Lawn Tennis and Major T. H. Gem (Perera)

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Here occurred one of the more surprising and perhaps least known of Birmingham's many gifts to the world – the invention of Lawn Tennis by Major T H Gem and Mr J B A Perera. The Blue Plaque gives the date of the first game as 1865 but recent research shows that experimentation began as early as 1859.

Harry Gem, Clerk to the Birmingham Magistrates and Mr Augurio Perera, a trader in Spanish merchandise, played rackets at Birmingham's Bath Street Racquet Club and wanted to devise a not too dissimilar game for outdoor play – and suitable for both sexes. This led them to experiment on the croquet lawn of Perera's Edgbaston home at 8 Ampton Road, known then as "Fairlight", when Perera was 37 and Gem 40 years of age.

In the summer of 1872, the two friends together with local doctors Frederic Haynes and Arthur Tompkins, formed the world's first club specifically for the playing of tennis, in Leamington Spa. Play was on the lawns of the Manor House Hotel – located opposite Perera's new home (also called "Fairlight") in Avenue Road, Leamington Spa. Harry Gem also moved to Leamington Spa in 1872.

The Leamington Club did not survive for very long, although there is today a Leamington Tennis and Squash Club but in a different location in the town.

After Leamington, the first club to take up the game of Lawn Tennis appears to have been Edgbaston Archery and Croquet Society (based since 1867 in grounds next to the Birmingham Botanical Gardens and in 1877 renamed Edgbaston Archery and Lawn Tennis Society). Evidence supports that with the demise of the original Leamington club, the Society is the oldest surviving tennis playing club in the country and therefore, by implication, in the world.

Additional information provided by Robert Holland, Hon. Sec. Edgbaston Archery and Lawn Tennis Society