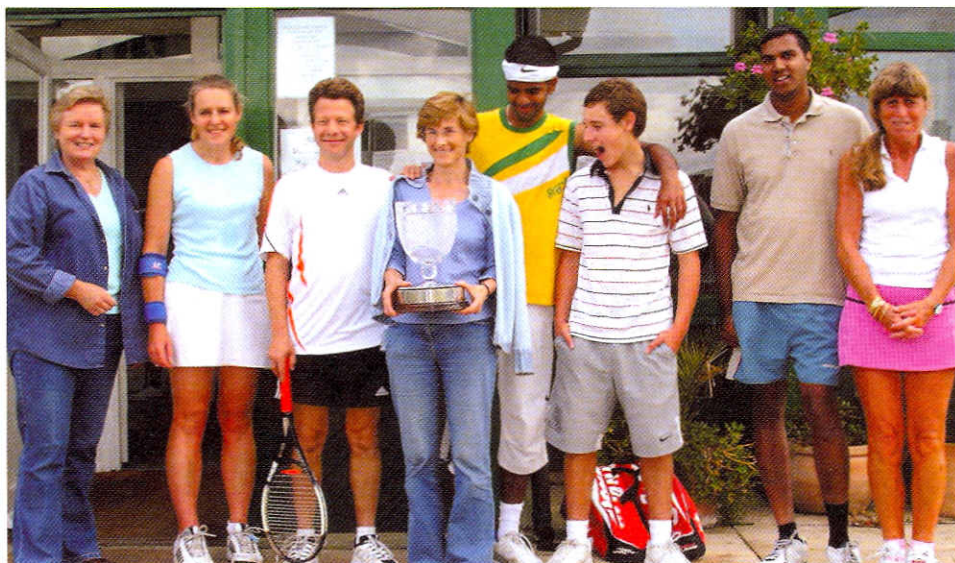


South London Neighbourhood Rivalries



Sue Goligher, Secretary and Captain of Wigmore Lawn Tennis Club, holds the Millennium Cup Trophy with some of her team members and Barbara Wancke (far left), Organising Committee Chairman and Tournament Director.

It started out as a means of promoting tennis clubs in Streatham to the local community and, seven years on, has turned into a friendly, closely-fought inter-club annual campaign.

The Millennium Cup was the brainchild of Barbara Wancke, then Secretary of Woodfield Grove Tennis Club, who conceived the idea to celebrate the new millennium and create activities for its growing membership. She applied to the Millennium Festival Awards for All Committee for a grant from Sport England to cover the start-up costs - including publicity, court and balls - for a new event to draw together clubs in the neighbourhood.

"It was a way of continuing the goodwill we had experienced from Telford Park and Wigmore clubs when ours was closed for rebuilding," recalls Barbara. "Our members were welcomed into their club sessions and social events and we made a lot of friends, so we wanted something to keep us all related."

Woodfield Grove had benefited from an £840,000 Sport England grant to completely refurbish its premises and re-opened its doors in October 1999, prompting other local clubs to apply for funding for similar development projects. As a result of her efforts, the Millennium Cup was granted £1,196 to fund its initial pilot scheme as part of the Millennium Celebrations. The competition, however, did not actually get off the ground until the following spring because of Wigmore Lawn Tennis Club's refurbishment works over the summer of 2000.

The idea was to provide opportunity for the promotion of new activities within each club involving members and the training of volunteers.

Teams were to be made of squads of players in varying age groups, while others could participate as on-court officials, ball kids and/or volunteers manning the services at the clubs during each tie. It was hoped to attract spectators from all the participating clubs as well as the wider community and provide a means of fund-raising through the sale of refreshments and snacks.

"We hoped members would want to get actively involved with the event and that the matches would attract some outside interest from people who wished to see the clubs and experience what should have been a rather unique competitive atmosphere," explains Barbara. "It was to be like our own local mini Davis Cup competition and in some ways it now is. The reality, however, is that it has become purely a player event. The volunteer aspect never caught on, although I still see it as a way to teach people new skills like umpiring."

The competition is played on a league basis to determine which two clubs will contest the final each year, with the winning club receiving a

magnificent trophy commissioned from The Silver Tennis Collection. The Millennium Cup trophy, which was donated by the three inaugural clubs in perpetuity, is a beautiful crystal vase centrepiece measuring 215 mm in height and 145 mm in diameter set on a wooden base with a silver sleeve.

"We were so thrilled to win the trophy that first time in 2004," says Telford Park's Chairman Brigit Wilkins about accepting the Millennium Cup from Brazilian tennis legend, Maria Esther Bueno. "This is such a brilliant competition and to have such a great champion there watching the final made it all the more special for us that day."

"I was so pleased to be there," said Maria Esther at the time. "The matches were really competitive and they were all trying their hearts out, which was so good to see. It's what competing is all about."

