butterworths and Braddell in the van⁶⁶¹. John Kay fell in the first round of the singles to Donald Stewart of West Middlesex while Henry Porter was eliminated by a knee injury, which denied him any further involvement in the tournament and put paid to the Kay & Porter entry for the men's doubles. Twelve ladies entered for the ladies' singles and they came mainly from clubs in south-west England. Current champion Gertrude Gibbs was there to defend her title and the only serious pretenders to the crown were Cheltenham's Florence Mardall, Fanny Morris and Clara Hill. The four leaders progressed comfortably enough to the second round and there Gibbs disposed of Mardall rather easily 6-2, 6-1. Morris and Hill progressed to the third round where they came up against each other while Gibbs had a free pass to the final. Morris overcame Hill 6-4, 6-3 and then took on the champion. The final was a good match, but particularly good for Cheltenham as Morris won through 6-4, 6-4, although the Field held to the view that Gibbs was the best player of the event but weakened by a case of "tennis arm". Its report is unlikely to have dampened Cheltenham spirits⁶⁶².

In the women's doubles, Gibbs & partner Miss Constable eliminated Morris & Hill in the first round after "a capital contest" (6-4 in a third set), then progressed to take on sisters Florence Mardall & Beatrice Kay in the final⁶⁶³. Cheltenham again shaped up against Cirencester. Again there was a tight three set match and again there was disappointment for Cheltenham as Cirencester prevailed 6-4 in the third. A loyal Gibbs camp follower, the Field expressed surprise the sisters came so close to winning and applauded Mardall's "hard hitting and well-placed returns".

The mixed doubles was a "scratch" event in which the men drew for their partners. Clara Hill had the good fortune to collect Donald Stewart and Gertrude Gibbs was paired with Charles Lacy Sweet – two strong women combining with two strong men. The Field assessed them as two of the three strongest pairs, the third being Von Donop and Miss K. Jones. Hill & Stewart saw off the latter pair in the third round and made their way through to a final with Gibbs & Sweet. Cheltenham lady versus Cirencester lady in a third final. There was no cliff-hanger this time. Although "Miss Gibbs appeared to forget her 'tennis arm'", "Donald Stewart played splendidly, his service was particularly good," and the result was victory for Cheltenham & the West Middlesex 6-4, 6-3⁶⁶⁴. Gibbs had contested all three finals and won one, lost two – an impressive performance. All four of Cheltenham's ladies had a share of the spoils: Morris had the singles crown, Hill the mixed, and Mardall & Kay took the runners-up prize for the women's doubles.

The next important tournament for the Cheltenham mixed team was the inaugural open tournament of Leamington Spa LTC in August, and this was to be of particular interest because it gave the Cheltenham ladies their first taste of competition with Maud Watson, who was soon to begin a reign of nearly four years unbeaten at singles in the major tournaments, de facto women's champion of Britain⁶⁶⁵. John Kay was a bridge between the two clubs as he

⁶⁶¹ The choice of a top ten at this time is highly subjective but there seem to be eight players with a suitable track record: the Renshaws, Hartley, Lawford, Richardson, Woodhouse, Browne and Lubbock. Peter Aungier can reasonably be included but there is less clarity beyond – a vacant space (for PA, see p.59/60 this chapter above). Alfred Mulholland retired on doctor's advice in the 2nd round of the 1882 Irish singles (Field 27/5/1882 p.711) and appears to have played in no further reported major tournaments that year or in 1883 (- but was reported shooting grouse in Lochindore in August 1883).

⁶⁶² Field 3/6/1882 p.742

⁶⁶³ Miss Constable was possibly Martha M. Constable, a daughter of Rev John Constable, Rector of Marston Bigott (near Bath) from 1880 and Principal of Cirencester Agricultural College from 1859 to 1880 (census for MMC 1881, Cambridge Alumni for JC [ACU]). MC was still playing in the Cirencester tournament in 1886 (Wilts & Glos Standard 24/7/1886 p.3).

⁶⁶⁴ Field 10/6/1882 p.800

⁶⁶⁵ Field 5/8/1882 p.205 & "Maud Watson", Alan Little, Wimbledon LT Museum 1983, p.8 & 16

had lived in Leamington from 1877, learned his tennis there and played for their first team in 1879⁶⁶⁶. His brother Robert lived locally at least part of the time and was on the tournament organising committee⁶⁶⁷. The women's events on offer were an open mixed, an open women's doubles and a Warwickshire mixed, seemingly closed to the Cheltenham contingent⁶⁶⁸. The men's open singles and Warwickshire singles and doubles were generally well supported. Fourteen couples entered the Warwickshire mixed but just six couples entered the open mixed and four the women's doubles⁶⁶⁹. Cheltenham found itself supplying half the female participants for the open mixed and three of eight players in the women's doubles - as in Dublin, the viability of the open women's events depended on the presence of the Cheltonians. In the mixed Florence Mardall partnered Henry Porter, Beatrice Kay played alongside her husband, and Clara Hill linked up with W.H. Graham of Leamington LTC, John Kay's partner in the Warwickshire men's doubles. Maud Watson, aged seventeen, played with her brother Erskine in the open mixed while her sister Lilian restricted herself to the Warwickshire mixed; neither sister played in the open women's doubles. Erskine played under the banner of Cambridge University while his sisters were identified as Berkswell, their home village⁶⁷⁰. Mardall & Porter unfortunately came up against the Kays in the first round of the mixed and progressed at their expense, while Hill & Graham lost to the Rawlinsons of Leamington. In the second round Cheltenham played the Watsons and had a first encounter with Berkswell's championess in waiting. A close match resulted - "a grand struggle" - and the Cheltenham pair lost in three well fought sets 6-4, 4-6, 3-6. In the final the Watsons routed the Rawlinsons 6-2, 6-1.

Fresh from earning the Field's approval in the West of England, the Mardall sisters saw action again in the women's doubles but the field was so small that when they won the event in its second round, the journal failed to offer a comment and omitted the score from its tournament report. In the open singles John Kay and Henry Porter were casualties of the second round and Erskine Watson rubbed salt in John's wounds by eliminating him in the first round of the Warwickshire singles before going on to claim the title. John fared rather better in the Warwickshire men's doubles and succeeded in winning the event playing with Leamington's W.H. Graham, though it must be said that the opposition was less than distinguished, the best players of the open doubles - Robert Braddell, Edward Williams and Herbert Wilberforce - being disqualified by residence.

After Leamington, Henry Porter made a foray down to Teignmouth on the south coast for the local club's open tournament. Here the fresh sea air and seafood would have appealed while events on court would have been less pleasurable to him as he lost in the first rounds of the men's singles and mixed doubles and retired in the second round of the men's doubles (partnering a Teignmouth club member by the name of J.W. Copeland)⁶⁷¹. The tournament attracted entries from Maida Vale (H. Berkeley) and London Athletic (A.J. Stanley) but in the Field's estimation it was too low in the pecking order to be worthy of more than a single line of commentary: "...some high-class play was shown, that of Mr H. Berkeley, Mr Stanley and Mr F. Thomas being particularly brilliant". The mixed was the only women's event.

⁶⁶⁶ JCK obituary Chronicle 12/1/1929 p.6; club matches: see p.33 this chapter above, footnotes 418 & 419.

⁶⁶⁷ Field 5/8/1882 p.205, censuses for RAK 1861 & 1881. The Kay family seem to have moved to Leamington in stages: John lived there from 1877, his mother was based there when she died in 1880 and brother Robert married there in 1884 (Leamington Spa Courier 10/7/1880 p.5, 19/4/1884 p.5).

⁶⁶⁸ For a doubles tournament in 1880, the requirement was to be a member of a "known Warwickshire club" (Leamington Spa Courier 5 & 11/9/1880 p.5). For the 1881 charity doubles the stated requirement was residence within a 50 mile radius of Leamington (Leamington SC 2/7/1881 p.5), and in 1882 the Field used the loose phrase "limited to the county" for the Warwickshire events (5/8/1882 p.205).

⁶⁶⁹ Field 5/8/1882 p.205

⁶⁷⁰ Leamington Spa Courier 5/8/1882 p.4

⁶⁷¹ Field 2/9/1882 p.355 & 29/7/1882 p.168 (LT Fixtures)

Representing Cheltenham's ladies in their last outside tournament of the year, Clara Hill and Marian Bradley travelled north in early September to play in the Edgbaston Cricket & Lawn Tennis Club open. In 1881 there had been ladies' singles and doubles (won by the Watson sisters) and in 1882 the events were extended to include a mixed doubles⁶⁷². Clara entered the singles, Marian the mixed with Leamington LTC's William Rawlinson, and Clara and Marian played together in the ladies' doubles. Rawlinson was a young Cambridge graduate and assistant master of a small prep school in Leamington – he was to win the men's doubles in tandem with Leamington's J. Goodacre⁶⁷³. The women's field had been weak in 1881 and this may have deterred the Watson sisters in 1882 as they were local but gave the tournament a miss. In the mixed, Bradley & Rawlinson had the misfortune to encounter the ultimate winners in the first round – the husband and wife combination of Charles and Constance Smith from St Leonard's – and made a dignified exit, 2-6, 4-6 (“some of the rallies being very good” in the second set)⁶⁷⁴. Constance Smith then demolished Hill in the second round of the singles 6-0, 6-2, and went on to complete the extinction of Cheltenham hopes by combining with Mrs Dent to defeat Hill & Bradley in the final of the ladies doubles 6-4, 6-3, 6-3 (“Some fine play was shown” but Smith & Dent “were to the fore all through the contest”)⁶⁷⁵. Smith was ladies' champion of St Leonards LTC in Sussex and an accomplished player who was destined to reach the final of the Cheltenham open singles later that month and come within a whisker of victory⁶⁷⁶.

[Cheltenham's 1882 grass court championships, Maud Watson rules the roost](#)

For Cheltenham LTC's ladies, the climax of the tournament season was the club's open tournament which started on 18th September. This, the club's second open grass court championships, was staged as before in Montpellier Gardens and earlier in the year James Lillywhite had been busy extending the tennis facilities, in the process removing the last vestiges of the cultivated gardens that gave the square its name. There was a hint of wistfulness in the Looker-on's observation that fifty years before, a “Garden of Roses” was there to be enjoyed and now its last traces were obliterated, overgrown by tennis courts “of which some thirty or forty have been marked out on the greensward”⁶⁷⁷. The grounds had been “parcelled out” into tennis courts and let for the season, sportsmen ousting promenaders⁶⁷⁸. For the tournament, eight courts had been laid out on the north side and were in excellent condition according to the journal⁶⁷⁹.

The composition of the tournament committee was much the same as in 1881 except that John Kay had now joined the team and he was to manage the final three days of the competition. The events too were much the same as the previous year – singles and doubles for both sexes, mixed doubles and a “Gloucestershire” championship - but handicap singles for club members had been added so that there were now eight events in total.

As in 1881, the Cheltenham open was the leading British championships for women – it stood head and shoulders above all the other tournaments - and in 1882 the entry was the strongest gathering of talent yet seen. The Field declared that “never before have so many fine

⁶⁷² Field 6/8/1881 p.210

⁶⁷³ Rawlinson biog: census for WHR 1881, Cambridge Alumni 2023 (ACU), Leamington Spa Courier 14/10/1882 p.5 etc.

⁶⁷⁴ Field 9/9/1882 p.384. The Smiths: marriage register 2/2/1880 (ACU), census 1891 etc.

⁶⁷⁵ Field 9/9/1882 p.384/5

⁶⁷⁶ Hastings Observer 26/8/1882 p.6, Field 30/9/1882 p.484 (Maud won 6-2, 3-6, 7-5)

⁶⁷⁷ Looker-on 27/5/1882 p.327

⁶⁷⁸ Looker-on 6/5/1882 p.280

⁶⁷⁹ Looker-on 23/9/1882 p.603 & Field 23/9/1882 p.460

lady players met in one competition”⁶⁸⁰. Writing in 1890, Herbert Lawford described the supremacy of the All England championships for men in the following terms⁶⁸¹:

“It is only at this meeting that the question of who is the best man of the year is definitely decided, for in each year since its institution every man has competed who has had the remotest chance of victory, and who has been fit and well at the date fixed for the struggle.”

