

Cippenham Table Tennis Club – 50 years 1973-2023



By Graham Trimming

2023 was a momentous year for Cippenham Table Tennis Club as it marked the fiftieth anniversary of its founding. A celebration, well attended by current and former members, was held at the club's headquarters in June.



Cippenham TTC stalwarts Ken Phillips, Graham Trimming and Peter Hillier prepare to cut the cake at the 50th anniversary celebration

The club was founded in the summer of 1973 by Graham Trimming who, together with a few friends, established its base at St. Andrew's Shared Church in the village of Cippenham, from which the club took its name, part of the urban town of Slough, then in Buckinghamshire but now in Berkshire. The nucleus of the founding members came from the ITW company team that had won Division 5 of the Slough League in its first season. However, by the end of that season only Graham, of the regular team members, remained an employee of the company and so it was time to either join another club or start their own. The latter option was chosen and Cippenham entered two teams in the Slough League and another two in the Maidenhead League. By the following season, 1974-75, the number of teams had grown remarkably to six in Slough and three in Maidenhead, with one team in each of the top divisions of those leagues.



St. Andrews Shared Church - the club's first venue

Although numerically the club became strong and attracted some good local players, five years elapsed before the club first won a local league title when the Slough League championship was captured in 1978. That was the first of twenty-four such titles won by the Club before the demise of the Slough League in 2010. The Maidenhead League title has also been won on twelve occasions to date as was the Buckinghamshire Club Championship in its inaugural season 1984.

Encouraged by a successful “double” of the Slough and Maidenhead league championships in 1980-81, the club embarked on a venture into the National Club League (*now the Senior British League*). A team was operated for four seasons in Division 3 before it was decided to withdraw because of a lack of available local players of the required standard. Then in 1987, the ETTA initiated regional leagues and the Southern Region League was born. Cippenham promptly entered teams in both the open and ladies’ sections and, in the ten years of the league’s existence, won both sections five times.

Prior to that, the club had moved headquarters. In 1992 Haymill School closed and representatives of the club joined with those from other organisations to promote the site as a community centre. In 1994 this came to fruition and Cippenham TTC became one of the first tenants of the new centre, utilising the former school gymnasium where four match tables or six practice/coaching tables could be set up. Grant funding of £5,500 was secured to make this happen and, now with suitable facilities, a coaching scheme was launched.



Haymill Centre in use for the Club Championships 1988

Within a couple of years the indefatigable Ken Phillips took over as Head Coach, a position he has retained ever since. Ken is one of the main reasons that the Cippenham club has been so successful as he has introduced many hundreds of young players to the sport. Under his stewardship, the club’s coaching scheme has produced over twenty international players at various levels and around the same number of national champions. The most famous of these are Joanna Parker (*now Drinkhall*), Gareth Herbert, Gavin Evans and Terry Young. Such was the success of the coaching around the turn of the century that five different Cippenham protégés won the English National Under-12 Boys’ Singles title between 1993 and 2003.



The 12 Cippenham players who played for Slough, Maidenhead and High Wycombe in the finals of the Leach Cup and Hammersley Cup in 1999: (l-r): Ken Phillips (coach); Helen Smith; Francesca Parnell; Chris Hansell; Gemma Chapman; Joanna Parker; Hannah Stone; Emma Human; Tom Mitchell; Bradley Evans; Stuart Tweedy; David Hayes; Warren Brooks; Sue Hayes (coach); Rhys Evans (coach).

In 1995 Buckinghamshire won the County Championships Junior Premier Division for the first time with an all-Cippenham team and then, remarkably, all twelve players in the 1999 finals of the Leach Cup and Hammersley Cup, involving teams representing Slough, Maidenhead and High Wycombe, were being trained at Cippenham. In total, Cippenham players were responsible for thirteen titles in the four national junior and cadet team events over the period 1996 to 2003. Alongside this, Cippenham won the Junior British League Girls' Premier Division title three times between 2000 and 2006.

