

HISTORY OF TENNIS COURTS

There are many theories as to the origins of tennis but many believe that the early form of tennis can be dated back to the 11th century when monks used to play hand ball around the cloisters of monasteries. The game gradually evolved to the game of Real Tennis, the precursor of the modern game, and became very popular with the French and British nobility. Henry VIII was a keen player and had the original Real Tennis court built at his Palace at Hampton Court (see below) but Charles II later re-modelled the court in the 17th century to the court that exists today which is the oldest in Britain.



Grass

Real Tennis was and still is played on hard surfaces, wood or stone, and it was not until the late 18th century that “Field Tennis” or “Long Tennis” began to evolve on grass courts. It wasn’t until the Victorian era that the game of Lawn Tennis as we know it today became popular. Major Walter Clopton Wingfield patented his version of the game in 1873. His design of the court was much the same as it is today in terms of marking but the shape of the court was in an hourglass design.

The shape of the court was modified in 1875 to today's design and official rules of Lawn Tennis were drawn up by Marylebone Cricket Club. Wimbledon's All England Croquet Club adopted the sport in 1880 and subsequently changed its name to the All England Lawn Tennis & Croquet Club, home of the Wimbledon Championships.

Until the early 1970s, the majority of tennis tournaments were played on grass, including three out of the four Grand Slams – Wimbledon Championships, Australian Open and the US Open. Wimbledon is now the only Grand Slam event played on grass, whilst the majority of professional tennis events played on grass take place in England.

Clay

Clay courts are mainly found in Europe and South America and up until the 1980s, virtually all the courts in Spain and Italy were clay courts. The French Open championships at Roland Garros is the only Grand Slam event to be played on clay.

Acrylic/Asphalt/Concrete

These materials, traditionally used in civil engineering, can be porous or non-porous (impermeable). They utilise a wide variety of surface textures, colours and names. It was not until the 1940s that acrylic courts were used in official tournaments. Now, the Australian Open and US Open are both played on acrylic courts.

Carpet

'Carpet' is the term used for most synthetic indoor surfaces and the first carpet surface was called 'Sportsface'. In the 1970s, 'Supreme' became the first rubber mat surface to become widely accepted. Artificial grass is also a surface used in tennis as well as other sports such as hockey and football. The pace of the court can be varied by adding sand or rubber granular material.