An Organising Committee of representatives from all the participating clubs oversees arrangements for each year's competition and sets the framework for the future running of the event. "We meet around three or four times a year to discuss how things are going and whether we need to tweak the rules a bit," explains Barbara who continues to serve as Chairman and

AMB Sports the specialists in the design and construction of sports facilities including a comprehensive range of tennis courts and surfaces. Over fifty years combined experience.

Surface include:- AMB Dek-Macadam, AMB Prodek Acrylic, AMB-Turf Synthetic Grass, AMB Prodek SCP Porous Acrylic.

For full product range and technical information contact us on **08700 624370**

Tournament Director for the competition. "The major concern is usually the standard of play criteria, which sounds rather grand but is actually the mechanism that ensures the Millennium Cup remains a friendly competition through which new players can gain useful match experience." The intent of the competition is to involve players who do not ordinarily play for their clubs in county events and so give them an opportunity to compete in matches at a local level. In order to keep the standard equitable, the Committee agrees with each club to exclude specific team players.

It is necessary to get as many players as possible to compete

Each club has to find players to compete in the following disciplines at each tie:
 Singles 16 & Under Boys;
 16 & Under Girls; Men's Open (no age restriction);
 Women's Open (no age restriction); 45 & Over Men's;
 40 & Over Women's Doubles Men's, Women's and Mixed – all with no age restrictions.
 Captains are encouraged not to 'double up' players unless absolutely necessary to get as many players as possible to compete.
 "It's a really good way to mix age groups and we've seen some great junior/veteran partnerships from time to time," observes Peter Risdon, the official referee for the event.
 The inaugural Millennium Cup was won by Wigmore in 2001, who saw off challenges from

Telford Park and Woodfield Grove to win the magnificent crystal trophy for the first time. Grafton and Norbury Park Lawn Tennis Clubs then entered the competition, resulting in five clubs contesting the event from 2002 to 2005. "Unfortunately both Grafton and Norbury Park experienced difficulties in fielding teams and had to withdraw," recalls Peter. "But Grafton returned last year and we are hoping to see Norbury Park back in 2008. West Norwood have yet to participate although they have an open invitation to do so." After their initial win, Wigmore has appeared in every final without clinching the trophy again, until last September when they came from behind to snatch it from the grasp of Telford Park, 5-4. Telford Park, champions for the past three years, established an early lead by going up 3-1 in matches won when 14 year-old Tumani Carayol put in an impressive display against Paul Stewart, winning through 6-3 6-2, while their men's pair looked to be dominating the men's doubles. A straight sets victory by Wigmore's mixed doubles team of Neil Dowden and Caroline Strachan over Marvin Torres and Estelle Galez and a win by Jimmy Callus in the Under 16s Boys' singles levelled proceedings at 3-all. Marlene Russell's 6-3 6-1 win against Alison Reeves put Wigmore ahead as the men's doubles became the critical factor.
 A tenacious comeback by Adrian Crawford and Vineet Mohan from a set down against Alders Hodgkinson and Alex Vincent in the doubles gave Wigmore the unassailable lead 5-3, although Telford Park's Christine Short was able to claw back a final point when she defeated Caroline Strallan in the final match.

"I am so very pleased that we won again," said Sue Goligher, Wigmore's Secretary and Millennium Cup Captain. "Especially after all those years as runners-up! It's a great competition that has given many of our members, good match play experience." The Committee reviews the competition each autumn.
 "We ask the question of the clubs every year whether it is worth continuing with the Millennium Cup because there are invariably difficulties in finding the players from time to time but the overwhelming response is always positive," says Barbara.
 "We actually take it pretty seriously, with a proper rulebook and full records of the results since inception so we can measure progress. For a while there were quite a lot of one-sided matches and this didn't help the cause. Last year everything was more evenly-balanced, which gives the participants encouragement because nobody likes to get thrashed. If you are new to the game, this can be a complete disaster!"
 The Organising Committee is now looking at establishing a Millennium Cup website so players can have ready access to current scores and past results as well as to photos, news and match reports.
 "In the old days we used to have 'friendlies' between the local clubs but those have long gone in the fixtures calendar so there was really no way to give new players some match play experience. The Millennium Cup has changed that for members of the Streatham clubs," concludes Barbara rather proudly.
 "Let's hope there'll be a few more years yet for it to run!"

Trevor May
 AT THE SURFACE OF SPORT



Trevor May Contractors Ltd

Mill Lane Barn
 Canterbury Road
 Challock
 Ashford
 Kent
 TN25 4BJ
 Tel +44 (0) 1233 740574
 enquiries@trevormay.co.uk
 www.trevormay.co.uk



Trevor May Contractors Ltd
 Principal Contractor

Edel Grass
 Manufacturer and Supplier

Edel Grass

UK Office
 PO Box 1694
 Evercreech
 Shepton Mallet
 Somerset
 BA4 6YB
 Tel +44 (0) 1749 831413
 edelgrassdr@aol.com
 www.edel.nl