

A BRIEF HISTORY OF GLENFERN PARK. HOME OF THE FERNTREE GULLY TENNIS AND BOWLING CLUBS AND FORMER ARCHERY CLUB

Prior to 1963 the original Tennis Club had faded from existence.

One of the reasons was that court facilities were extremely poor by today's standards; they consisted of two clay gravel courts with a small wooden shed which served as a clubhouse. These were situated on the Main Rd. (now Burwood Highway) immediately adjacent to the old Ferntree Gully Shire Council's works depot which were located on the south-eastern corner of the Main Rd. and Lysterfield Rd. (now Brennock Park Dve.). There was a motley group of corrugated tin sheds, out of which the Council's Outdoor Staff worked, and remained as such until the writer sold that property and the Ambulance Station (which was situated on the other side, facing Burwood Highway, of the clay courts) in 1982 to Safeways. That sale took seven years and depended on a satisfactory conclusion to the transfer of the Ambulance facility to Dobson St. (FTG) which included a Supreme Court case and various legal requirements. The current Ambulance Station land in Dobson St. was sold by the writer also, as part of an exchange with the Burwood Highway Station, between Safeways and the Ambulance organization.

Another court (asphalt) was also used by the then Club, situated on the Brennock Park Drive side of the FTG Football ground (1st oval). Another reason for the old Club's demise was that a group of members played away on a private court in Burke Rd. – which virtually split the Club. How long the clay courts were unused is not known. In 1963 a move to hold junior coaching at those two courts surfaced. A gentle man Mr. Stan Capuano, proposed to be the coach. Other adults, mainly parents came to a meeting called to consider restarting the FTG tennis Club... it so happened 4 students from the old FTG Technical School, namely Lance Hion, Richard Morrison, Frank Turner & Gary Paton attended that meeting, and virtually became the first members of what has become the current Club, with the first president Mark Ross remaining briefly in that position.

A NON-EVENT took place when the clay courts came back into use by us. The FTG Football Ground's Committee sent the writer a bill for some hundreds of dollars; supposedly the rent unpaid by the defunct Tennis Club. IT WAS RETURNED TO THE SENDER WITHOUT COMMENT AND ANY MONEY; that was the end of that!

In 1964 a Club Committee was formed with the writer being elected as President and remained so for seven (7) years with a second stint of 3 years to 1978. During those first years the Club membership grew very fast. Judy Simons became secretary and held that office for 2 years and from the increased membership came the late Doris Winspear, who served as secretary for 5 years and Treasurer for another 2 years.

The late Don Keith, one of the first Knox Councillors when Knox first became a separate municipality in 1963, was approached to consider the possibility of the tennis club finding a new home; because of the dire need with its swelling members; particularly the juniors. As the club entered competition, other courts (private) were sought. Boyles property on Burwood Hwy., where currently is erected the AMAROO HOSTEL, was one of those. Due to the good offices of Don we were advised that a portion of land alongside Ferntree Gully Creek could be available for sporting use. It was a blackberry infested stretch with small creek beds draining to the main waterway. It was zoned as flood prone land before the creek was piped by the Dandenong Valley Authority.

Committee members inspected the site, and as it was the only land available, we agreed that steps should be made to secure and develop it for the club's purpose. It had no access road so we would be starting from scratch.

The council called a meeting of interested persons to form a committee of Management and the first meeting of that Committee was held on the 26th June 1965. During the period from the first inspection to that date the Archery Club had taken over the far end of the land and so the Committee consisted of the writer, Judy Simons from the Tennis club and 3 members of the Archery Club, Ian Wilson, Ron Ralph and Dave Howell and 2 members of the public. Annual elections were based on 3 being elected for 3 years, 3 for two years and 3 for 1 year. That was the system for all Committees of Management throughout Knox which supervised all Sporting reserves and public Parks.

A note from the minutes of the 26th June reads:

“A general discussion took place when it was agreed that although the area would be suitable for various forms of sporting activities and for general use by the public as a Park, that the filling in of all the depressions would further expand its usefulness.”

And so GLENFERN PARK WAS BORN.