Before 1882, no one could claim that the women’s singles champion at Cheltenham was definitely the best woman of the year, although she probably was, but the winner in September 1882 could truly be recognised as champion of Britain - Lawford’s criteria, with a few tweaks, were fulfilled. Every woman competed who had a chance of victory and was fit, well, resident on the mainland and free of overriding family obligations. Prime favourites would have been Gertrude Gibbs (winner at Bath and Cheltenham in 1881) and Fanny Morris, who took the crown at Bath in June 1882 after beating Gibbs in the final⁶⁸². However, Fanny had taken it into her head to marry an employee of the Ceylon public works department in the middle of September, and at the time of the tournament was on honeymoon en route to Colombo, and Gertrude entered only the ladies’ and mixed doubles at Cheltenham and was probably carrying an injury (- she was to lose in the first round of the ladies doubles and she and her partner retired in the second round of the mixed)⁶⁸³. Participating in 1882 and next in line would have been Mary Abercrombie (champion of Ireland) and Marian Bradley (Cheltenham champion in April 1881), followed by Constance Smith (Edgbaston champion), Edith Davies (winner of the Waterloo LTC open⁶⁸⁴), Mrs Hornby (winner of the Cirencester Park open⁶⁸⁵), Ella Ramsay (tournament veteran and winner of the Cheltenham ladies’ doubles in September 1881) and Maud Watson (Edgbaston champion 1881 and Leamington mixed doubles champion 1882)⁶⁸⁶. Florence Mardall (Cheltenham champion in 1879 and runner-up in April 1881) would have been a contender if circumstances had permitted but her mother had died on 30th August and the family were in mourning as well as caught up in the process of moving house - neither she nor her sister Beatrice played⁶⁸⁷. Ireland was represented just by Beatrice Langrishe and pity it was that her sister May, who had won the 1882 Northern, and Miss Perry (Cheltenham finalist in September 1881) failed to make the crossing to England. It must be

⁶⁸⁰ Field 23/9/1882 p.460 & also 30/9/1882 p.485

⁶⁸¹ Badminton Library 1903 p.275 – Ch. XIII, HFL on Match-Playing

⁶⁸² Field 3/6/1882 p.742

⁶⁸³ Morris: Looker-on 16/9/1882 p.587, 23/9/1882 p.600 & 602, Homeward Mail 26/9/1882 p.930; obituary for Fanny Glos Echo 21/6/1926 p.6 (“In Ceylon she won many prizes....”). Gibbs: Field 23/9/1882 p.460 - her partner Charles Sweet was later a finalist in the men’s doubles (Fld 30/9/1882 p.484); in the Cirencester open Gibbs had also opted out of the ladies singles, just playing the ladies’ doubles (Field 5/8/1882 p.204).

⁶⁸⁴ Field 8/7/1882 p.56 refers to “Miss Davies, West Bucks LTC” and for Cheltenham she is “Miss Davies, Bucks LTC” (23/9/1882 p.460). Bucks Herald 29/7/1882 p.7: in a report on a tennis match, referred to “Miss Davies, who came to the match crowned with honours and prizes from Lancashire and other places”; list of those present for Schorne College day included “Miss Davies, of Edgcott Rectory” – Edith Mary, daughter of Rev MW Davies.

⁶⁸⁵ Mrs Hornby was most probably Harriet, the wife of Rev Charles Hornby, vicar of Ebrington some 20 miles north-east of Cheltenham (see Field 29/8/1885 p.334 [Mrs HC Hornby at Buxton] & 30/5/1885 p.716 [Mrs H at Bath]). By 1881 she was the mother of 6 children under the age of 15 and was more than twice the age of Maud Watson (Rev CEH census 1881). Rev Charles was an Old Cheltonian and brother of CC Council member Henry Hornby (who in his turn was a colleague of fellow Council member Earl Bathurst of Cirencester Park) (CC register 1910 p’s 16 - 18, 102 & 110). The College link could explain why Mrs H was paired with CC’s Percy Hattersley-Smith in the Cheltenham mixed doubles of April 1881 (lost in first round).

⁶⁸⁶ All per Field reports of the tournaments

⁶⁸⁷ Examiner 6/9/1882 p.8, Looker-on 30/9/1882 p.617/618

said though that May had yet to claim any notable scalps and Perry dropped out of open singles events after 1881, appetite evidently lost.

Fifteen players from ten different clubs took to the lawns of Montpellier Gardens to contest the women's singles and of these all but four had open tournament successes of some sort to their credit (the tyros were Smythe, Hulme and the Hayward sisters⁶⁸⁸). It was as though Dr Abercrombie had issued personal invitations to all the likely contenders and rounded them up – firmly within the bounds of possibility. Cheltenham LTC was represented just by Abercrombie, Bradley, Ramsay and Hill and the club handicap event was there to accommodate lower ranked home team players (- the leaders joined in for the handicap and interestingly Ramsay was awarded the same handicap as Abercrombie and Bradley – Owe 30)⁶⁸⁹. It was clear that the management committee were aiming for a high standard and they certainly achieved their objective. The dark horses were the Watson sisters, then untested against quality opposition, and the eldest, Lilian, came up against Edith Davies in the first round. Two daughters of the country clergy head to head in conflict – Berkswell Rectory, Warwickshire versus Edgcott Rectory, Buckinghamshire. Edith won through in three sets, 6-2, 4-6, 6-1 and the result was an early pointer to the difference in singles capabilities of the Watson sisters. Maud meanwhile began a charge through the best of Cheltenham. She dropped a set to Bradley in the first round but recovered to edge past 6-4, 4-6, 6-3, brushed off Ramsay in the second 6-3, 6-1, had a bye in the third, then cruised past Abercrombie in the fourth 6-1, 6-4 to take her place in the final⁶⁹⁰. Abercrombie for her part had taken out Beatrice Langrishe in the second round in a tight three-set match, winning the decider 6-5. In the final Maud, a teenager, was confronted by Constance Smith of St Leonards, a married woman three years her senior, mother to a young child⁶⁹¹. In contrast to Maud, Constance had encountered only one player of note in her run to the final – Edith Davies, who she defeated after some spirited resistance 6-5, 6-3 (“a wonderfully close contest in their first set”). The final was “a splendid match” decided by an advantage set in which Warwickshire prevailed over Sussex, just⁶⁹². After winning the first set 6-2, Maud conceded the second 3-6 before working her way to a lead of 5-3 in the third. Constance stood her ground and fought back to 5-5, and as it was the final, the advantage set format applied – winner to be two games up. Maud took the eleventh game, Constance pressed her to 30 all in the twelfth, but that was as far as she could go and Maud took the next two points to claim first prize.

In the ladies' doubles Cheltenham's best - Abercrombie & Bradley - met the sisters from Berkswell in the first round and lost out in three sets 6-5, 1-6, 4-6⁶⁹³. In the next round Cheltenham's second best pair - Hill & Ramsay – also fell prey to the Watsons in another close encounter 2-6, 6-5, 4-6, and so the sisters moved on to the final. Here they faced up against Constance Smith partnered by Beatrice Langrishe. Again the Watson's had a fierce struggle – yet another three-set match – but this time their game dropped off in the third and the Anglo-Irish pair claimed first prize with a scoreline of 6-4, 2-6, 6-3⁶⁹⁴.

Maud may have been a relative unknown on first arriving at Montpellier Gardens but she and her brother Erskine had enjoyed some success at the recent Leamington tournament and there she must have caught the eye of Robert Braddell, winner of the open singles there,

⁶⁸⁸ The Hayward sisters – Beatrice & Isabel – seem to have been first cousins of the Watson sisters. Their mother Marianne, born Rowe, was sister to Henry Watson's wife Emily (census for M&E Rowe 1851 etc, ACU). By further coincidence, or not, their father Robert B Hayward was a master at Harrow school in 1881 (census for RBH 1881 etc, ACU) – he also taught maths.

⁶⁸⁹ Field 23/9/1882 p.460. Bradley came up against Ramsay and won 6-3, 6-3.

⁶⁹⁰ Field 23/9/1882 p.460 & 30/9/1882 p.484

⁶⁹¹ Census for Mrs CJS 1891, marine Master's certificate for son Arthur 1902 (DoB 25/3/1881)(ACU) etc.

⁶⁹² Field 30/9/1882 p.484

⁶⁹³ Field 30/9/1882 p.484

⁶⁹⁴ Field 30/9/1882 p.484

because he partnered her for the Cheltenham mixed and brother Erskine for the men's doubles. Erskine was well enough known to Robert beforehand as they had opposed each other at doubles at least twice in June 1881, Erskine playing for Cambridge University and Robert representing Oxford University and the West Middlesex (Robert won on both occasions but the games were well contested)⁶⁹⁵. Maud's partner for the mixed was one of the two strongest players in the competition – the other being William Renshaw. The draw placed William and Robert on opposite sides and after Maud had picked her way to yet another final, she found herself on court in the intimidating presence of Britain's national champion, paired for the occasion with Beatrice Langrishe (- Marian Bradley out of the picture on this occasion). Maud was the stronger woman, William the stronger man, and betting would have favoured the dominant male. If Maud felt any nerves she must have overcome them in the knock-up as the pairs went game and game from the start to level at 6-6 in the first set. Then Robert & Maud took control. They won the next two games to secure the set and then accelerated away to clinch the match 6-2 in the second, the set "very easily gained" in the words of the Field⁶⁹⁶.

In her first major open tournament, and the strongest gathering of female competitors yet known, Maud had come out on top in the singles and mixed doubles and been runner-up in the ladies' doubles. She had won several close matches and was clearly blessed with a strong competitive temperament, to be evidenced over the coming years by a striking consistency of success in tournament singles. A star was born, although in paying tribute the Field showed something less than a sense of her full potential⁶⁹⁷:

"Miss Watson came to the front in the Ladies' Championship, playing better and better in each round that she took part in. Her finest match of all was when she opposed Mrs Smith, the play between these ladies being exceedingly fine....The returns of this lady were at times something wonderful, and by her victory over Mrs Smith, she is entitled to take very high rank; indeed, it is questionable if she would not hold her own with either Miss Perry or Miss M. Langrishe."

The correspondent seems to have had an exaggerated view of the capabilities of Perry and a young May Langrishe (not yet eighteen). Although highly regarded in Ireland, neither had a tournament track record to speak of and when May had played Marian Bradley in a friendly match in Dublin in 1881/82, the game was said by Marian to have been a fiasco as May "went utterly to pieces from the start....through indisposition or nerves"⁶⁹⁸.

Maud and Lilian became members of Cheltenham LTC early in the 1883 tournament season⁶⁹⁹.

The Cheltenham men's open events, by contrast with the women's, saw a decline in quality from the previous year although numbers held up reasonably well. Ernest Renshaw, Ernest Browne and Edgar Lubbock stayed away – none of the old top ten put in an appearance - and the leading names listed for the first round of the singles were Robert Braddell and Pelham Von Donop, George Butterworth also being absent⁷⁰⁰. Of the home team players, only Percy Hattersley-Smith ventured into the All-Comers as John Kay was evidently caught up in the administration of the tournament, if not preoccupied with Mardall family

⁶⁹⁵ Field 25/6/1881 p.877

⁶⁹⁶ Field 30/9/1882 p.484/5

⁶⁹⁷ Field 30/9/1882 p.485

⁶⁹⁸ Bradley quoted in a letter to the Times from AG Bradley 20/4/1939 p.19. Maud finally played May in the final of the Irish Championships in May 1884 and won comfortably 6-3, 6-2, 6-2 (Field 24/5/1884 p.715 & 31/5/1884 p.739). May was evidently born on 31/12/1864 (Dublin Evening Mail 5/1/1865 p.2, census 1911).

⁶⁹⁹ See page 74 this chapter below – "In February 1883 the Arrivals..."

