

HISTORY OF THE ST KEVIN'S TENNIS CLUB

The St Kevin's Tennis Club was a result of a vision of the then Parish Priest, the late Reverend Father Charles McCann. In 1978, some seven years after the parish of St Kevin's was dedicated, he organised a group of parishioners who were interested in playing tennis, to form a working committee with a view to building a tennis club on an area that had been bulldozed out during the construction of the school sports oval.

Father Charlie, as he was affectionately known to all that knew him, realised it was going to be a way of getting people together. It really had a great effect on parish unity despite not too many people on the Club building working bees agreeing with him and, even if they did, sometimes not working with him. But he just kept saying, "Let's keep going."

David Kelly, who was a builder in the Parish, was elected the Club's first President at the Club's inaugural meeting. This was attended by approx. fifteen to twenty St Kevin's parishioners - all interested in playing tennis

These parishioners, who were later to be referred to as a 'team of experts' included electricians, plumbers, engineers, surveyors, equipment lenders and suppliers of materials etc. They all donated their time, materials or expertise as required.

The building of the retaining walls which included cutting into the side of the hill where the tennis courts are now situated was extremely hard and it took a lot of cajoling and drive by Father Charlie to get these retaining walls built over many weekend working bees.

David Kelly, who had never been involved in building any tennis courts before being elected President of the Club's first committee, bought some books to read up all about constructing tennis courts. Realising that these needed to be financed by St Kevin's parishioners interested in playing tennis, he sought and obtained (with some slight difficulty) a list of the then parishioners at St Kevin's.

The committee sent a letter to approximately 130 people, telling them that tennis courts were to be built in the parish and that by taking out a Foundation Membership for \$100 per family they would receive membership for three years. They received a response from 60 people and \$6000 gave the committee enough confidence to begin building the court complex.

Most (if not all) the bluestone blocks surrounding the courts came via Whelan the Wreckers (a well-known demolition Company in those days) mostly from Pentridge and from the Catholic Ladies College in East Melbourne.

Every Saturday morning, while the courts were being built, Father Charlie would celebrate Mass and he would then take the cement mixer and drive the tractor over to the site of the courts to await the voluntary labour which, more often than not, was in short supply.

Because some of the bluestone blocks forming the retaining walls were huge, weighing more than 800lbs (363kg), a front end loader had to be obtained. This enabled the placement of these blocks, mainly along the base and also directly above.

As is usually the case with working bees, some of those organised to build the retaining walls were successful and some were not. Even though Father Charlie announced at Mass that there was a working bee organised and some extra help did turn up, when they realised what was involved in putting up the bluestone retaining walls many of them disappeared never to be seen again.

Despite all the hardships encountered, for example not enough manpower during many weekend organised working bees, and the extremely hard work in cutting into the shale rock face where the retaining walls had to be located, eventually with the assistance of dedicated parishioners and non parishioners in the parish all the bluestone retaining walls were completed.

Building the Courts

As soon as the St Kevin's parishioners started to see the development taking place at the Tennis Club site, more and more became interested in joining, thus enabling club membership to increase and more money to become available to proceed with building the actual courts themselves.

Father Charlie argued that three courts were sufficient and a fourth court area could be allocated for a basketball court. After heated arguments with several members of the Tennis Club Committee, for once in the history of St. Kevin's, Father Charlie lost out and eventually, not only were the four proposed tennis courts built, but also two more directly above in an area which had also been excavated.

Rumour has it that a lot of the shale that was excavated from the two top courts area became filling for the building of the Eastern Freeway. The freeway builders needed it and the Tennis Club wanted to get rid of it – so it all worked out in the favour of the Club.

After designing and preparing the site for the courts David measured out the position for each net post and organised the holes to be drilled into the rock.

He tried to involve different people in the parish and some were just fantastic in providing materials. One parishioner in particular helped out with all the pipe works and safety railings around the courts. Although that in itself was a terrific bonus, most other material used was pretty much paid for as work went along. The good part was that people became more interested and memberships increased when they started seeing the courts being developed.

Contractors were hired to put down the crushed rock, the bitumen and then the surface which was originally agreed to be of the Plexipave type, thus avoiding the maintenance work associated with the *en tous cas* type surface.

When David installed the net posts and organised someone to put in the netting and the gates, where there was once a vacant piece of parish land, suddenly there were some tennis courts. Although it was a massive effort, particularly on the part of David Kelly and Father Charlie, all in all the courts themselves were completed in only twelve months.



**Mrs Stella Sheahan at the opening
of the tennis courts**

The courts were officially opened in March, 1980. Father McCann and Mrs Stella Sheahan were the patrons of the club. Mrs Sheahan was the oldest member of the parish at that time.

When Mrs Sheahan opened the courts she just walked up and cut the ribbon and the spring-loaded gate flew back. She declared the courts open and said, "God bless all those who play on them."

Although it was a huge effort it was done at a minimum of cost and that was the best part. The four courts cost about \$20,000 to put up at the time which was considerably lower than the going costs then. All this was due mainly to the dedication of two people – David Kelly and Father Charlie McCann.