The same meeting resolved to request from the Council the following:

1. A metal garage for the Archery Club to be erected by their members.
2. The erection of a Toilet.
3. Land already cleared to be rolled and grass sown.
4. Filling in the depressions with clean filling.
5. Blackberries to be sprayed.
6. The installation of 4 en-tous-cas Tennis courts and a suitable shelter.

The next Grounds (management) Committee meeting on the 6th August 1965 discussed amongst other things the need to bring in other sports to help the overall development. As Secretary/Treasurer the writer, had prior to the meeting invited Mr. Harold Clarke, the newly inducted President of the FTG Rotary Club to come to the meeting.

A whisper informed me that Mr. Clarke had not selected a project for his Club to take on for his year. Consequently at the meeting it was suggested to him that he might consider seeking to get established a FTG BOWLING CLUB. It so happened that the land where the latter was eventually used for that purpose was privately owned and was land set aside by the developer sub-dividers as open space or for units for the elderly. That's the land which fronts Merrick Close and appears to the observer that it is part of Glenfern Park reserve – which it is not. Mr. Clarke's club included as a member, Mr. Neville Haynes, then the Town Clerk. That land was eventually passed to the Bowling Club, as the Council did have power to negotiate that.

To promote a possible Bowling Club a meeting of interested persons was held in the former Knox Council Committee room (Spring St. FTG). Swamped with standing room only; the decision was unanimous. Large shop window posters were printed by Mr. Doug Wheatland under his house in Clematis Ave. FTG, they cost 3 pounds twelve shillings, paid by the Grounds Committee, but recouped from Mr. Arthur Tainsch, ANZ Bank Manager some years later.

The rotary Club was exceedingly vibrant and well supported by local business men and they adopted Clarke's suggestion to take on the task. The members actually built the initial club house even to the point of excavating, mostly by hand, the holes needed to accommodate the concrete piers which support the building. As the GLENFERN PARK LAND is all alluvial without any solid base. their Clubhouse was constructed on an earthenpad upon which a concrete slab was laid.

The same as the main Tennis Club Pavilion.

When the "MAIN ROAD" as Burwood Hwy. as it was originally known, was to be duplicated the AVENUE of ASH and PLANE TREES had to make way for its rejuvenation. Lady Knox, widow of the late Sir George Knox (after whom the Knox Municipality was named) objected to their removal, "reportedly stating that she would chain herself to one of them"; in view of the fact that all those trees were planted after the first World War as an AVENUE OF HONOUR for the fallen and those who served.

The late Mr. Richard Egan-Lee, the City Engineer, then arranged for the healthiest of those trees to be moved, after trimming etc. to the new GLENFERN PARK by use of a massive crane. Doubts arose as to whether they would survive, EIGHT OF THEM ARE NOW STILL FLOURISHING 30 years later as magnificent shady ornaments along the top of the old Ferntree Gully creek alignment.

The park with the Bowling Club and all its upgraded improvements, the Tennis Courts, bitumen drives etc. have created a pleasant cul-de-sac which has over the years provided, not only sport but social amenities for so many hundreds of people, together with junior tennis players. The whole overall development had taken many hours of discussions at meetings by the Committee of Management. The tennis Club kept control of that committee.

From the original requests, the council set about honouring the problems and eventually provided at Council's cost two (2) En-tous-cas Tennis Courts. At the actual opening, by the then president of the shire, the late Councilor Bernie Seebeck, the tennis Club members had been able to raise sufficient funds to pay cash for a 3rd Court. On that particular day the club members erected a 12' by 12' tent enabling shelter if needed and the serving of afternoon tea. There was no Pavilion.

It took some time and of course money (ours) to achieve a more permanent shelter. The Knox council after its early years (1960's) instituted a loan system to provide funds. It consisted of a point of view, with so many recreation development needs throughout the Shire, that clubs using such public facilities were required to financially contribute. It was a very fair system, 20% from Club funds as a deposit, 40% from the council and the remainder paid off, interest free, over the next ten years by the Club.

The committee of management Minutes of 28/3/66 contains a receipt for \$1000.00 from the Shire secretary for our payment for the third court as well as correspondence from the council as to whether the general public was hiring the courts. Fees were then laid down for non-members:- 7/6d per court – per hour, 20/- for 3 hours and each additional 3 hours 20/-. The tennis club had written to the grounds committee requesting sole use of the courts on Mondays, Wednesdays, Saturdays, Sundays and all Public holidays, which was unanimously granted. The president of the Club being Secretary/treasurer of the Grounds Management made certain any income from public use of the courts went back to the Tennis Club.