⁷⁰⁰ Field 23/9/1882 p.460

affairs, and Henry Porter humbly restricted himself to the club handicap. Ten clubs were represented, including the West Middlesex and London Athletic, but the All England, Prince's and Fitzwilliam were notably absent and the singles was a lack lustre affair. Braddell of the West Middlesex had a comfortable run to take the title, "rather easily" beating Von Donop in the semi-final 6-1, 6-4⁷⁰¹ and then dismissing Arthur Fuller in the final by the same score, "his volleying powers standing him in good stead"⁷⁰². None of his opponents managed to salvage a set in the course of their defeats⁷⁰³. The men's doubles prompted no more than a barely concealed yawn from the Field as there was a dearth of close contests and none of the matches went to a deciding set⁷⁰⁴. Braddell, partnered by Maud's brother Erskine (recently graduated from Trinity Cambridge and now joined to the brotherhood of West Middlesex), cantered to yet another victory⁷⁰⁵. As Braddell won all three open events without conceding a set, and his victims included William Renshaw in the mixed, the tournament was something of a personal triumph but his was really the only male performance of note⁷⁰⁶. On a national scale, the Cheltenham men's open events had become a poor relation to the women's, but they were to revive in later years with the return of top ten players such as Ernest Browne⁷⁰⁷.

Maud Watson

Like so many of the early movers-and-shakers of lawn tennis, Maud had a connection to Harrow School, although inevitably not from education at the school. She was born in Harrow in 1864 to an assistant master of the school, the Reverend Henry William Watson⁷⁰⁸. The Reverend Watson taught mathematics at Harrow for eight years until 1865 when he was appointed Rector of Berkswell, a village of around 1,350 souls some four miles west of Coventry and about ten miles north-west of Leamington Spa⁷⁰⁹. His appointment carried parish duties but Henry was a distinguished academic and in Berkswell he devoted his energies principally to mathematical and scientific studies⁷¹⁰. He was an examiner in mathematics at different times for both Cambridge and London Universities and published a textbook on geometry in 1871; he wrote learned papers and contributed articles to academic journals on a range of subjects and his best known work was a treatise on the Kinetic Theory of Gases published in 1876. His contribution to science was recognised by election as a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1881⁷¹¹. His may have been a village parish but the rectory was substantial – more small mansion than family home - and it came with over a hundred acres of glebe land⁷¹². He was said to have built on to it to provide accommodation for pupils he took in and it was so large that during the first world war his successor was able to provide space for a

⁷⁰¹ Field 23/9/1882 p.460

⁷⁰² Field 30/9/1882 p.484/5. Arthur Fuller, a medical student at Edinburgh University, had won the Moffat tournament at the end of August (Field 2/9/1882 p.356, census for AF 1881). See "The Story of Edinburgh University Athletic Club", Col. CM Usher, 1966, p.298 & "Dr Arthur Fuller (medical sciences)" S2A3, Biographical Database of Southern African Science, 2023.

⁷⁰³ Field 30/9/1882 p.485

⁷⁰⁴ Field 30/9/1882 p.484

⁷⁰⁵ Erskine was a contemporary of George Butterworth at Marlborough College (Marlborough register 1905 p.264 for GMB [1872 – 1877] & p.274 for EGW [1873 – 1878]).

⁷⁰⁶ Field 30/9/1882 p.485

⁷⁰⁷ See Cheltenham Championship Roll on p.83 at the end of this chapter – D Stewart, RD Sears, Ernest Browne, J Dwight, H Grove; William Renshaw in the doubles.

⁷⁰⁸ Baptism register 16/12/1864 (ACU), "Maud Watson", Alan Little, Wimbledon LT Museum, 1983 p.2

⁷⁰⁹ Kelly's Directory 1896 for Warwickshire, p.35/6, quoting population in 1891 of 1,374.

⁷¹⁰ Kenilworth Advertiser 20/9/1902 p.5 & 17/1/1903 p.3 (obituary)

⁷¹¹ ODNB online for HWW 2015

⁷¹² Kelly 1896 p.35

twelve-bed rehabilitation hospital while remaining in occupation himself⁷¹³. Maud grew up in Berkswell and the rectory was to be her home until her late thirties⁷¹⁴. Henry was well versed in the ways of Harrow and apparently in sympathy with its enthusiasm for sport, although he sent his only son to Marlborough⁷¹⁵. His favoured pastime was mountaineering and he was one of the founders of the Alpine Club in 1857⁷¹⁶.

Maud learnt her tennis on the rectory lawns in the company of her elder siblings Lilian and Erskine, respectively seven and five years her senior⁷¹⁷. There is no report of the sisters playing as members of a local club before the late 1880's but Erskine in 1880 was probably playing at least college tennis at Cambridge and there is mention of him representing a Cambridge club called the May Flies in 1881⁷¹⁸. When Cambridge University LTC was founded in May 1881, Erskine joined up and he was runner-up in the club's first singles tournament that June⁷¹⁹. Later in June he made the pilgrimage to Prince's Club in London as part of the Cambridge VI for a historic first Oxbridge match and lost all his three doubles matches (but ran Oxford's Braddell & Comber close)⁷²⁰. Fellow Trinity College student Barclay Buxton had played at Wimbledon in 1880 (and been a casualty of the first round) and he became the first secretary of the university tennis club⁷²¹. He was Erskine's conqueror in the first club singles tournament and partnered him in at least one May Flies match. Erskine therefore had some experience of how the game was played in serious competition and could pass on to his sisters his knowledge of stroke-play and tactics. Their father Henry used to take in and tutor young men in preparation for university and these students in residence proved a source of hitting partners for Maud, and may perhaps also have helped with her introduction to the basics of the game⁷²². One, Robert Blackwood, part of the household in April 1881, partnered her in the 1882 Warwickshire mixed doubles in Leamington⁷²³.

Maud's first recorded tournament was a charity doubles event staged in July 1881 on a private estate on the outskirts of Leamington, and she and Lilian came away with their first winner's trophies in the form of silver bracelets. In the absence of staging under the name of an established club, this might have been expected to be no more than a domestic affair, but the tournament was linked to a bazaar in aid of a regional church charity and benefited from the patronage of the Bishop of Worcester and a large number of titled ladies (four Countesses and umpteen Ladies and Honourables) – and society rallied to the cause⁷²⁴. The tournament was open to ladies and gentlemen living within a radius of fifty miles of Leamington and there was strong support from a number of qualifying clubs. The referee and secretary for the tournament was the curate of Leamington Priors – appropriately as the charity existed to

⁷¹³ Coventry Herald 22/1/1915 p.9, Coventry Standard 12/3/1915 p.2

⁷¹⁴ Kenilworth Advertiser 17/1/1903 p.3, census 1901 for MW etc

⁷¹⁵ Marlborough register 1905 p.274 for EGW

⁷¹⁶ ODNB online for HWW 2015

⁷¹⁷ A. Little 1983 p.2/3

⁷¹⁸ Field 21/5/1881 p.701 – May Flies v. Esher LTC at Cambridge

⁷¹⁹ Formation: Field 14/5/1881 p.668. Tournament: Field 11/6/1881 p.810

⁷²⁰ Field 25/6/1881 p.877

⁷²¹ Harrow register 1911 p.501, Field 10/7/1880 p.74

⁷²² A. Little 1983 p.3 & censuses for HWW 1871 & 1881

⁷²³ Field 5/8/1882 p.205, Census 1881 for Henry Watson. Blackwood was an alumnus of Melbourne Grammar School, aged 20 and en route to Trinity Hall, Cambridge (Cambridge alumni, ACU). A keen sportsman, in 1886 he was runner-up in England's amateur lightweight boxing championships (Australian DNB 30/4/2023). The two pupils in residence at census 1871 – Frank Burnett & Herbert Flower – were tutored on their way to Trinity Cambridge.

⁷²⁴ Leamington Spa Courier 25/6/1881 p.5, 2/7/1881 p.5, & 23/7/1881 p.4. The charity was the Ladies Home Mission Association, founded in connection with the Society for Promoting the Employment of Additional Curates (the aim was to increase the number of clergy in “densely-peopled” districts).

promote the employment of curates – and the Leamington LTC club secretary was on hand to provide guidance while other club members assisted as umpires⁷²⁵. Players from the Leamington, Edgbaston and Leicester tennis clubs entered and all told eleven pairs of women and nineteen of men battled it out on courts that were “a little fast” but in excellent order in the beautiful grounds of Shrubland Hall⁷²⁶. There was a large gathering of spectators around the courts – a throng of the fashionable - and according to the Leamington Spa Courier the ladies’ doubles proved a particular attraction: “...as the contest grew nearer its close, loud applause greeted the performance of any particularly good stroke”⁷²⁷. This must have been Maud’s first real taste of playing in front of an audience and if it was, she must have acclimatised in the early rounds against weak opposition as she and Lilian were able to do themselves justice when they came up against a strong Leicester pair in the final, Mrs Watts and Miss Noon (sisters too). Berkswell won through 6-2, 5-6, 6-4 and Maud and Lilian collected their bracelets, the start of a formidable collection of silver. Watts & Noon also played on the ladies’ tournament circuit in later years and they were to reprise their match with the Watsons in the final of the 1883 Leamington all-comers ladies’ doubles, with the same outcome⁷²⁸. In 1885 Watts won the Buxton open ladies’ doubles playing with Miss Bracewell⁷²⁹.

Almost immediately afterwards, in the same week, the Watson sisters competed in the Edgbaston Club tournament and here Maud played her first open singles. Edgbaston was some twelve miles north-west of Berkswell and almost as local as Leamington. Nine ladies played in the women’s singles and as most had played in the Shrubland event, they would have felt no surprise when Maud and Lilian won through to contest the final, Watts and Noon being otherwise engaged⁷³⁰. Maud won the singles title and then combined with her sister to take the doubles. The Field, which had neglected to give any space to the Shrubland doubles, now perked up and took note of the sisters’ performance on the courts of an established club: the Watson play was adjudged “very good and at times brilliant...throughout the tournament” but the journal offered no comment on their technique and in lumping the sisters together, showed no awareness of Maud’s potential. Edgbaston was Maud’s one and only open singles tournament of the year but her performance was enough to catch the eye of Charles Heathcote, the Venerable Bede of early tennis history, and in his review of 1881 he included Maud on his list of ladies worthy of mention: “No ladies’ championship had as yet been instituted at Wimbledon, nor was any such match played in this year at Dublin, but Miss G.R. Gibbs at Bath, Miss Bradley at Cheltenham, Miss Cole at Exmouth, and Miss M. Watson at Edgbaston, respectively evinced their superiority to their rivals”⁷³¹. At the end of the year Maud was just seventeen.

Maud’s next open singles was Cheltenham’s second grass court championships in September 1882 and her win there was the beginning of nearly four years unbeaten at the top of the women’s game, a record of extraordinary consistency that included victories at the first and second All England ladies’ singles at Wimbledon⁷³². In 1883 she swept the floor at Cheltenham and the West of England in Bath – stretched only by Edith Davies who took her to

⁷²⁵ Leamington Spa Courier 23/7/1881 p.5. Referee: Rev AG Fryer (Cambridge Alumni, ACU); LLTC umpires: Whieldon (LLTC Secretary), Adams, Haynes.

⁷²⁶ Leamington Spa Courier 23/7/1881 p.4, Warwick Advertiser 23/7/1881 p.7. Names of some of the club players: Leicester LTC - Watts (2), Noons (2); Edgbaston LTC - Chamberlains (4), Hart; Leamington LTC - Tomkins, Shapley, Rawlinson, Goodacre.

⁷²⁷ Leamington Spa Courier 23/7/1881 p.4

⁷²⁸ Field 7/7/1883 p.12

⁷²⁹ Field 5/9/1885 p.379. Historian Charles Heathcote treated this event as the first All England Ladies’ Doubles (Badminton Library 1903 p.168 & p.438).

⁷³⁰ Field 6/8/1881 p.210 & Leamington Spa Courier 23/7/1881 p.4

⁷³¹ Badminton Library 1903 p.158

⁷³² Field 5/6/1886 p.738 - beaten for the first time; A. Little 1983 p.8 & 16

three sets at both events⁷³³ - and then completed a hat-trick of singles events by winning at Exmouth, where the field included tournament regulars from Cheltenham and Leicester and Lilian Cole of Exmouth, champion for the past two years⁷³⁴. Her list of noteworthy victims ran to Edith Davies (at Bath & Cheltenham), Florence Mardall and Lilian Cole (at Exmouth), Mrs Hornby (at Bath), Florence Davies (at Cheltenham), and Miss Pope (at Bath – after Pope had put out Gertrude Gibbs)⁷³⁵. She took no Irish scalps, as none were there to be taken, but rectified the omission in 1884 when she extended the boundaries of her singles empire to Dublin and London, conquering all who crossed her path including her sister Lilian, May & Beatrice Langrishe, Blanche Bingley, Mrs F. Watts, Florence Mardall and Lilian Cole⁷³⁶.

