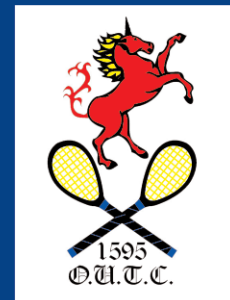


Newsletter

Oxford University Tennis Club



Autumn 2021

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Welcome back to tennis – and our Club Newsletter!

The Chairman writes: “A very warm welcome back to Tennis. It is extraordinary what has happened in the last 18 months and equally extraordinary that



we so quickly forget the months in lockdown and restrictions on sport. Whilst many of the pandemic rules have been eased we are being cautious about completely opening up the clubhouse, but all sessions are now bookable and we hope you enjoy the thrill of competitive 'realers once more.

Some big thank yous go to Chris Peri for acting as our Covid compliance officer and keeping an eye on all the twists and turns of government policy. Derek Williams brought together a great team whilst the court was closed, the floors have been scrubbed and the galleries and markings repainted, and the place is positively sparkling – see page 10 for Derek's report on what he found. Richard Alden has had a new front door welcome mat fitted.

Many thanks to all.”

Neil Mortensen

THE UNICORN FUND

Simon Stubbings writes: “The pandemic has shown the value organisations gain from having reserves. Over his many years of overseeing the Club’s finances Martin Mercer has ensured through prudent budgeting that we have been able to withstand shortfalls in income. This has been achieved informally through a depreciation policy that has allowed the creation of a sinking fund. The Committee now feels it sensible to formalise this arrangement and create a fund (to be called the Unicorn Fund) which will provide us with reserves to cushion the impact of unforeseen events such as pandemics, loss of sponsorship, etc. Details of how the Unicorn Fund will operate are being worked out and will be circulated shortly.”

EDITORIAL

It’s good – very good – to be back to tennis. It’s been eighteen months of non-playing frustration for most of the time and for most of us. But there have been some notable achievements which are reported here in this Newsletter. As Simon Stubbings says, it has caused us to reconsider how we can protect the long-term future of the Club in Oxford, to which end a new Unicorn Fund is to be set up. More details to follow.

Derek Williams has led an intensive effort to freshen up the Court itself and his account of the work and his discoveries introduces a set of pieces featuring the Club and the Court. Ever wondered about some of those photos and drawings in the Clubroom itself? Well, Miles Donnelly has now taken a closer look at the 1930s photo of the Lords Aberdare – donors of our Aberdare Trophy, while, in the first of a series of pieces, Roman Kzarnic considers the game of tennis and its emotional dimensions.

As you may know the Oxford teams were successful in the 150th Varsity Match. Congratulations are due – and the match reports (including a verse epic by Quentin Gueroult) introduce our section on the game in Oxford. Andrew and Craig end the Newsletter with a look at upcoming events and the return to the wider world of tennis.

Thanks to all who contributed to this Newsletter and please let us have your feedback, your suggestions, your own pieces.

Graham Harding

SEEN IN THE CLUBROOM . . .

THE LORDS ABERDARE AND OUTC

And on the subject of the Club, you’ve probably noticed the photo hanging on the wall by the bar. Two distinguished gentlemen – with a caption saying ‘The Lords Aberdare’. You’ll know the Aberdare Cup of course as an important fixture in our playing calendar, but do you know to whom do we owe the pleasure? The 3rd and 4th Lords Aberdare, father and son, are shown in this photograph taken outside the court at OUTC (probably when, as Andrew neatly puts it, “Lord Junior received his Blue”).

Both men captained the Oxford University team from First String. By reputation warm and generous, they contributed in numerous ways to the growth and perpetuation of the sport of Real Tennis. Both are reputed to be amongst the greatest amateur players of all time

The 3rd Lord Aberdare (1885-1957), Clarence Bruce, was British amateur Champion in 1930, 1932 and 1938. He played 18 times for Great Britain in the Bathurst Cup, was six times winner of the Coupe de Paris and MCC Gold Prize-winner on five occasions. He played an active role in the organisation of the Olympics, serving both on the International Olympic Committee and on the organising committee for the 1948 Olympics in London.

The 4th Lord Aberdare (1919-2005), Morys Bruce, was four times British singles amateur Champion and four times amateur doubles Champion. A keen student of the history of the game, he wrote *The Story of Tennis* (1959) and the *Willis Faber Book of Tennis and Rackets* (1980). He presided over the reopening of Melbourne in 1975 and Fontainebleu in 1990. He played Real Tennis well into his seventies, Chris Ronaldson reports that he caused the rules of RT to be changed: “The US allegedly abolished the pass between the wars, after becoming frustrated when Lord Aberdare had used the giraffe* in order to serve passes while recovering his breath after long exchanges”.

