

BRAINTREE COLLEGE

Braintree College first entered a team in the league in 1968 when they finished fourth in division one. PE lecturer and reigning men's singles champion Fred Sheldrake was the main driving force.

In its early seasons the team include fellow lecturer Alan Dyer, plus former men's singles champion Tim Mullane and student Neil Beckett, a men's singles semi finalist in 1971. They had a run of near misses in the league, finishing 4th, 2nd, 2nd in the next three seasons, in the last case missing the title by the closest possible margin, one game, after finishing level on points with Crittall A.

Their one title came in 1976, the year after a team of Sheldrake and Beckett, John Tay-Ahenakwa and Ron Fosker had finished third. One new signing the next year made the difference: Derek Wood had just moved to Witham, wanted a game and did the natural thing and rang up the league secretary, one Ron Fosker. Tay-Ahenawka had just left the college and the team was looking for an additional player – so it was with a clear conscience that the general secretary recommended he joined the College team!

It all fell apart a bit after the title. The draughty college hall was far from an ideal venue and Wood, Beckett and Fosker left to join the newly formed Bramston club. The club relied on students from that point with the obvious difficulty of a lack of continuity. No sooner had they established a decent team than the students would get their qualifications and move on. Perhaps their best student-led team was that of 1980 which won division two, featuring Sim Sie Kuang, Chua Soon Ann and Chua Soon Ping with some redoubtable backing from Sheldrake himself. They finished a respectable sixth in division one the next season without Ping but then all the students left and the club folded.