1885 saw the continuation of her dominance and confirmation of her position as national champion, another year without defeat. Some strong new contenders in the shape of Louise Martin and Lottie Dod took arms against her and drew blood, but they were seen off as she claimed the singles crowns of Wimbledon, Dublin, the Northern, Cheltenham and London Athletic⁷³⁷. This was the pinnacle of her success. In 1886 the leaders of the following pack caught up with her and her supremacy came to an end - she was defeated in three major tournaments by three different young players on the rise, all destined for long and illustrious tournament careers. At the beginning of June in the West of England at Bath, Maud despatched Bracewell, Gibbs, Bingley and Martin – an exceptionally tough draw – then fell to Lottie Dod in the final in a close contest⁷³⁸. At Cheltenham, she had an easier run to the final, then lost to Louise Martin in another close game⁷³⁹. In the Northern she took her revenge on Dod in the challenge round, well rested through champion's privilege⁷⁴⁰, but at Wimbledon Blanche Bingley won the ladies' All-Comers and then wrested the title from her in straight sets 6-3, 6-3⁷⁴¹. From Cheltenham 1882 to Bath 1886 – three years and eight months - Maud ruled the ladies' singles, and now her regime was ended. Although she continued to compete at the top for another three years, the 1886 Northern was to be her last major singles title⁷⁴² and rule by triumvirate followed as Dod, Martin and Bingley harvested the major titles for years to come.

In tournament ladies' and mixed doubles between 1882 and the end of 1885 Maud collected titles with less absolute consistency than in singles but she invariably won the events she entered. Playing exclusively with Lilian as her partner, she won the ladies' doubles once at each of the Irish, West of England, Cheltenham, Edgbaston and Leamington tournaments – a success rate of five out of eight events entered. In 1884 she and Lilian lost twice to Florence Mardall & partner (Edith Davies at Cheltenham, Lilian Cole at Exmouth) and there must be a

⁷³³ Bath: 2-6, 6-1, 6-3 (Field 2/6/1883 p.724); Cheltenham: 6-3, 5-6, 6-1 (Field 9/6/1883 p.766). In 1884, Edith was the next best thing to Maud, winning at Bath, Cheltenham and the Northern in Maud's absence.

⁷³⁴ Field 18/8/1883 p.250, A. Little 1983 p.4 & 16. Lilian Cole's wins: Field 20/8/1881 p.268 & 19/8/1882 p.283 (also Exmouth Journal 20/8/1881 p.5 [Lilian]). Cheltenham - Florence Mardall; Leicester - Mrs Watts & Miss Noon.

⁷³⁵ Pope beat Gibbs 6-2, 2-6, 6-3 in the third round (Field 2/6/1883 p.724). Lilian Watson, by contrast to Maud, lost in three consecutive first rounds: to Edith Davies at Cheltenham 1882 & Bath 1883, and Florence Davies at Cheltenham 1883; she gave the 1883 Exmouth singles a miss.

⁷³⁶ Field reports for All England, London Athletic, Irish & Exmouth tournaments. Lilian – AELTC; Bingley – LAC & AELTC; Langrishes – Irish; Watts, Mardall & Cole – Exmouth.

⁷³⁷ A. Little 1983 p.16. Scores against 1885 new contenders per Field reports: Louise Martin 6-2, 4-6, 6-3 (Dublin) & 6-2, 6-3 (Cheltenham); Lottie Dod 8-6, 7-5 (Northern). Blanche Bingley was defeated at London Athletic 6-4, 6-2 and Wimbledon 6-1, 7-5.

⁷³⁸ Field 5/6/1886 p.737

⁷³⁹ Field 12/6/1886 p.776 & 19/6/1886 p.811

⁷⁴⁰ Field 3/7/1886 p.27

⁷⁴¹ Field 17/7/1886 p.94 & 24/7/1886 p.144

⁷⁴² A. Little 1983 p.16. Maud beat Bingley over 3 sets in the final of the 1886 Exmouth tournament but the entry was weak (Field 7/8/1886 p.222).

suspicion that family loyalty came at the expense of an unblemished record⁷⁴³. In mixed she had little choice but to look for partners outside the family, as Erskine left home for London to train as a solicitor and joined the West Middlesex in 1882⁷⁴⁴, and over the same four seasons she played many more mixed events and enjoyed a better success rate – eleven titles from thirteen open events with seven different partners: the Irish twice (with William Renshaw), the Northern once (again with William Renshaw), Cheltenham twice (once with Robert Braddell, once Wilfred Milne), Leamington twice (once with Erskine, once Edward Williams), Exmouth twice (once with Williams, once John Deykin), Teignmouth (with Erskine), and London Athletic (with Harry Grove)⁷⁴⁵. Her two losses came at Cheltenham, in partnership with Donald Stewart, and one of these was against Florence Mardall & George Butterworth – Florence was no mean doubles player⁷⁴⁶. Such consistent winning with so many different partners says much for Maud’s versatility as well as her skill.

In his biographical booklet of 1983, Alan Little gave this profile of Maud as a player by way of introduction to her tournament record:

“Maud developed an all-round game which had no apparent weaknesses. She had an ideal temperament and her cool, quiet concentration often upset her more excitable opponents. Her over-arm serve gave her an edge over most opponents, who were wary of her volleying and driving ability. Her judgment was excellent for she was able to discover her opponents’ weak points very early and take advantage of these to the utmost, while her behaviour on court was an example to all.”⁷⁴⁷

To win so consistently she needed a strong competitive temperament, and she certainly had that.

In February 1883 the Arrivals pages of Cheltenham’s local journals recorded that Miss Watson and Miss M. Watson arrived from Berkswell at Hazel Lea, Clara Hill’s family home⁷⁴⁸. The stay with Cheltenham LTC’s Grande Dame (in her house of many bedrooms) was probably part of a process of inducting the sisters into the club⁷⁴⁹. Reports of the Cheltenham tournament of 1882 had shown no club affiliation for the sisters – the Field merely labelled them “Berkeswell” [*sic*] - and it seems possible that at the time they had no “club” as such beyond a group who played regularly on the lawns of Berkswell rectory⁷⁵⁰. At the end of May 1883 no more information was forthcoming from the Field in its reports of the West of England tournament – even Berkeswell was dropped - and the local *Western Daily Press* was only marginally more helpful by designating Maud “Coventry” in its report⁷⁵¹. This changed at the Cheltenham tournament in June. The Looker-on led the way, categorising the sisters “CLTC”

⁷⁴³ A. Little 1983 p.16 & Field reports inc. 14/6/1884 p.832 (Cheltenham) & 9/8/1884 p.212 (Exmouth).

⁷⁴⁴ Page 70 this chapter above, “Braddell, partnered by Maud Watson’s brother...”. Erskine was articled to CJ Mander of Lincoln’s Inn and took his intermediate exams in April 1884 and finals in June 1885 (Law Society lists of candidates April 1884 and June 1885 [ACU]).

⁷⁴⁵ Field reports for the tournaments and A. Little 1983 p.16 etc. Note: open events only – Warwickshire doubles etc. not included.

⁷⁴⁶ Field 9/6/1883 p.766

⁷⁴⁷ A. Little 1983 p.3

⁷⁴⁸ Looker-on 10/2/1883 p.90, Examiner 14/2/1883 p.2

⁷⁴⁹ Hazel Lea: see Chapter 8 page 10 above, “An eight-bedroom villa in Lansdown Road...”

⁷⁵⁰ Just one reference to “Berkeswell LTC” is to be found in the BNA before the announcement of the formation of a club in 1914 (3 courts, 35 members [Coventry E Telegraph 25/4/1914 p.3]). In 1889 the Hampshire Advertiser reported a mixed doubles match for 3 pairs between Berkswell LTC and New Forest LTC (14/8/1889 p.4).

⁷⁵¹ Western Daily Press 4/6/1883 p.3 (echoed by the Bath Chronicle 7/6/1883 p.2). The ladies’ doubles was open to “all members of recognised lawn tennis clubs, or to any person introduced by a patron, or by a member of the committee” (Western DP 31/5/1883 p.3). Membership of a club was not obligatory.

in its report of the first round of the ladies' singles (- Maud won, Lilian lost), and the Field followed suit, although neither sister chose to play in the club handicap singles⁷⁵². Maud and Lilian had signed up to Cheltenham LTC and a year later when Maud won the first All England ladies' championship and William Renshaw maintained his dominance in the men's, the Looker-on could celebrate the club's capture of both All England singles titles and enthuse that "Miss Maud Watson of the Cheltenham Lawn Tennis Club" and her sister Lilian "produced some really brilliant play"⁷⁵³.



9.4 The Watson sisters in Dublin, 1884. Standing - Lilian and Herbert Lawford; seated - Ernest Renshaw and Maud.⁷⁵⁴

There were several tennis clubs in striking distance of Berkswell. Edgbaston was some 12 miles to the north-west, Leamington 10 miles to the south-east and Wellesbourne – home club for Mrs Hornby – 16 miles south. Cheltenham, at over 40 miles to the south-west, was a long ride from Berkswell but the club had a strong group of female players, close links to the Renshaws, a tournament that attracted the nation's leading ladies, and first class facilities, indoor, outdoor, hard court and grass. Members had experience of all the majors and were uniquely well qualified to provide an inside track to the Fitzwilliam and All England

⁷⁵² Looker-on 9/6/1883 p.362 & 16/6/1883 p.380, Field 9/6/1883 p.766 & 16/6/1883 p.809.

⁷⁵³ Looker-on 26/7/1884 p.473.

⁷⁵⁴ This image is shown with the consent of the Archives Committee of Fitzwilliam LTC, email 22/1/2020

tournaments, to introduce and to guide. Cheltenham was certainly the place for a talented sportswoman ambitious to develop her game to its full potential. And when it came to getting to and from the club, the Watsons would not have been dependent on horsepower. Berkswell had a direct rail link to Birmingham, Cheltenham likewise, and it was possible for the sisters to travel to and from Cheltenham by rail. The fastest train from Berkswell to Birmingham was around 35 minutes and from Birmingham to Cheltenham around 90 minutes – rail may actually have been preferable to road⁷⁵⁵.

Neither Maud nor Lilian married. They lived on in the rectory at Berkswell until illness forced the retirement of their father and a move to Brighton in 1902, but after his death early in 1903, they returned with their mother and slipped back into village life, now accommodated away from the grand rectory in a five-bedroom house called Holly Lodge⁷⁵⁶. While Henry was in office as rector, preoccupied with his research and academic affairs, the sisters had assisted with his pastoral duties and they were so assiduous in their work with the local community that when he retired, a group of parishioners made presentations to them as well as to their father⁷⁵⁷. Henry was given an illuminated address expressing appreciation of his benevolent management of church matters over thirty-six years, while Lilian was presented with a gold watch and Maud a ring in acknowledgement of the “debt of gratitude” owed to them “for their kindness and for the unfailing interest which they have shown in all the affairs of the parish”.

After retiring from tournament tennis in 1889, Maud appears to have turned to foxhunting as a sporting pastime and from 1894 her name was to be found in reports of the meets of the North Warwickshire Hunt (kennels in nearby Kenilworth)⁷⁵⁸. Her involvement with the local community continued unabated after her return from Brighton and at different times she was secretary of the Berkswell section of the Red Cross Society (1910)⁷⁵⁹, secretary of the local Mission to Seamen⁷⁶⁰, president of the Berkswell Women’s Institute⁷⁶¹ and Berkswell’s first female parish councillor⁷⁶². Her willingness to shoulder responsibility in voluntary organisations was reflective of a robust temperament and an aptitude for management. When war came in 1914 half the rectory was converted to be a VAD auxiliary hospital for the wounded, with capacity for about twenty, and Maud’s Red Cross training came to the fore - she was made commandant⁷⁶³. Some of her early patients had seen action in Flanders and Gallipoli⁷⁶⁴. Maud served as commandant from 1915 to 1919 and was awarded the MBE in

⁷⁵⁵ Per 1883 rail timetables: Examiner 27/6/1883 p.6 (Cheltenham), Coventry Herald 5/1/1883 p.3 (Berkswell). Great Western Ry for Cheltenham to Birmingham, London & North Western Ry for Berkswell to Birmingham.