*For new readers, the giraffe serve goes high with plenty of spin so that when it hits the penthouse it clings to the back wall. Tricky to get right and even trickier to return.



The Hon. C. N. Bruce
1st string 1906

The Hon. M. G. L. Bruce
1st string 1939

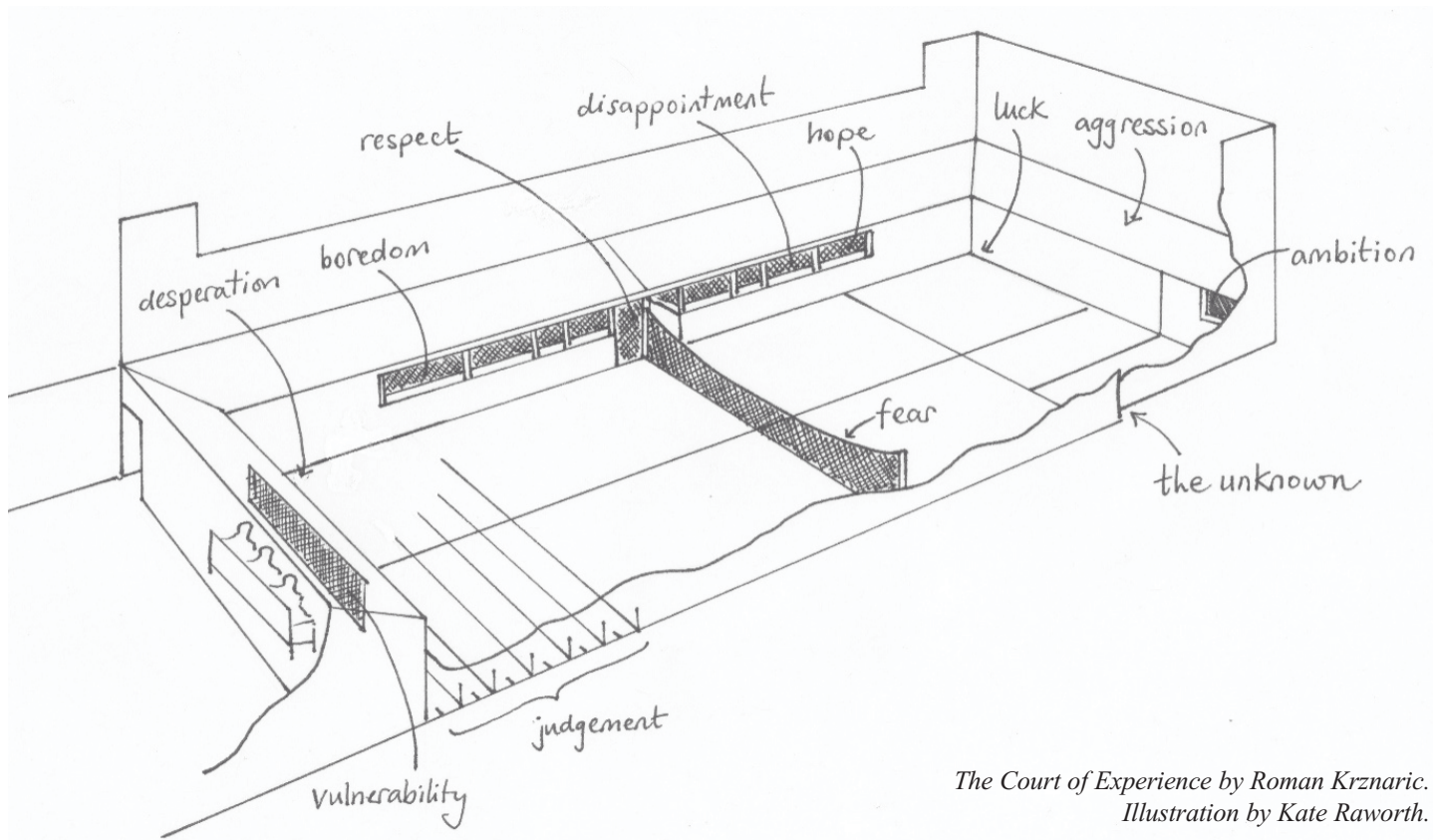
THE COURT OF EXPERIENCE

What are the emotional dimensions of playing tennis – and what can they teach us about who we are and who we want to be? This is a question I explored in my 2006 book, *The First Beautiful Game: Stories of Obsession in Real Tennis*, especially through an illustration called ‘The Court of Experience’ (see next page).