However, by far the most important event in the history of the club occurred in October 1996. That was the opening of the purpose-built Cippenham Table Tennis Centre within the grounds of The Westgate School. This project was five years in the making and was achieved only after securing £520,000 funding through large grants from the National Lottery, the Foundation for Sport and the Arts (through the English Table Tennis Association) and the Funding Agency for Schools. Top-up grants came from Sports Council Southern Region, The Westgate School, Slough Borough Council and Slough Social Fund. Graham Trimming describes this project as "the hardest thing I have ever done in my life, but also the most rewarding". A Building Sub-Committee worked for five years and, apart from Graham, owes much to Alec Watson, Frank Earis and Steve Joel and also benefited considerably from assistance provided by Paul Baker who, at the time, was employed as Facilities Officer by the ETTA.



*The Building Committee 1996:
Graham Trimming; Frank Earis; Alec
Watson; Steve Joel*



*Cippenham Table Tennis Centre as originally built in 1996. The front has
since been reshaped with an extension to the servery and lounge areas and
re-positioning of the main door*

This facility has since enabled Club to vastly expand its operations to the point where it now hosts many events on behalf of the national, regional and local associations, runs its own open tournaments, has twice-weekly open practice sessions to which anyone can come along and play table tennis plus three weekly coaching sessions that continue to produce outstanding young players.

Cippenham Table Tennis Centre boasts a playing area of 25m x 22m which accommodates eight or nine tables in high-grade tournament conditions, twelve tables for National Junior League and National Cadet League and more for general play and coaching. Adjacent is a lounge and servery that benefits from a glazed screen viewing out onto the playing hall plus entrance foyer, office, washrooms and storeroom. Changing and shower facilities are provided in the adjacent school amenities block.

It was a mere six weeks after opening that the new centre was blessed with staging a friendly men's international match between England and Slovakia and this prompted three further matches in the European Women's League. Since then the National Junior and Cadet Masters have been staged several times plus the Senior and Junior Premier Divisions of the County Championships. For more than twenty years Cippenham has also hosted all weekends of the Senior British League.



Set up for Senior British League in 2023

That momentous year of 1996 also saw Cippenham named by the ETTA as National Club of the Year and this award was repeated the following year. A third such accolade was received in 2010 as the National Excellence *PremierClub* of the Year. Individual Cippenham members have also received many honours with Jan Chapman, Melanie Farquhar, Catherine Hayes, Sue Hayes, Gareth Herbert, Peter Hillier, Jacque Lovell, Stephanie Mitchell, Ken Phillips and Graham Trimming all receiving annual awards from the national association. Ken also received the NCF England Coach of the Year (Local Volunteer in an Individual Sport) award in 2000 and the Berkshire Active Lifetime Achievement Award in 2017. On a more local note, the Mayor of Slough's Annual Sports Awards were, for many years, a rich hunting ground for Cippenham with a total of eight club awards and sixteen for individual members.

The first fifty years have seen a total of 890 players represent Cippenham in official club matches and the club continues to prosper with a membership of between one and two hundred, this year running twenty-two teams in various leagues including ten in the British League across all four of its sections.

A club like Cippenham can only succeed with a great deal of volunteer assistance and so training is an essential element of this. Many courses have been held at the club over the past quarter of a century and these have included coach education, umpire training, tournament organisers' courses and first aid. Volunteers are appreciated and rewarded and there is an annual award for outstanding contribution. For their immense contribution over very many years the club has also honoured four life members: Peter Hillier; Jacque Lovell; Ken Phillips; Graham Trimming.

An 80-page publication covering much more detail of the history of the club was produced for the anniversary and can be found at:

https://www.cippenhamttc.co.uk/files/ugd/4fa328_3688758ac4204125881e61ac11ed5ed2.pdf

Photos from the club's 50th anniversary celebration can be found at:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/cippenhamttc/albums/72177720308952732/>