⁷⁵⁶ Kenilworth Advertiser 17/1/1903 p.3 (obituary HWW) & 8/6/1907 p.5 (death of Mrs W at Holly Lodge); census for MW & LW 1911 (Holly Lodge). Coventry Herald advertisements for Holly Lodge - letting 6/6/1884 p.2, sale of contents 17/6/1904 p.4.

⁷⁵⁷ A. Little 1983 p.14, Kenilworth Advertiser 20/9/1902 p.5

⁷⁵⁸ Kenilworth Advertiser 3/2/1894 p.4, 23/2/1907 p.8, 11/7/1908 p.8; Leamington Spa Courier 7/11/1896 p.7 etc. Little refers to her fondness for animals, “especially horses”, but she would have shared the attitude of farmers to foxes (A. Little 1983 p.15).

⁷⁵⁹ Kenilworth Advertiser 31/12/1910 p.4. To become a member of the Red Cross she would have had to qualify in first aid and sick nursing. The purpose of the Red Cross then was to be ready to aid the sick and wounded in the event of war.

⁷⁶⁰ Coventry Herald 20/12/1919 p.14

⁷⁶¹ Kenilworth Advertiser 6/3/1920 p.2

⁷⁶² Coventry Standard 8/4/1922 p.5: elected first woman councillor, “Miss Watson hopes to use her powers specially in the interests of the women”.

⁷⁶³ Coventry Standard 12/3/1915 p.2, Cov’ Herald 4/6/1915 p.9 & Cov’ Standard 11/6/1915 p.8. VAD: Voluntary Aid Detachment.

⁷⁶⁴ Coventry Herald 4/6/1915 p.9

recognition of her services in charge of the unit⁷⁶⁵. She stayed on in Berkswell until 1932 when she moved to Charmouth on the south coast. She died in 1946 at the venerable age of eighty-one and was buried in the churchyard of the village that was her home for over sixty years⁷⁶⁶.

[The guard begins to change – farewell to Lillywhite, the Abercrombies and Bradley](#)

By the end of the 1882 season the club was well established and enjoying what might be called a state of stable prosperity. Its grounds in Montpellier Gardens were secure, its annual tournament was well regarded, and its match players were successfully involved at all levels of the emerging tournament circuit. Now, though, the central team of players and administrators established in 1878/79 began to be eroded as illness and family demands took their toll. Of the players, Fanny Morris had sailed away to Ceylon in September in what was a happy event for her but a regrettable one for the club as it lost from its ranks the reigning champion of the West of England. Amongst the administrators, James Lillywhite was the first loss and a tragic one.

In the spring of 1882 when James was fifty-six, his health began to deteriorate and by the beginning of August there was widespread concern⁷⁶⁷. In its edition of 8th August, some six days before Cheltenham Cricket Week was due to begin, the Chronicle regretted to learn that its able arranger and manager was “very unwell” but expressed the hope that he would rally sufficiently to take his usual active part in proceedings⁷⁶⁸. This was not to be and with James “seriously indisposed”, Messrs Lawrence and Sweeting, together with a Captain Homfray, stepped in to manage arrangements for the cricket festival⁷⁶⁹. James was suffering from stomach cancer and late in August he travelled to London for a consultation with doctors but they could provide no remedy⁷⁷⁰. On his return to Cheltenham he took to his bed with only one outcome in view⁷⁷¹. The illness was long and painful, but bravely borne, and James died at 3 Queen’s Circus on 24th November with his daughter Fanny at his side⁷⁷². It was eight years since he had first offered Sphairistike sets for sale to Cheltenham’s sporty set⁷⁷³, nearly five years since he masterminded the introduction of tennis into the Winter Gardens⁷⁷⁴, and two tennis seasons since he took over the lease of Montpellier Gardens and created a first class venue for Cheltenham’s open grass court tournaments⁷⁷⁵. Fourteen years had passed since Ellen Renshaw first moved into Clarence House and became his near neighbour, unwittingly placing her sons in close proximity to a master teacher of ball games⁷⁷⁶. James was a continuous and central presence during the development of lawn tennis in Cheltenham but his role was never properly acknowledged and chronicled and it is hard to give full flesh to an assessment of his impact on those early years. He was there, he knew everyone, and from the

⁷⁶⁵ A. Little 1983 p.15, Coventry Standard 26/4/1919 p.9, awarded MBE 1/1/1920 (iwm.org.uk 2023, per London Gazette 30/3/1920)

⁷⁶⁶ A. Little 1983 p.15. St John the Baptist churchyard, Berkswell (ACU).

⁷⁶⁷ Date of birth: The Cheltonian, January 1883 edition p.15/16 “In Memoriam)

⁷⁶⁸ Chronicle 8/8/1882 p.4

⁷⁶⁹ Gloucester Journal 19/8/1882, p.8; “Lawrence” was Edwin Lawrence, James’ son-in-law, and Sweeting would have been the Montpellier Gardens/Rotunda co-lessee Charles Sweeting.

⁷⁷⁰ Cancer: death certificate dated 25/11/1882; cause of death “Scirrhus of Stomach 6 months. Liver. Exhaustion”; age at time of death: 57. London doctors: Grenville Simons 2004, p.52

⁷⁷¹ Grenville Simons 2004 p.52

⁷⁷² Death certificate 25/11/1882

⁷⁷³ Looker-on 12/9/1874 p.601, Chronicle 29/9/1874 p.1

⁷⁷⁴ Open for tennis: Looker-on 22/12/1877 p.1, Chronicle 19/3/1878 p.4; W Garden rink manager 16/6/1877 p.1, Chronicle 8/10/1878 p.4.

⁷⁷⁵ Chronicle 19/4/1881 p.8

⁷⁷⁶ Looker-on 28/3/1868 p.203 – “Removals”

time that Cheltenham's first tennis court was marked out he was in support supplying guidance and equipment and working behind the scenes to provide courts and venues to meet the needs of pioneer player and organiser alike. His work was largely unsung but knowing his reputation in cricket, we must conclude that his influence was profound. In a letter to the Times in 1927, Sir Harry Perry Robinson, Times official war correspondent in the First World War, asserted that Clopton Wingfield's tennis game was derived from the Badminton kit first marketed by James in England in 1873; if so, James can be said to have prompted the very launch of lawn tennis in 1874⁷⁷⁷.

His passing was openly mourned by the cricketing world, Cheltenham town and Cheltenham College. All were fulsome in his praise. The College magazine's *In Memoriam* reported that many masters and present pupils attended his funeral and it recalled with nostalgia his cricketing exhortations:

“.....and many Old Cheltonians absent in India and all the world over would have their hearts by the graveside of their old cricket tutor and friend, for ‘Jim’ had indeed endeared himself to our hearts.....The well-known voice seems to be ringing in our ears ‘Play, gentlemen, play,’ ‘Oh, deary, deary’, and at the nets ‘Bring that left shoulder forward’”⁷⁷⁸.

As a mark of the school's high regard, the Principal the Rev Herbert Kynaston acted as officiating clergyman at his funeral⁷⁷⁹. The Chronicle paid tribute to James's services to sport and went on to describe him as “one of our foremost caterers for the amusement of the public”, offering the view that “perhaps as an energetic entrepreneur he had few equals”; this was a cautious assessment but the journal did well in looking beyond the world of cricket and his role at the boys' College⁷⁸⁰. On the day of his internment a large number of his fellow townsmen showed their respect by partially closing their shops and drawing down their blinds⁷⁸¹. Family, friends, business colleagues and associates gathered for a fond farewell and in 1883 the committee of the cricket week marked his passing in a tangible way by donating the profit from the event to his widow Eliza⁷⁸².

Illness next took its toll on the two Cheltenham Abercrombie households. John Abercrombie lived in Suffolk Square with his wife Louisa and daughter Mary while his mother Wilhelmina lived in the village of Charlton Kings with two unmarried daughters and the three orphaned daughters of her younger son Alexander⁷⁸³. Matriarch Wilhelmina died in February 1883 at the age of ninety-three, less a victim of illness than simple old age but her passing still wrought a major change in the lives of her dependents⁷⁸⁴. Then, just over two months later on 3rd May, John's wife Louisa died at her home aged sixty-eight⁷⁸⁵. The combination of events

⁷⁷⁷ Times 10/6/1927 p.10: “of course lawn tennis was derived from Badminton....from it Major Wingfield invented Sphairistike”. See Chapter 7 above p.37/38

⁷⁷⁸ The Cheltonian, January 1883. In “Lillywhite's Legacy” p.52/3, Grenville Simons records that between 50 & 60 senior College boys walked bareheaded in front of the hearse from the cemetery gates and formed a guard of honour on either side of the entrance to the chapel.

⁷⁷⁹ Gloucester Journal 2/12/1882 p.7

⁷⁸⁰ Chronicle 28/11/1882 p.4

⁷⁸¹ Gloucester Journal 2/12/1882 p.7

⁷⁸² Grenville Simons 2004 p.55

⁷⁸³ Wilhelmina's unmarried daughters were Mary & Catherine; her orphaned granddaughters were Wilhelmina, Gertrude and Jane (censuses for Wilhelmina senior 1861 to 1881, report of WA's will in Looker-on 2/6/1883 p.346, WA probate 1883 [ACU]). Alexander served in the Bengal Civil Service and the orphans were the issue of his first marriage to Jane Hastings, who died in 1862 at Charlton Kings (Home News 10/11/1862 p.1380); he had further children by a second wife who survived him.

⁷⁸⁴ Probate 11/4/1883, Looker-on 2/6/1883 p.346

⁷⁸⁵ Gloucester Citizen 7/5/1883 p.3, Leckhampton burial register 8/5/1883.

prompted the departure of both Abercrombie households from Cheltenham and in October the contents of their properties in Suffolk Square and Charlton Kings were put up for auction⁷⁸⁶. John moved to London with his daughter Mary and set up home with two of his unmarried sons who were based there⁷⁸⁷. His sisters Mary and Catherine – both spinsters in their sixties – appear to have moved to Burnham, near Windsor, and provided a home for their orphan nieces until they were married and flew the nest⁷⁸⁸. The upshot of this for Cheltenham LTC was that it lost the tournament secretary who had guided the club event since its inception in 1879 and one of its leading female players. Fortunately an able replacement for the doctor was on hand and John Kay stepped into his shoes immediately to manage the 1883 tournament⁷⁸⁹. Henry Porter took the reins in 1884 but at the tournament's end collected a review from the Field to the effect that the less said about the management of the tournament the better – it was so bad the players almost took over⁷⁹⁰. At the end of 1884 John Kay represented Cheltenham LTC at the national meeting of clubs in London and 1885 saw him back in the saddle as tournament secretary⁷⁹¹.

The Cheltenham tournament had been brought forward from September to the beginning of June and started just a month after the death of John's wife. Mary stayed away. At the end of April she had played in a five-pair mixed doubles match against Bath LTC and this was to prove her last reported match in Cheltenham colours, her Montpellier Gardens swansong⁷⁹². After the family upheaval, she retired from match play and was lost to the tournament circuit.

The Bath mixed match was also a final performance for Marian Bradley, who was likewise caught up in a move to London but for happier reasons. The doubles partners who won the historic first women's open doubles event in 1879 gave up competitive tennis at the same time⁷⁹³. When the Cheltenham tournament began Marian was five months away from marriage to Ernest Von Glehn and a new life in London. Her wedding in Cheltenham in early November was given wide coverage by Cheltenham's journals partly because Marian was well known in society for her theatre performances, charity work and exploits on the tennis court, partly because of the presence in church of a number of distinguished Cheltonian academics, and partly because the Dean of Westminster lent his august presence to conduct the ceremony⁷⁹⁴. The Dean was Marian's half-brother George Bradley, a man of several high offices and formerly head of Marlborough College⁷⁹⁵. He was assisted in his duties by Rev James Owen, a senior teacher of Classics at Cheltenham College and fellow of University College Oxford whose wife Frances had been a "warm friend" and associate of Marian's in her charity work until her sudden death that June. Frances was an established author and literary

⁷⁸⁶ 13 Suffolk Square: Examiner 31/10/1883 p.5, Looker-on 17/11/1883 p.733. Springfield, Charlton Kings: Examiner 17/10/1883 p.8, Gloucester Journal 20/10/1883 p.4, Looker-on 1/12/1883 p.765.

