

Wimbledon Tennis Museum: The All England Lawn and Tennis Club

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

There are many unique visitor attractions throughout the world, and many are based on various different sports. From baseball to football, there are museums to celebrate them, but perhaps one of the most unusual sporting tourist attractions can be found at Wimbledon.

The name is known the world over for the famous tennis tournament that takes place over two weeks at the end of June, and beginning of July.

The only remaining grass court Grand Slam tournament, there's much more to Wimbledon than just a fortnight of international top quality tennis action on the courts. The All England Lawn and Tennis Club, who run Wimbledon, realised some time ago that there was potential in the site and, as part of the major investment, which has seen the famous roof arrive on the new Centre Court, and a brand new number one court, a new museum was opened to the public in 2006.

It's something I'd wanted to visit for some time, and when my parents came down to see us, it seemed like the perfect place to take them. I got my love for tennis, and most particularly Wimbledon, from my mother. It was a well known fact when I was growing up that everything ground to a halt in our house for those two weeks, and that's a family tradition I've continued to this day!

When we visited, it was a very quiet weekend, and we found parking at the site easily enough, although spaces there are very limited. It's easy enough to get to from the center of London using public transport, as you can take the Underground to either Southfields on the District Line or Tooting Broadway on the Northern Line or the train from London Waterloo station to Wimbledon station. With all these options, then just grab the 493 bus.

It's perhaps one of the most bizarre entrances to a museum, as it's actually located underneath the major merchandise shop at Wimbledon. You buy your tickets and then descend down the stairs. As you walk in, you learn some fascinating facts -- for example, did you know that visitors consume 28,000 kilos of strawberries during the two weeks? Well, you do now!

From there, you learn how the game of tennis started, and how it came to Wimbledon. There's even a section on how they get the courts ready

for play, and as my father used to do a similar job, we found this really interesting. They even have ancient lawnmowers that were once used at Wimbledon. Of course, there are sections about tennis racquets, and the 52,000 balls that they use in a tournament.

Once you've learnt about the background to the tournament, and the various elements that make it up, then it's on to the important part -- the players. Although you don't get to meet the players themselves, you do get a tour of the gentlemen's dressing room in the 1980s from a ghost-like John McEnroe. When I read about this online, I was a bit sceptical, but it's been exceptionally well done and we all really enjoyed seeing this section. McEnroe talks candidly about life at the tournament, and preparing for matches, and none of it sounds scripted. It was really interesting to get a glimpse of somewhere that we wouldn't usually be allowed to go.

The Whites of Wimbledon takes you through the outfits worn by the players over the last 100 years. Personal highlights for me were some of Venus William's unique dresses, Roger Federer's amazing monogrammed jacket, and Maria Sharapova's gold tennis shoes, embroidered with her name.

The highlight is of course seeing the Wimbledon trophies, and yes, they do look exactly as they do when you see the winners holding them up on the TV, although they are both fairly small. I guess the title and the award money more than makes up for that!

One unique aspect of the museum is that you can also book a guided tour of Wimbledon. We broke up our museum visit to do the guided tour, which they're very happy for you to do. Our guide was exceptionally knowledgeable and very enthusiastic, happily answering any question we had. The tour took us to court number one, where we'd been lucky enough to see a match a couple of years earlier, where you get a front row seat for a couple of minutes.

We then headed up what's affectionately been named Henman Hill, where crowds who couldn't get tickets to the showcourts used to gather to watch British favourite Tim Henman in action on big TV screens. From the top of the hill, you have wonderful views across London, and I was amazed at how much you could see, including the London Eye, and the skyscrapers of the City of London.

Passing various outside courts, we saw the TV broadcasting suite, complete with a topiary of a TV cameraman on top of it, before heading inside to the press suite, where players do interviews after their matches. They've got a very impressive set-up here, but the numbers of

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journalists that cover the tournament are just staggering, so I guess they need to!

After a stop-off to see the title winners' boards, and a glimpse of the other showcourts, numbers two and three, the tour finished with a visit to Centre Court, with a front row view again. Now if only we could get those during the tournament itself!

The museum was a fascinating glimpse into every aspect of tennis, and covered more things than I could ever have imagined, but for me, the tour was the highlight, allowing you to enjoy the site without the crowds of Wimbledon fortnight. For any tennis fan, like me, this place really is a must-do on any visit to London.

To find out everything you need to know before a visit, check out the [Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Museum website](#), where you can also book guided tours online.

About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. [Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!](#)

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