



A brief history of our club - the early years from 1920s to 1990s

Alan Cooper, a long-standing member of our club, wrote this brief interesting history of the early years of the club's existence.

The Tennis Club was formed by a wealthy benefactor Mr H. Guy Chester who was Chairman of Lloyds of London, the insurance underwriters. He was born in 1887 and died 4 days after partnering the writer of this article in October 1973. In the early 1920s he acquired what is now known as The North Bank Estate, which included the land on which were subsequently built Chester House - a young persons' Hall of Residence, The Meadow - a nursing home, and The Paddock Sheltered Housing.

In 1924 Mr Chester formed the tennis club on the site of The Paddock, and there were 4 en-tous-cas shale courts. The home now known as The Meadow was not built until 1966 and prior to that it was grassland on which 2 cows grazed.

I joined the club in 1969 and at that time the ability to play tennis on Sundays had just been granted but only between the hours of 2 and 5pm. It was impossible to play during the winter months because after the first frost of the winter, the sub-surface of cinders would come to the surface. In the spring there was a need for a working party to roll the cinders back down and reapply fresh top dressing. A great deal of maintenance was required during the season, watering and rolling the courts.

In 1985 a big change took place as the estate management was to build sheltered housing on the site of our courts. New hard courts and clubhouse were built on our current site. In 1987 floodlights were installed, and at a later date the courts were resurfaced with the current artificial grass. To finance the floodlights a loan was obtained from the LTA and, as we did not own the land, ten members had to guarantee £500 each should the club collapse for any reason. A miscalculation of the total cost of the floodlights led to a shortfall of money available of about £1500, so we had to write to the Methodist headquarters in Manchester effectively begging for this additional funding. A cheque was received by return of post, for which we were very grateful.



Joe Anan joined the club as Coach in the early 1990s and the fortune of the club was transformed with the setting up of the "Return to Tennis" sessions that he started, attracting many new and enthusiastic members to the club. These sessions continue to the present date.

The picture is an aerial view of the club in 1947.

Sadly Alan Cooper died on 2 January 2024. Mike Lee penned these words about him: "I first met Alan when Fred and I joined the club in November 1975. He had already by then been at the club since 1969 having moved to London from Altrincham, staying initially at Chester House. Alan contracted Bone TB as a child which inhibited his later physical development, but it never stopped him living a full life. He once told me that doctors had given him a life span of 50 years and after he had well exceeded that, stated the reason was down to his tennis. He felt the exercise had strengthened his constrained heart and lungs. Alan was also our last link to Guy Chester who founded the club, having met him a number of times in the very early 70s. Alan continued to play at the club until 2 years ago and will be remembered, amongst other things, for his many creative entries in the ever-expanding Muswell Hill Tennis book of excuses for a bad shot. He was a wonderful example of how to overcome adversity and make the best of a life. The end of an era."

Bio of Harold Guylee (Guy) Chester O.B.E. 1887-1973

Date

25 February 1887

Event

Born at Manor Park, eldest son of Thomas Guylee and Mary Hannah Chester (nee Lambert). Guy was one of five children: Winifred Lambert (Winnie) born in 1885, Guy in 1887, Samuel Herbert (Bert) born in 1888, Edith born in 1891 and who died the same year and Thomas Arthur (Arthur) born in 1893. He was given the name Guylee after his father's mother who was born Hannah Guylee in 1821, the daughter of Thomas Guylee (born in 1784). His father's father, Samuel Chester (born in 1824) was a Methodist Minister in Ripley, Derby. Educated at Skerry's College and Carpenters' School in Stratford but left school at 16. Keen at playing cricket, football and tennis.

14 September 1903

Entered Lloyd's to work for Edward Hicks

December 1914

Elected an underwriting member of Lloyd's. After the 1914-18 war he had a syndicate of his own at Lloyd's which was most successful. In 1921 Edwards Hicks retired and the whole syndicate became Guy's with twenty names.

3 June 1916

Married Winifred Tomkinson, a school teacher at United Methodist Church, Manor Park. Shortly afterwards they moved to Roseberry Road, Muswell Hill and started worshipping at the then Wesleyan church.

End of 1919

Moved to Hazlehyrst in Colney Hatch Lane.