⁷⁸⁷ Dr A census 1891 – resident of Marylebone with John, George and Mary. Departure from Cheltenham: horticulturalists lament at relocation (Examiner 2/1/1884 p.4), Fever hospital's loss (Gloucestershire Echo 25/2/1884 p.3) etc.

⁷⁸⁸ Census 1891 for sisters Mary & Catherine Abercrombie & niece Gertrude; probate for Catherine 1893 (ACU). Marriage dates per ACU: Jane in 1889, Wilhelmina in 1891, Gertrude in 1897.

⁷⁸⁹ Field 16/6/1883 p.809: the report refers to the "sole management of the meeting" being in the hands of JC Kay, although Dr A is listed as tournament Hon Sec.

⁷⁹⁰ Field 21/6/1884 p.869: "As to the management at this tournament, we think the less said the better, the players at the finish almost taking arrangements into their own hands".

⁷⁹¹ Clubs' meeting: Field 13/12/1884 p.807; secretary: Field 6/6/1885 p.752.

⁷⁹² Looker-on 5/5/1883 p.280. She partnered John Kay and won 4, lost 1. Mardall, Bradley & Hill all played.

⁷⁹³ AG Bradley letter to the Times 20/4/1939 p.19 - MB's retirement from tennis

⁷⁹⁴ Mercury 10/11/1883 p.3, Looker-on 10/11/1883 p.713

⁷⁹⁵ Marlborough College register 1905 p.viii & ix, University College Oxford, record of masters p.28.

critic⁷⁹⁶. The bride was given away by her brother Francis, Old Cheltonian and fellow of Merton College Oxford, and amongst the guests was another Old Cheltonian in her brother Andrew, fellow of Balliol College⁷⁹⁷. Rounding off an intimidating list of the highbrow was Sir George Grove, Director of the Royal College of Music and renowned music historian - Lady Grove was Marian's half-sister Harriet⁷⁹⁸. With an audience like this, the church organist, Cheltenham-born Henry Rogers, would have needed nerves of steel as he "effectively rendered a selection of music on the organ" which included works by Rossini, Tours, Batiste, Silas and L-Wely⁷⁹⁹. Humble sporting connections were to be found in Mary Abercrombie, named as one of about thirty-eight guests invited to the wedding breakfast, and Ella Ramsay who was one of eight bridesmaids⁸⁰⁰. The dresses of the bride and bridesmaids were described as very chaste and pretty and together made "a splendid coup d'oeil"⁸⁰¹. Of the bridesmaids, four were over the age of twenty and four under fourteen, so Ella was kept company by several of her own age group. Six of the eight were nieces of the bride – a sample from her huge family - and the other "outsider" keeping Ella company was Alice Owen, ten-year-old daughter of James & Frances⁸⁰². The proceedings followed a conventional pattern and after the wedding breakfast, "the happy couple left Cheltenham by the 1.55 train en route for the Riviera", honeymoon bound⁸⁰³. Marian's husband, an Oxford graduate, was an affluent London merchant from a cultured and well-connected family and in due course she was comfortably established in Kensington near Holland Park⁸⁰⁴.

In the space of just over a year, three of Cheltenham LTC's pool of tournament competitors had moved on to new lives in new places far from Montpellier Gardens. The departure of Abercrombie, Bradley and Fanny Morris saw the club deprived of three of what had been its four leading singles players, but the Watson sisters had arrived and there were others up-and-coming. At the end of 1883 a strong cadre of tournament women remained, the national champion amongst them, and the standing of the club in the women's game was as high as ever. The loss of James Lillywhite and John Abercrombie was more significant for the club in the medium term because while there was continuity in management over the next few years, the lease of Montpellier Gardens was to change hands in 1886 and club and new lessees were destined to fall out⁸⁰⁵. In 1890 the club committee found fault with the facilities

⁷⁹⁶ Frances: Examiner 14/11/1883 p.4, Looker-on 23/6/1883 p.394; author (born Frances Mary Synge) - Examiner 27/6/1883 p.2. Rev James: Chronicle obituary 20/7/1907 p.4, CC register 1910 p.40.

⁷⁹⁷ Francis: CC register 1910 p.191. Andrew: CC register p.277.

⁷⁹⁸ Sir GG: obituary Pall Mall Gazette 29/5/1900 p.8

⁷⁹⁹ Examiner 14/11/1883 p.4. Henry Rogers was in his late twenties & had been a church organist in Cheltenham since 1868; Dorothea Beale appointed him organist at Cheltenham Ladies College (census for HR 1881, Chronicle obituary 22/8/1931 p.3).

⁸⁰⁰ Examiner 14/11/1883 p.4. "Miss Ramsay" was described as "daughter of Sir A. Ramsay, Bart"; strictly this should have read "the late Sir A. Ramsay", the 3rd Bart who had died in 1875. By 1883 Sir A.E. Ramsay 4th Bart had lived in Cheltenham for several years, after moving from Liverpool after 1879; he had several daughters aged between 8 and 18 (census 1881) but there was no rationale for them to be bridesmaids and he and his wife were absent from the list of guests.

⁸⁰¹ Mercury 10/11/1883 p.3 & Examiner 14/11/1883 p.4: "The bride was attired in an ivory Duchesse satin, in the early English style, with "slashed" sleeves, long waisted. It was trimmed with Brussels lace and trails of orange blossoms, stephanotis and myrtle. She wore a wreath of orange blossoms in her hair, over which was thrown a tulle veil, fastened by diamonds and pearls. She carried a magnificent bridal bouquet, and was wearing a handsome turquoise cross, the gift of the bridegroom".

⁸⁰² Owen census 1881 (ACU), Examiner 14/11/1883 p.4

⁸⁰³ Mercury 10/11/1883 p.3

⁸⁰⁴ Ernest VG: Oxford Alumni 2023 (ACU); censuses 1881 to 1901. Kensington: Electoral roll for Ernest 1888, censuses for MB 1891 & 1901 – 21 Earls Terrace. EVG home background: ODNB 2023 for his sister Louise Creighton (writer, social activist, wife of Bishop of London), etc.

⁸⁰⁵ New lessees: HA & RJ Webb, brothers (Chronicle 5/6/1886 p.4 & 20/3/1886 p.4)

offered for the Cheltenham open and took the step of switching venues at the last minute, transferring the event to the grounds of the East Gloucestershire Cricket Club and walking away from an agreement with the lessees⁸⁰⁶. In the days of the happy partnership between Lillywhite - lessee and grounds manager for the tournament - and Abercrombie - tournament mastermind and chairman of the Montpellier Gardens Company - that would never have happened. The new lessees, the Webb brothers, sued the tournament committee for breach of contract in 1891 and submitted a claim for damages of £3,000, a sum the presiding judge described as “absurd and exorbitant”⁸⁰⁷. The committee argued in their defence that they changed venues because the courts were not in a fit state to last the five days of the tournament, and they won the day. The tournament seems now to have entered a period of decline, indicative probably of a general decline in standards of play at the club. In reporting on the annual tournament some years later in 1895, the Looker-on painted a picture of a once major open reduced to a social club event:

“The tournament, which for the last five years has been held at Charlton Park under the auspices of the East Gloucestershire Club, makes no pretence to rivalry with the more ambitious meetings which were originated some fourteen or fifteen years ago under the secretaryship of the late Dr Abercrombie, and held until the unfortunate disagreement in 1890 at Montpellier Gardens, but it serves the pleasant purpose of bringing a large gathering of friends together to witness the results of the daily practice that is so persistently indulged in in selective seclusion throughout the summer months. No such formidable play, moreover, as that of the Brothers Renshaw and others whose fame has waxed since last they “urged the flying ball” over the net at Montpellier, is to be expected, and gorgeous challenge cups are replaced by prizes, whose intrinsic value is the least consideration that adds zest to the three days’ play. The Tournament, in fact, is a friendly *reunion*, and it fills a gap in the fashionable engagements of the summer which society can hardly appreciate too highly.”⁸⁰⁸

[The legacy of Cheltenham LTC](#)

1884 marked the end of the first decade of lawn tennis⁸⁰⁹. Clopton Wingfield had launched his novelty game of Sphairistike or Lawn Tennis in 1874 and in the same year James Lillywhite offered his first lawn tennis sets for sale in Cheltenham. Cheltenham Croquet Club adopted the novelty game in the winter of 1874/75 and offered guidance and encouragement as the sons and daughters of the gentry attempted their first swings of a racket on the lawns of Montpellier Gardens⁸¹⁰. Croquet club spawned tennis club and Cheltenham LTC came into being in 1876 after an experimental tennis tournament in 1875, in which one intrepid woman – visiting for the club’s croquet tournament - competed with the men and by winning her first round, laid down a marker for Cheltenham’s ladies (Clara Hill’s

⁸⁰⁶ Gloucestershire Echo 4/6/1890 p.2 & 24/4/1891 p.3, Field 14/6/1890 p.875

⁸⁰⁷ Field 25/4/1891 p.608, Gloucestershire Echo 24/4/1891 p.3. Lessees: Chronicle 5/6/1886 p.4.

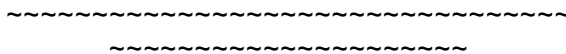
⁸⁰⁸ Looker-on 13/7/1895 p.660/661

⁸⁰⁹ Leamington Lawn Tennis Club apparently originated in 1872 as a group of less than a dozen men who played a type of tennis on the lawns of a local hotel and called themselves “the Leamington Club”. They gave their game several different names including “Pelota” and “Lawn Racquets” (“The Seeds of Lawn Tennis”, by WG Gibbons, 1886, p.2 – 3). A report in the Leamington Spa Courier 24/7/1875 (p.4) refers to the club as “The Lawn Rackets Club” and indicates that it was formed in 1874; it states that the name Lawn Rackets was carefully selected. The club was still referring to itself as a “lawn rackets” club in 1879 (LS Courier 24/5/1879 p.4).

⁸¹⁰ Examiner 11/11/1874 p.3 (“Lawn Tennis... all the rage at garden parties”), Field 12/6/1875 p.585 (“last winter”) & 28/11/1874 p.590 (Lillie letter – Germaines rules better suited to women’s apparel).

husband was her embarrassed victim). A core of serious female players began to form in 1877 and by the end of 1878 it had grown into a group of about ten who were to compete in outside tournaments during the early years when women's open events struggled for viability, hobbled presumably by the reluctance of the daughters of the gentry to compromise their modesty by rushing about in a public place swatting small balls, however many layers of petticoat armour they might wear⁸¹¹. Where the Dublin ladies were shy, and the London ladies a study in absence, the Cheltenham ladies boldly went forth. The Cheltenham tournament programme of 1879 featured the first reported open ladies' doubles competition in Britain, as the committee elected to give women parity of events with the men. With the Fitzwilliam club, which was a keen supporter of women's participation, Cheltenham LTC established a tournament model which incorporated singles and doubles events for both sexes and also mixed doubles. Its open tournament was Britain's premier event for women from inception in 1879 until the West of England in Bath took over the mantle in 1883⁸¹².

Cheltenham LTC's best known contribution to the development of tournament lawn tennis lies in its role as nursery to the Renshaw twins. The Renshaw brothers grew up as part of Cheltenham's fashionable society and learnt their tennis in their home town, benefiting from first class facilities within walking distance, a national sports retailer in James Lillywhite just down the road, and the guidance of veteran sportsman John Abercrombie⁸¹³. Wise counsel would have been on tap from sports guru Lillywhite, and Henry Porter – winner of that first tournament in 1875 and club stalwart throughout the first decade - would have imparted the fruits of his knowledge as the brothers developed the basics of their game on the lawns of Montpellier Gardens. Cheltenham LTC's first open tournament in 1879 attracted the Irish champion and Wimbledon finalist Vere Goold and also the All England Club's Arthur Myers, who played in the Wimbledon championships of 1878 and 1879⁸¹⁴: William's victory in the Cheltenham singles launched his tennis career and the rest is history.