Mr. Ron Ralph of the Archery Club reported that vandals had destroyed Archery targets and would have to be replaced. He said this was because the Archery Club did not have a storage shed. It took 3 years to obtain their metal garage and then another 2 years to have Electricity connected. During the late 1960's and early 1970's a continual stream of letters came out of the grounds Committee's "Press" Department to the Council with requests for fixed and permanent buildings and again the Archery Club suffered further losses from vandals hitting their metal unit. Eventually funds became available for the small brick Tennis pavilion with an outside locker in which members were required to stow the court nets instead of leaving them out in the variable weather.

Such were the economies imposed to create funds along with hiring and membership fees for future improvements.

The current tennis pavilion was opened officially on the 15th of April 1973 and cost \$8000.00 – the Club putting in 1/5th - \$1600.00, the Council 2/5^{ths} - \$3200.00, with the balance of \$3200

(2/5^{ths}) being paid back to Council over the next 10 years interest free at \$320.00 per annum. The club members actually paid \$4800.00 to have the permanent home which the Club has had since 1973, 31 years. It was such a change with its kitchen facilities, from the (2) two LP burner camp stove upon which the kettle was boiled in the small brick home, now an antique (used as the store shed). The new one accommodated a refrigerator!!!

The Club's membership was healthy & strong – juniors and seniors. Some knew how to play tennis, some tried very hard and trophies and pennants flowed in, to decorate the interior, won in Junior Comps, Ladies Comps. and seniors. Not long after Glenfern Park had the dedicated attention of members and the Club Committee, the writer had a phone call from a lady, a Mrs. Pickett, who was the widow of a former Ferntree Gully Shire Councillor, asking to call and see her. In the back porch of her house was a large wooden locker, from it she extracted some large silver cup trophies which she gave to me, stating that they came from the time of the original FTG tennis Club which apparently started circa 1923 AD. A newer member of the club was able to have them re-electro-plated and re-inscribed for gratis.

THOSE CUP TROPHIES SHOULD STILL BE IN EXISTENCE as they were designated to be various Club Championship rewards, and no doubt will be received by this years memento winners.

The various competition organizations, such as the FTG and District tennis Association, Eastern Metropolitan Region and the Knox Night tennis Assoc. were well supported by teams from the FTG Club. For the record the Knox Night tennis Assoc. came into being by myself and some presidents of other local clubs, meeting one night to consider whether the advent of such a unit would work. Mr. Robert Frampton, then president of the fledgling Mountain Gate Tennis Club (a co-Knox councillor at the time) and Boronia, Wantirna and Studfield Club Presidents unanimously agreed to set it up. No other person was involved at that meeting. The Clubs took on the task of pursuing court lights to get it moving.

The reason this suggestion came about was that a few teams from FTG were entered in and played in the EMRTA Night Comp where they traveled to Blackburn, Croydon, Lilydale and other district clubs including Ringwood which were too far from home. Our Club had a myriad of dedicated members (a few grumblers within) who built an edifice running into hundreds who enjoyed the sport as provided by the Club.

The writer can only speak for the period from 1963 to 1976, nigh on 30 years ago, when ill health intervened.

Before this resume closes, it is very necessary to remember all those people who helped to make it happen – in effect from nothing.

To the ladies who devoted themselves to the cause, who worked in the kitchen – to the members who argued about the Club's original Constitution night after night, to get it right – to the Ground's committee who worked and planned the Glenfern Park reserve, laying the foundations for its ultimate development – which became the home of the Ferntree Gully Tennis Club, the Bowling Club and the Archery Club.

Then finally, the Tennis Club would not have progressed without the club Secretaries and people who not only loved playing tennis as individuals but who put very much time and work in being MEMBERS OF A CLUB WHICH WAS A BENEFIT TO OTHERS ALSO.

NB: References within to Glenfern Park are taken from extracts from the Grounds Committee's Minutes & Correspondence Books, both being tripled page Letter Books; all hand written.

J. K.GILL
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