1919-1939

Guy led the Senior Department of Sunday School. This became known as the Sunday Afternoon Institute and met in the Church Parlour until 1932 when it moved to the Oak Room at North Bank. In connection with this the Methodist Church Tennis Club was started just off Cascade Avenue.

19 August 1920

Daughter Edna born.

Winifred became involved with the YWCA which met in a hut in the grounds of Devonshire Lodge (which was adjacent to Hazlehyrst on the site now occupied by the Hostel), built by Mr Samuel Cook who lived at North Bank and also owned Devonshire Lodge. The hut seated about 100 people. A

- number of girls also lived at Devonshire Lodge under the direction of Miss Smithson.
- 1924 Mr Cook died and the houses (North bank and Devonshire Lodge) were to be sold for development. Winifred was concerned about what would happen to the YWCA. Guy went to see Mr Cook's brother and agreed a price to buy the whole estate including the two cows, Daisy and Buttercup. Guy also bought two ponies.
- League of Nations Union started with Guy as secretary. Continued as Secretary until 1939. In 1945 became President of Muswell Hill United Nations Association.
- Autumn 1924 Tennis Club was likely to lose their current site, so Guy decided to build a new Pavilion and four En-Tout-Cas tennis courts in the top meadow of North Bank (site of The Paddock Sheltered Housing Scheme). This was opened in 1925.
- 1925 Guy became President of the Muswell Hill Horticultural Society and remained President until his death.
- June 1926 Garden Party held at North Bank in aid of Hornsey YMCA and opened by Princess Helena Victoria (1870-1948), daughter of Prince Christian of Schleswig-Holstein and granddaughter of Queen Victoria.
- In 1926 Guy was elected to serve on Lloyd's Underwriters Association and he served for about 35 years being chairman for 5 years. He was elected to the Committee of Lloyd's in 1933 and continued with one year off until 1952. He was Deputy Chairman of Lloyd's in 1937 and again from 1940-1942. In 1973 he celebrated the completion of 70 years at Lloyd's.
- July 1927 Winifred died in hospital following an operation.
- 1932 Guy became President of the London Branch of the Methodist Missionary Laymen's Movement and remained in this office until 1960.
- 8 October 1932 Refurbished North Bank was opened. This was particularly planned for work among young people.
- 1933 Guy became President of the Hornsey YMCA and continued as President until 1950. He remained on the Council.
- 1936 Alabama was bought and added to the Estate.
- 1938 Stained Glass Windows fitted and dedicated in 8 small windows of Muswell Hill Methodist Church
- 1953 Elected as Vice President of the Methodist Conference for 1954. The Rev W Russell Shearer was President. 1954 conference was held in London.
At Muswell Hill Methodist Church was Society Steward for two periods (1933-35 and 1941- 44), Chapel Steward for 15 years, Circuit Steward for 10 years (1939-48), Secretary and Treasurer of Circuit Ministers' Homes Trust, Treasurer of the Church Trust, Connexional Treasurer of the Methodist

Sunday School Department and in 1943 became the Connexional Treasurer of the new Methodist Youth Department.

Sunday Afternoon Institute continued to meet weekly in the Oak Room at North Bank. The Sunday meetings generally took the form of a short service. Guy often gave the talk. Once a month there was a special speaker with a tea to follow in the Garden Room with Sunday School Staff and overseas guests. There were also social meetings on a Monday evening. Young people could join the Institute at about 16 years old but there was apparently no upper age limit.

22 February 1947

Responsibility for North Bank Estate handed over the Trustees of Methodist Church Purposes. Guy established a substantial endowment fund for the Estate.

1960

Chester House Hostel and Headquarters of Methodist Youth Department opened. Total cost was £230,000 of which £50,000 was donated by Guy. Around this time Pinner Lodge was purchased and offered to the Highgate Circuit on lease as a Manse. In 1963 two houses in Woodberry Crescent were purchased for the use of former residents of Chester House.

30 October 1963

Awarded the O.B.E.

1964/65

Stables at entrance to North Bank converted into flats.

1967

The Meadow opened as a Methodist Home for the Aged for 32 people.

21 October 1973

Following church and after playing hymns on the piano Guy died in the gardens.

Written by Michael H Quinlan
(Grandson of Guy Chester)
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