⁸¹¹ The ten: 1877 - Clara Hill, 2 Maltbys, 2 Morrises, Ella Ramsay (Looker-on 1/12/1877 p.759); 1878 additions - Abercrombie, 2 Mardalls, Bradley (Looker-on 14/12/1878 p.801). The Maltbys left Cheltenham in 1879/80 & provided the singles finalists in the Sussex County tournament of 1880 in Brighton (Field 16/10/1880 p.573) – see Chapter 8, page 7 above (“Mary Abercrombie, Marian Bradley and Florence.....”).

⁸¹² Field 2/6/1883 p.723. Bath's singles entry was 19 v. 10 for Cheltenham & Bath's field was stronger.

⁸¹³ Tennis education: Field 9/9/1899 p.464 & Looker-on 9/9/1899 p.858 (obituaries for ER); Field 20/8/1904 p.352 (obituary for WR) etc.

⁸¹⁴ Arthur partnered Julian Marshall in a match between the All England Club & Oxford University late in June 1879 (Field 5/7/1879 p.19). At the All England Championships, he reached the last 5 in 1878 & the last 12 in 1879 (Todd 1979 p.220 & 221).

Cheltenham Open Tournament – Championship Roll 1879 to 1888

SINGLES

	<u>Men's singles</u>		<u>Women's singles</u>	
	<u>Winner</u>	<u>Runner-up</u>	<u>Winner</u>	<u>Runner-up</u>
1879	W. Renshaw	V. St. L. Goold	Florence Mardall	Marian Bradley
1881	E. Renshaw	E. de S.H. Browne	Marian Bradley	Florence Mardall
(April)				
1881	E. de S.H. Browne	R.W. Braddell	Gertrude Gibbs	Miss Perry
(Sept)				
1882	R.W. Braddell	A. Fuller	Maud Watson	Constance Smith
1883	D. Stewart	W.J. Bush-Salmon	Maud Watson	Florence Davies
1884	D. Stewart	R.D. Sears	Edith Davies	Louisa Martin
1885	E. de S.H. Browne	C.H.A. Ross	Maud Watson	Miss C. Butler
1886	E. de S.H. Browne	J. Dwight	Louisa Martin	Maud Watson
1887	E. de S.H. Browne	J. Dwight	Louisa Martin	Maud Watson
1888	H. Grove	E. de S.H. Browne	Louisa Martin	Blanche Hillyard

DOUBLES (W = winner, R = runner-up)

	<u>Men's doubles</u>	<u>Women's doubles</u>	<u>Mixed doubles</u>
1879	W: W Gardner & EW Burnett R: A Ainslie & WJ Weston	W: Bradley & Abercrombie R: Clara Hill & F Mardall	N/A
1881	W: W Renshaw & E Renshaw R: GM Butterworth & G Harrison	W: Bradley & Abercrombie R: Clara Hill & Ella Ramsay	W: Miss Langrishe & EdeSH Browne R: Miss F Mardall & HB Porter
(April)			
1881	W: E Lubbock & RW Braddell R: HB Porter & A Taylor	W: Clara Hill & Ella Ramsay R: Mrs "Dark" & Miss Jones	N/A
(Sept)			
1882	W: RW Braddell & EG Watson R: PG Von Donop & CL Sweet	W: C Smith & B Langrishe R: Maud & Lilian Watson	W: Maud Watson & RW Braddell R: Beatrice Langrishe & W Renshaw
1883	W: G Butterworth & WB Salmon R: D Stewart & GJ Mitton	W: Maud & Lilian Watson R: F Davies & Miss Cornford	W: Miss F Mardall & G Butterworth R: Miss Cole & P Hattersley Smith
1884	W: CK Wood & CL Sweet R: RD Sears & J Dwight	W: F Mardall & EM Davies R: Maud & Lilian Watson	W: Maud Watson & W Milne R: Edith Davies & CK Wood
1885	W: W Renshaw & EdeSH Browne R: TR Grey & H Emmons	W: L Martin & C Butler R: F Mardall & EM Davies	W: Miss M Bracewell & W Renshaw R: Miss B Langrishe & CL Sweet
1886	W: W Renshaw & EdeSH Browne R: H Grove & J Dwight	W: M Bracewell & B Bingley R: Miss Holden & D Patterson	W: Miss M Bracewell & W Renshaw R: Blanche Bingley & J Dwight
1887	N/A - handicap event	W: Maud & Lilian Watson R: L Martin & Miss Stannell	W: Maud Watson & JR Deykin R: Miss Bracewell & J Dwight

Postscript: lifting the ladies' veils – finding Marian Bradley & Mary Abercrombie
(and some further details of their lives off the court)

In the early years of tennis tournaments the Christian names of female competitors were rarely mentioned in event reports and initials were often omitted, particularly if the women in question were the senior spinsters of their families. Modesty would have played a part and in one memorable instance – in Dublin in 1882 – a number of the Irish competitors refused permission for local newspapers to publish even their surnames⁸¹⁵. When there is nothing to work from but a bald surname with the name of a tennis club attached, it can be hard to link biographical information to a player. In Cheltenham Bradley and Abercrombie both consistently withheld their initials and I have found no instance of a sports report which mentioned the Christian names or initials of either player, whether the publication was local to Cheltenham, Dublin, Bath, Birmingham or London. Although I am confident both players are accurately identified, an explanation seems in order and the purpose of this note is to record the trail followed and to provide some additional personal information for the two pioneers.

Miss Bradley

Although Marian's initials were missing from all her tournament reports, newspaper accounts of the marriage of "Miss Marian Bradley" in 1883 gave details of the bride's family, most notably her brothers and half-brother George, the Dean of Westminster. Brothers Francis and Andrew were distinguished academics and the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography provided entries for them both, as well as for George and Marian's father Charles. The entry for Francis, eminent philosopher, included a reference to a sister who played in the Wimbledon championships in the 1880's and in correspondence with ODNB on the accuracy of this point, I was tipped off that the Times published an obituary for Marian on her death in 1939⁸¹⁶. The obituary made clear the link between Marian, Cheltenham, lawn tennis and William Renshaw⁸¹⁷. Some days after publication, Arthur Bradley, a half-nephew of Marian's, wrote to the Times giving additional information on her tennis exploits which confirmed the identification⁸¹⁸.

References to "Miss Bradley" in the local press during the seventies and early eighties are consistent with her identification as Marian, the youngest child of the Rev. Charles Bradley. She was the last of seven children by his second wife Emma who survived to adulthood⁸¹⁹. The Reverend Charles moved to Cheltenham from Clapham soon after Marian's birth and she grew up there, staying on with her mother after her father died in 1871. She had three older full sisters – Emma, Frances and Ellen - but they had all married and moved out by the end of 1870; by the time she made an appearance in the press as a croquet player in 1872 she was the only *Miss Bradley* of her immediate family⁸²⁰.

Over the years local newspapers reported Miss Bradley's involvement in an array of activities and she was a familiar face in what was a relatively small town – with a population of

⁸¹⁵ Freeman's Jnl 2/6/1882 p.7: "In deference to the expressed wishes of some of the lady players, we refrain from giving the names of those who competed in [the ladies singles championship]...During an interval in the champion play there was a grand doubles match between Mr St Leger and Miss Blank and Mr E Renshaw and Miss Ramsey, which the Irish pair won..."

⁸¹⁶ Emails from ODNB 1/6/2015 (re. Francis Herbert Bradley, 1846 – 1924)

⁸¹⁷ Times 17/4/1939 p.19, Mrs E. De Glehn.

⁸¹⁸ Times 20/4/1939 p.19

⁸¹⁹ Last child: censuses for Rev. Charles Bradley 1841 to 1871 etc.

⁸²⁰ Marian had spinster half-sisters but the youngest of these was in her fifties in the first years of lawn tennis and they can be disregarded as candidates for Cheltenham's "Miss Bradley". In the 1871 census, Marian and Andrew were the only children still living with Rev Charles & Emma.

around 55,000, Cheltenham was no Dublin⁸²¹. *Miss Bradley* gave generously of her time to local charities, graced various balls in the early eighties, played in croquet and tennis tournaments, exhibited flower pictures with *Miss Abercrombie* in the Fine Art Society's rooms, performed in amateur theatrical productions and even wrote the libretto for an amateur operetta performed in the Assembly Rooms in 1880⁸²². The advertisement for her operetta – called *For Lack of Gold* – named the librettist just as *Maia*, but the Looker-on helpfully explained that this was Miss Bradley⁸²³. For her performance in an amateur farce in the Montpellier Pump Room in 1882, Miss Bradley drew plaudits from the Looker-on for her particular “histrionic talent” - “her comic acting convulsing the audience with laughter” - and at the finish she was called upon to take a special bow to receive “a tribute of violets and applause”⁸²⁴.

Marian's age fits for all the press references. She was nineteen in 1872 when she was reported playing in the croquet tournament, in her late twenties for the various balls attended by *Miss Bradley*, and thirty when she married in 1883. The censuses for 1871 and 1881 gave her residence as 19 Royal Parade in Cheltenham and this was the address attached to Looker-on reports of Departures and Arrivals for *Miss Bradley* between 1870 and 1883; it was the address for Marian's wedding breakfast in 1883⁸²⁵.

Miss Abercrombie

The logic for the tennis-playing *Miss Abercrombie* to be Mary, daughter of Dr John Abercrombie, is compelling. Mary's father was a man of sixty-one in 1878, on the brink of retirement and with no tennis ambitions of his own to judge by his absence from club and tournament playing reports, including even that for the social mixed tournament of December 1878⁸²⁶. Yet in May 1878 he organised an informal tournament for women on his doorstep in Suffolk Square⁸²⁷; in December 1878 he stepped up to be one of six committee members for Cheltenham LTC; and in 1879 he took on the job of organising Cheltenham's first open tournament and was to continue as tournament secretary until 1883. In June 1879 he placed a letter in the Field seeking a dialogue with the officers of “recognised” tennis clubs on the possibility of a tournament in Cheltenham, and in his letter he made special reference to the opportunity afforded by the national archery meeting in Cheltenham for the escorting “from distant places” of young ladies who would like to play in a Cheltenham tournament; the participation of women was at the forefront of his consciousness⁸²⁸. His daughter's enthusiasm for the new game was surely the root cause of his commitment of time and effort.

Because of the family links to Dublin, it is hard to believe that the *Miss Abercrombie* of Cheltenham who played in the Irish open of 1881 was not the doctor's daughter⁸²⁹. There was only one event for women in the Dublin tournament of 1881 - a mixed doubles - and just six pairs played; William Renshaw was the other half of the Cheltenham pair. Mary's sister lived a short walk from Fitzwilliam Square and a trip from Cheltenham to Dublin would have served a dual purpose - family visit and participation in the championships. *Miss A* entered the Irish Championships again in 1882.

⁸²¹ Population: census 1881 for Cheltenham (44,000), Charlton Kings (11,000) (Chronicle 3/5/1881 p.6).

⁸²² Pictures: Looker-on 11/2/1882 p.88

⁸²³ Maia: Looker-on 27/11/1880 p.1 - Edgar Manning in the cast. Miss Bradley: Looker-on 4/12/1880 p.784.

⁸²⁴ Looker-on 25/2/1882 p.120/1

⁸²⁵ Looker-on 10/11/1883 p.713

⁸²⁶ His one appearance in a Field tournament report was as an absentee in the first round of the Bath veterans' open singles of 1882 (Field 3/6/1882 p.742).

⁸²⁷ Looker-on 11/5/1878 p.305

⁸²⁸ Field 14/6/1879 p.710

⁸²⁹ Freeman's Jnl 25/5/1881 p.7 etc.

Miss A's retirement from tournament tennis in 1883 dovetails with a period of mourning for Mary following the death of her mother and the relocation of Doctor Abercrombie's family to London. Miss A played in a match between the Cheltenham and Bath clubs on 28th April 1883⁸³⁰. Mary's mother died on 3rd May and Miss A was missing from the entry for the Cheltenham open that began on 4th June; the name was absent from all further match and tournament reports for the rest of the decade⁸³¹. When Mary herself died in 1912, it would have been particularly poignant for Cheltenham tournament veterans Ella and Ernest Browne as she died at their home in Tullamore, Ireland – a final tennis thread for the doctor's daughter⁸³².