Building the Clubhouse

While sitting on logs outside the tennis courts and having a great time one day, shortly after the courts were built, David Kelly suggested to Father Charlie that the next step would be to build a Clubhouse. With Father Charlie having a hand in everything that went on in the parish he indicated that he didn't want to see "just a tin shed built". In response David indicated his intention to put up a sixteen square clubhouse and offered to present a design for Father Charlie's Approval.

Having received Father Charlie's nod for the design of the proposed Clubhouse, David went ahead and having had his regular draftsman prepare working plans for it which were submitted for Council approval, the building of the Clubhouse commenced in August 1981, approximately ten years after the inaugural meeting of the first tennis club committee. The Clubhouse was completed, again with a lot of help from the parishioner and non-parishioners – all of whom donated their labour, expertise and in many instances, building material. The Clubhouse was blessed and officially dedicated by Father Charlie McCann in February 1983.

The Club was now financial. As well as the Foundation Membership there were Family, Single and Child Memberships. Everything was well organised and members were full of enthusiasm and excitement.

This enthusiasm by members was channelled into raising money to pay for the building of the clubhouse. The committee set up a Loan for which people were asked to lend the club \$100 for three years. Although it was intended that this loan be re-paid after three years, when it was due to be re-paid, the committee

sent out letters advising that the club would appreciate it greatly if members chose to donate it to the Club. The Committee was heartened to see that about approximately 75% of the members donated that money.

With a loan of a further \$6000.00 which was borrowed from the parish (and which was paid back by the Tennis Club within three years, contrary to belief of some parishioners who were not members of the tennis club), the building of the tennis courts and the Clubhouse complex was never a burden on the St Kevin's Parish Finance.

Again, in building the Clubhouse, the generosity of many parishioners who were directly involved in trade or supply of materials etc., came to light when much of the plumbing work, painting supplies and ancillary material were donated free of charge.

The clubhouse was officially opened by Father Charlie McCann on February 27, 1983.



Tennis Courts and Clubhouse

The first Stage (lower four courts) of the St Kevin's Tennis Club complex was completed when the area was landscaped with gardens, a bitumen car park was formed and lights were installed.

Later Developments

With the club membership growing so quickly and with more courts being needed, the courts at the nearby Passionist Monastery were used until two more courts were added on the upper side of the St Kevin's Tennis Club Complex. Once again, these two "top courts" were built with volunteer labour and donated materials which were completed in 1984/85. When the plexipave court surfaces needed replacing, rather than repaint the surfaces it was decided to go for synthetic grass cover for all six courts.

The original four bottom courts were first resurfaced in 1994/95 and the top courts in 1997. In 1998 lighting was installed around the top courts. This was an enormous undertaking which was once again completed largely by voluntary labour.

At first, the committee asked for quotations but when the cheapest quote received was for \$35 000, they decided to do the work themselves and it was fortunate that they were able to buy some second hand light poles for a quarter of the cost.

During several weekends three or four committee members excavated the professionally designed foundation holes for further two light poles which necessitated the use of jack hammers, owing to the existing hard solid shale which is typical of the area.

Members poured the concrete in the pole foundation holes, encasing threaded steel rods which were later used to anchor the light poles. Fifteen men were able to manhandle each pole into position, as a mechanical elevator raised the poles which were then fixed solidly into position by tightening up the nuts threaded onto the concrete encased threaded steel rods. An electrical company did the wiring and installed a coin operated timer. All this took ten months to complete.

St Kevin's Tennis Club's facilities are regarded very highly by many, so much so that visitors coming from other clubs to use the facilities were heard to comment on the layout and the location. One visiting team member was even heard to say that it was just like going away to a holiday resort when visiting St Kevin's.

The Club in 2002

In 2002, the club almost reached capacity. There were one hundred and ninety-two memberships either junior, single, adult or composite family units. Land rental and electricity costs as per meter reading are paid out of membership fees to the parish or the parish school.

At present there are inter-club competitions for men's, ladies', mixed and junior teams and times for social games and the Tennis Club continues to thrive.

Competitions take place for mixed adults on Saturday afternoons, for juniors on Saturday and Sunday mornings, for men on Tuesday nights and for ladies on Wednesday nights and Thursday mornings. The ladies' social groups play on Monday nights and Wednesday mornings and these are extremely popular.

Apart from tennis related activities, the Club facilities are also used sometimes by the parish school for inter school tennis events or year-end dinners for departing final year students.

They are also used by the Parish Family Groups for yearly activities as well as the odd occasion, when the Clubhouse is hired out to Club members for private celebrations of one kind or another.

With all this Tennis and other activities involving the Tennis Club it can be seen that Father Charlie McCann's vision of bringing the St Kevin's parishioner together has been realised.

Acknowledgement

This St Kevin's Tennis Club History was rewritten in his format based on the Club History included in the book "***St Kevin's Parish, Templestowe -Reminiscences of the Parish***"- written by Margaret Mangan whose permission for this rewrite (and proof reading) is forever gratefully acknowledged.