I was inspired to create it by a genre of graphic design known as ‘emotional cartography’ or ‘sentimental cartography,’ which became popular in Europe in the eighteenth century. You could, for instance, buy yourself a map of the ‘Empire of Love’ showing landscape features like the ‘sea of doubt,’ the ‘field of intoxication,’ and the ‘land of lust’.

I’m sorry to say that I couldn’t find a place for lust on my map of a tennis court. But at least some features of the court might resonate with your own experience of playing. The grille, of course, carries the label of ‘ambition,’ with the dedans opening us up to ‘vulnerability’. A ball off the tambour threatens the prospect of the ‘unknown’ while a failed shot into the winning gallery brings us the ‘disappointment’ of hitting hazard the second.

Looking back over this emotional map, fifteen years after I first drew it, I’m inclined to revise some of the labels. The last gallery would no longer be ‘boredom’ generated by an opponent who – somewhat tediously – repeatedly hits balls into it. Now I would describe it as ‘wisdom’: having reached my fiftieth year,



*The Court of Experience by Roman Krznaric.
Illustration by Kate Raworth.*

I'm constantly looking for ways to end the point as fast as possible and avoid long and exhausting rallies. There is no wiser shot, as far as I'm concerned, than hitting the last gallery. And perhaps I would add an extra 'fear' at the position where I would be volleying a return of serve: over the years I've discovered how much trepidation really underlies my execution of that shot, especially on big points in tight matches. I'm still trying to find ways to overcome it.

All that said, it's not my own Court of Experience that really matters – it is yours. So pick up a pencil and

draw one for yourself. Perhaps you will come up with a totally different landscape, giving space to curiosity, revenge and maybe even wonder.

This is the first in a series of articles on tennis and the art of living by Roman Krznaric, a writer, public philosopher and real tennis addict who has been playing in Merton Street since 1989.

www.romankrznaric.com



VARSIY MATCH REPORTS – BY THE VICTORS!

Men's First Team

The 150th Varsity Match was held on July 2nd & 3rd at MCC Real Tennis court at Lords and despite the impact of the pandemic it was a fantastically competitive match. The pandemic had limited training for both teams, with the match delayed to July with the hope of holding it in a more normal environment.

However, the ongoing pandemic meant social distancing measures were still in force and the match was witnessed by players only or via webcam.

Having not lost the men's Varsity match since 2017, this year's event went down to the wire, requiring a deciding doubles match – which Oxford won. The Cambridge team should consider themselves very unlucky, having been leading 3-1 going into the final

two matches. Oxford first- and second-string singles players (Rory Giddins and Benedict Yorston) produced superb victories under huge pressure to level the match 3-3. Rory and Benedict then joined forces to play and win a tense deciding doubles.

Rory Giddins playing in his final Real Tennis Varsity match requires a special mention being unbeaten in the last four years, having won 10 matches including

two deciding doubles matches. A superb effort, however even Rory had to be at his very best to get Oxford over the line this year. See next page for the full match results. It was a huge effort to play the Varsity match and without the efforts of all parties this year's brilliant match would have not been possible. With the 151st Varsity match less than six months away it promises to be another eventful match between Oxford and Cambridge.



Left to right: Ross Martin (reserve), James Kempton, James Bates (Captain), Benedict Yorston and Rory Giddins

Match scores	Player	Score
4th singles	James Kempton (Oxford) vs Patrick Smart (Cambridge)	2/6 1/6
3rd singles	James Bates (Oxford Capt) vs Marc Bonaventura (Cambridge Capt)	4/6/ 3/6
1st doubles	Rory Giddins & James Kempton (Oxford) vs Ed Hyde & Marc Bonaventura (Cambridge)	6/1 6/2 5/6 6/4
2nd Doubles	James Bates & Benedict Yortson (Oxford) vs Ivo Macdonald & Patrick Smart (Cambridge)	2/6 5/6 1/6
2nd singles	Benedict Yorston (Oxford) vs Ivo Macdonald (Cambridge)	6/1 6/5
1st singles	Rory Giddins (Oxford) vs Ed Hyde (Cambridge)	3/6 6/1 6/4
Deciding Doubles	Rory Giddins & Benedict Yorston (Oxford) vs Ed Hyde & Patrick Smart (Cambridge)	6/1/ 6/3

Women's First Team

The 150th anniversary match was hosted at Lord's and kindly sponsored by Pol Roger. According to handicaps the Oxford ladies looked to be the favourites going into

the match, and we certainly had plentiful experience between the squad members, but the strength of the Cambridge team should not be under-estimated!