References to *Miss Abercrombie* in the various Cheltenham newspapers are consistent with her identification as Mary. Miss A's entries in the Looker-on's lists of Arrivals and Departures have Dr Abercrombie's address of 13 Suffolk Square attached to them on the occasions when the family chose to register her movements. The practice was for those wishing to appear in the lists to enter their names in a book at Montpellier Library and the entries would have been generated by a member of the doctor's household⁸³³. An example of them is to be found in the Departures pages of 7th February 1880:

“DEPARTURES.....

Abercrombie, Miss, 13, Suffolk Square, for Dublin

Abercrombie, Miss M, Charlton Kings, for Dublin”⁸³⁴

This was presumably a visit to Clara in Dublin. “Miss M. Abercrombie” would have been one of two spinster members of the household of Mary's grandmother in Charlton Kings: Aunt Mary, aged sixty-one, or Cousin Wilhelmina, known as Minnie, aged twenty-five⁸³⁵. It is hard to say which of the two would have been Mary's travelling companion. Charlton Kings was a large village with a population of 11,000 some two miles from Cheltenham. In July 1883, Mary and her father entered themselves in the Looker-on's Departures for a trip to Scotland – “Dr Abercrombie, Miss Abercrombie, 13 Suffolk Square, for *Scotland*” – and in late September they published their departure to London – “Dr Abercrombie, Miss Abercrombie, 13 Suffolk Square, for 39 Welbeck Street, London”⁸³⁶. Bearing in mind that the doctor also was the source of the published results for the Cheltenham tennis tournaments, the identity of *Miss Abercrombie* within Cheltenham society is free of doubt. If the tennis playing Miss A had been someone other than Mary – for instance Cousin Minnie – then the tournament secretary would have made it crystal clear; the social pages of the Looker-on were no place for confusion about his daughter's pastimes and his blood link to a prominent tennis club member.

Apart from their mutual interest in lawn tennis, father and daughter shared a hobby in horticulture and their house in Suffolk Square provided a garden of one and a half acres for cultivation of the flowers, shrubs and fruit trees of their choice⁸³⁷. Both exhibited regularly at the local Horticultural Society flower shows and were prize winners, sometimes at each other's

⁸³⁰ Looker-on 5/5/1883 p.280

⁸³¹ Death of Mrs A: Looker-on 5/5/1883 p.283; tournament start: Field 9/6/1883 p.766

⁸³² Ella Browne was born Ellen Ramsay. Looker-on 3/8/1912 p.20 & Leinster Reporter 10/8/1912 p.2 (Brookfield, Tullamore - & see census for EdeSHB 1901).

⁸³³ Looker-on 3/1/1880 p.9:”....the Editor requests that such persons as are desirous that their names should appear will be kind enough to enter them in the book kept for that purpose in Montpellier Library, and open at all times for inspection”.

⁸³⁴ Looker-on 7/2/1880 p.89

⁸³⁵ Census for household of Wilhelmina A 1881. Minnie: Looker-on 13/1/1877 p.25 & 10/2/1877 p.89, Mercury 17/2/1877 p.4

⁸³⁶ Looker-on 14/7/1883 p.441 & 29/9/1883 p.618

⁸³⁷ Garden: advertisement for sale of No.13 in Looker-on 19/10/1912 p.19

expense. In the Spring Flower Show of 1878, for the category “Roses in pots, cut, in loose bunches of three, six varieties” the doctor took first prize while Mary came third⁸³⁸. The following spring, Mary took a partial revenge in “Roses in pots, in collections of eight” by claiming second prize and relegating her father to third⁸³⁹. In 1881 she branched out into the fruit categories and won two first prizes, attracting admiration for her “black clusters” of grapes⁸⁴⁰. Dr Abercrombie’s prowess as a gardener was recognised beyond local boundaries. A correspondent of the *Journal of Horticulture* wrote a piece in 1884 recording a visit to Suffolk Square late in 1883 and bemoaning the departure of the Abercrombie family. The doctor’s garden was described as being “well known” for years and mention was made of his “zeal and skill in the cultivation of carnations and picotees” - “His long ribbon border has been the delight of the habitués of Cheltenham for years”⁸⁴¹. Father and daughter must have been very close.

In March 1885, the Cheltenham School of Art staged an exhibition of work by its students and Mary, an ex-student by then, lent her drawing of the Venus de Milo for the event⁸⁴². The *Looker-on* considered her picture the “gem of the collection” and – ever consistent – referred to her just as *Miss Abercrombie*. The *Chronicle* was matter of fact in its mention of the picture but added initials to the surname⁸⁴³. The *Gloucester Citizen* followed the *Chronicle* and these two journals probably just reproduced the attribution of the exhibition catalogue, with the result that for once in the local newspapers *Miss Abercrombie* was garnished with the initials M.C., for Mary Catherine⁸⁴⁴.

⁸³⁸ *Looker-on* 4/5/1878 p.292

⁸³⁹ *Looker-on* 10/5/1879 p.298 & 299

⁸⁴⁰ *Looker-on* 24/9/1881 p.618 & 619

⁸⁴¹ *Examiner* 2/1/1884 p.4

⁸⁴² *Looker-on* 28/3/1885 p.200/1

⁸⁴³ *Chronicle* 31/3/1885 p.2. In 1882 the *Chronicle* reported that “Mary Abercrombie” had been presented with the Cheltenham School of Art “local” prize for “head from nature” (19/12/1882 p.5).

⁸⁴⁴ *Gloucester Citizen* 27/3/1885 p.4

APPENDIX

**Cheltenham LTC women's champions & finalists in open tournaments
from 1879 to 1884**

General: The chart below shows the women of Cheltenham LTC identified as winners or finalists in tournaments open to all comers for 1879 to 1884 inclusive. Reports in the Field are the principal source. All known successes are shown but the list may not be exhaustive.

A name in italics and brackets indicates a player is not a member of Cheltenham LTC. Square brackets indicate a player is probably a member at the time but there is an element of doubt.

For mixed events the second name is that of the male partner.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Month</u> start date	<u>Tournament</u>	<u>Event</u>	<u>Winner</u>	<u>Runner-up</u>	<u>Note</u>
1879	October	Cheltenham	Singles L Doubles	Florence Mardall M. Bradley & M. Abercrombie	Marian Bradley F. Mardall & Clara Hill	
1880	October	Brighton	Singles Mixed	Ellen Maltby [Miss Davidson] & W. Renshaw	Mary Maltby	1 2
1881	April	Cheltenham	Singles L Doubles Mixed	Marian Bradley M. Bradley & M. Abercrombie	Florence Mardall Clara Hill & Ellen Ramsay F. Mardall & Henry Porter	
	May	Dublin (Fitzw'm)	Mixed	M. Abercrombie & W. Renshaw		3
	May	Bath	Mixed	F. Mardall & H. Porter		
	Sept.	Cheltenham	L Doubles	Clara Hill & Ellen Ramsay	Miss Jones (<i>& Mrs "Dark"</i>)	4
1882	May	Dublin (Fitzw'm)	Singles Mixed	Mary Abercrombie	Marian Bradley M. Bradley & W. Renshaw	5
	May	Bath	Singles L Doubles	Fanny Morris	F. Mardall & Beatrice Kay	
	July	Leamington	L Doubles	F. Mardall & Beatrice Kay	Clara Hill (<i>& Miss Hutton</i>)	6
	Sept.	Edgbaston	L Doubles		Marian Bradley & Clara Hill	
1883	May	Bath	Singles L Doubles	[Maud Watson] [Maud & Lilian Watson]		7
	June	Cheltenham	Singles L Doubles Mixed	Maud Watson Maud & Lilian Watson F. Mardall (<i>& G.M. Butterworth</i>)	Florence Davies Miss Cornford & F. Davies	
	July	Leamington	L Doubles Mixed	Maud & Lilian Watson Maud Watson (<i>& E.L. Williams</i>)	F. Mardall & John C. Kay	
	August	Exmouth	Singles Mixed	Maud Watson Maud Watson (<i>& E.L. Williams</i>)		
	August	Teignmouth	Mixed	F. Mardall (<i>& Charles L. Sweet</i>)	L. Watson (<i>& E.G. Watson</i>)	

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<u>Year</u>	<u>Month</u> start date	<u>Tournament</u>	<u>Event</u>	<u>Winner</u>	<u>Runner-up</u>	<u>Note</u>
1884	May	Dublin (Fitzw'm)	Singles Mixed	Maud Watson Maud Watson & W. Renshaw		8
	May	Bath	L Doubles Mixed	F. Mardall (& <i>Edith Davies</i>) F. Mardall (& <i>C.H. Gostling</i>)		9
	June	Cheltenham	Singles L Doubles Mixed	F. Mardall (& <i>Edith Davies</i>) M. Watson (& <i>Wilfred Milne</i>)	[Louisa Martin] Maud & Lilian Watson	10
	June	London Athletic	Singles	Maud Watson		
	July	AELTC (Wimb'n)	Singles	Maud Watson	Lilian Watson	
	July	Edgbaston	L Doubles Mixed	Maud & Lilian Watson F. Mardall (& <i>J.R. Deykin</i>)	F. Mardall (& <i>Edith Davies</i>)	
	August	Exmouth	Singles Mixed	Maud Watson Maud Watson (& <i>J.R. Deykin</i>)		
	August	Scarborough	Mixed	E. Ramsay (& <i>EdeSH Browne</i>)		

Notes to the Appendix

1. Brighton 1880: Ellen & Mary Maltby competed at the Cheltenham open in October 1879 as CLTC members before their family left Cheltenham around the end of the year. The 1881 census shows the family as resident in Hove/Brighton at 64 Brunswick Place but it is not clear when they moved there – they were listed as *Visitors* at 64 Brunswick Place in Brighton Gazette 9/10/1880. The pairing of Ellen and her brother Ernest in the mixed is shown as Cheltenham LTC.
2. Brighton 1880: Miss Davidson is assumed to be a member of Cheltenham LTC as she is paired with WR but there is no confirmation of this in other tournament reports.
3. Dublin 1881: There was no ladies' singles or doubles.
4. Cheltenham Sept 1881: The mixed doubles event was abandoned because of "wretched weather".
5. Dublin 1882: There was no ladies doubles.
6. Leamington 1882: Leamington's first open event. No ladies' singles.
7. Bath 1883: Maud & Lilian Watson were members of Cheltenham LTC by the time of the Cheltenham tournament which began on 4 June – they may well have been members when Bath began a week earlier on 28 May.
8. Dublin 1884: There was no ladies' doubles as such but a "Challenge Doubles" was arranged between the Watson sisters and two of the Langrishe sisters – Ireland versus England. The Langrishes won 11-9, 6-2.
9. Bath 1884: The mixed doubles was for "scratch" pairs.

10. Cheltenham 1884: Louisa Martin was runner-up to Edith Davies in the singles. The Field and the Gloucestershire Echo reports recorded her as a Cheltenham LTC member but her parents were resident in Ireland and although she had very close family living in Cheltenham's Suffolk Square, there must be an element of doubt as to her affiliation (the Looker-on made no reference to her club). She first played in the Irish Championships in 1885 and was listed by Freeman's Journal as "Miss L. Martin, Meath" and referred to as "the Irish Lady" (26/5/1885 p.7); at the Cheltenham tournament of 1885 the Field labelled her "Dublin".

Champions & finalists showing year first reported as affiliated to Cheltenham LTC

(The year in which their name was first listed amongst Cheltenham players in a report of a Cheltenham club friendly or an open tournament)

- 1877 Clara Hill
Ellen Maltby
Fanny Morris
Ellen Ramsay
1878 Beatrice Kay (born Mardall)
Florence Mardall
Marian Bradley
Mary Abercrombie
1879 Mary Maltby
1880 [Miss Davidson]
1881 Miss Jones
1883 Maud Watson
Lilian Watson
Florence Davies
Miss Cornford
1884 [Louisa Martin]