Left to right: Eve Shenkman, Lottie Hoskin, Mary Strevens (Captain), Georgie Willis and Laura Neill

Our ladies knew they would have to play well to retain Oxford's recent winning streak...

The first match of the day was the second string between Eve Shenkman and Jacqueline Siu. This pairing had played last year, with Shenkman coming out triumphant, so Siu was very much out for revenge. Although this match proved a closer affair, Shenkman showed her class with some great chases and ultimately romped to a 6/2 6/3 victory. Let's go Oxford!

Next up for the ladies was Georgie Willis, our number one for the last 5 years, pitted against Sophia Lewis. This was also a repeat match of last year and Lewis knew she needed to raise her game to cause any problems for the dominant Willis. And start strong she did, hitting some beautiful shots and rushing to a 2-0 lead. However, Willis is not our top player for nothing, and after adjusting to the Lord's court, she soon was relentlessly hitting the targets and claimed the next 12 games in a row! 6/2 6/0! What a performance!

The final match for the ladies on Friday saw Laura Neill make her Varsity debut. Neill is a very talented squash player who took up the sport last Michaelmas and has really developed into a fine real tennis player! Neill was drawn against Kate Kirk, a very experienced Cambridge player, but it soon became clear this was to be a one-sided affair with Kirk unable to handle the fierce low shots of Neill. 6/0 6/1 to Oxford!

Saturday morning saw Lottie Hoskin and Eve Shenkman team up and take on Jacqueline Siu and Kate Kirk in the first doubles match of the weekend. This is a new pairing for Oxford but the ease with which these two played together did not make it obvious, delivering a very solid 6/2 6/1 victory. This win also meant that Shenkman secured an 100% winning record at Varsity – an impressive feat!

Lottie Hoskin then took to the court in the third string against Rosie Taylor. This pairing had not met before and began with a rather nervy start for both players. The first set proved very tight, with both players hitting some great winners, but ultimately resulted in Hoskin stealing it 6/5. Entering the second set, Hoskin stepped up her level to produce some very classy tennis and with Taylor's head going down a little, the momentum slipped from Cambridge to end 6/5 6/1 to Oxford!

The final match for Oxford saw Georgie Willis and Laura Neill battle against Sophia Lewis and Rosie Taylor. Although the final score of 6/2 6/2 suggests this was a relatively straight forward match, there were several key points midway through the second set which could have swung either way. Indeed, the Oxford duo did well to hold their nerve, playing some brilliant shots, and slotting the ball into difficult areas for the Cambridge pair to retrieve. What a way to end a fantastic weekend of tennis!

Women's Second Team

The 2s Varsity match was hosted at Cambridge. Once again, Oxford were the favourites ahead of the match, but with less collective experience than the Blues, there was perhaps more opportunity for nerves to come into play!

First up in the playing order was the fourth string match with Oxford's Judy Sayers taking on Camice Revier. Judy has previously played at Cambridge but did not let old allegiances get in the way of some very fine tennis- quickly gaining a 6/1 first set! The second set would prove more challenging however, with Revier finding her groove and hitting some lovely serves. Sayers kept her level though, and with the help of some beautiful shots in the dedans, managed to secure Oxford's first win of the day 6/1 6/3.

Next up to play was the third string match with Oxford's Jenny Jones against Maddie Angwin. Angwin put up a good fight, but Jones was unstoppable and really took advantage of her wicked serve she has been developing. What a weapon the serve proved to be and ultimately helped Jones claim a 6/1 6/2 win with relative ease.

The third match of the day, the second string, saw our captain Mary Strevens take the court! After a weekend of watching the Blues varsity she was ready to apply all the fine tennis she had observed into her own game ... with mixed results! Strevens was facing Poppy Metherell and gained an early momentum to win 6/1 in the first set, however Metherell still had plenty of spirit and began really swinging for her shots, causing difficulty. The second set had endless



Kneeling: Mary Strevens (captain) Left to right: Elle Curzon Green, Judy Sayers and Jenny Jones

deuces and 40 - 40s but Strevens managed to keep her head and eventually produce a 6/2 win in the second set. Oxford now were 3-0 up and needed just one more rubber to claim the overall win!

Last onto court was Elle Curzon Green versus Cameron Roker. Curzon Green is also a Cambridge alumna... but you would not know it given the fierce nature with which she competed against her former teammate! The first set was close, but Curzon Green seemed in control, whereas the second set really created a drama! Roker stepped her level in the second set and started hammering Curzon Green with some really challenging balls and great Grille shots. With Curzon Green 4-1 down it looked like the momentum would be hard to shift, but with some encouraging cheers from Oxford she soon responded and amazingly pulled a 6/5 second set win! What mental strength!

The doubles pairings were Curzon Green and Sayers against Revier and Angwin, with the more

experienced Oxford pair not in the mood for any generosity. After some good retrieving from both sides, Oxford triumphed 8-0. A great first Oxford debut for these ex-Cambridge players!

The second doubles match with Strevens and Jones against Metherell and Roker proved how important momentum is in real tennis, with the game ebbing and flowing throughout. Oxford first rushed to a lead but then Cambridge had a string of excellent games. Oxford responded with a second surge to take the score to 7-3 but Cambridge were not going to give up and managed to fight back to 7-6. However, Oxford were not going to let victory slip out of their hands now and played a tight final game to win 8-6. What tension to end!

What a weekend of tennis and I am so proud of all the ladies in both teams! Thanks to the Cambridge pros for helping to organise this weekend, and a special shout out to the Louise Ludekens for making the most delicious pack lunches!

Men's Second Team

Quentin Gueroult hymns the triumph of the men's seconds ... in the hope, as he says, that it adequately reflects 'our great victory'.

*Sing muse of that warrior's band four-men strong,
for their builds were stalwart, their arms were firm
and their rackets well-strung.*

*Away from home in distant lands the battle-horn was
blown: the varsity seconds cup was in play.
The handicap difference did not bode well,
and yet our soldiers charged into the fray.
All matches were hard-fought and difficult.*

*The captain Gu eroult had to use his guile
to conquer his Cantabrigian foe.
Ross, son of Martin, master volleyer;
remained unbeaten and victorious.*

*Billy, the son of Arnold, fleet of foot,
with the agility of the gazelle,
was paired with Henry, miracle-maker,
Swayne. Together, the coup-de-grace they laid.*

*Vanquishing their adversaries to claim the
final triumph. Our thanks we offer,
to our most generous host and markers,
the Cambridge pros and their President Vix,
our great mentor and supporter
Georgie, without whose counsel hapless
we would have been.*

*So ends this ode, when our bones are turn'd
to dust, may our fame, by the bards' praises,
rise up to heaven and may our war-cry,
still triumphantly resound through the vales
and hills: 'Up the Unicorn!'.*



Left to right: Billy Arnold, Ross Martin, Henry Swayne and Quentin Gueroult (captain)

THE 150TH VARSITY MATCH

2021 marked the 150th real tennis match between Oxford and Cambridge.

The very first was played in 1859 not on the Lord's court, which has been the venue for over 150 years but at the court in James St, Mayfair which had been built in 1635.

At that point the James St court was the premier court in the UK and the site of some epic battles for the title of world champion in the early 19th century. It was at this court that Oxford men won their first world titles: Philip Cox the elder in 1819 and then Edmund Tompkins the Fourth in 1862. But the court went downhill in the 1860s – it ended up as a garage for Westminster Council's bin lorries and has since been demolished. All that's left to mark it is the Hand and Racket pub in Orange St and the 'uniquely uncomfortable' benches that are now in the Merton Street dedans.

When the James St court closed the Varsity match was transferred to Lord's. At that stage and until the 1922 the match consisted solely of one singles and one doubles. The singles player got a full Blue; his doubles partner only a half blue.

Between 1859 and outbreak of war in 1914, Cambridge had far the better of the encounters –

winning approximately two of every three matches – a scoreline which probably reflected the fact that Cambridge had two modern courts, whilst Oxford had only the much less modern Merton St court that had been remodelled in 1798.

Cambridge's supremacy continued after the restart in 1922 for ten years. Oxford made something of a comeback in the 1930s but tennis in the city slumped again after the Second World War. It was not until Peter Dawes was recruited as a full-time professional in 1965 that things started to look up.

With the support of Chris Ronaldson (the fourth Oxford-bred world champion) the court was refurbished, player numbers rose rapidly and success came again in the Varsity matches. There's no official count of overall wins and losses since 1859 – though Cambridge is undoubtedly ahead – but recent years have seen more wins for the Dark Blues, success reconfirmed by this year's results.

There will – all being well – be a proper celebration of the 150th next year and the 2021 Oxford victory.

[With grateful acknowledgements to Jeremy Potter's wonderful book, *Tennis and Oxford*.]

Graham Harding

OUTC GOLF CHAMPIONSHIP 2021

Played at Oxford Golf Club on November 2nd, the guest players left the OUTC players way behind!

A very pleasant afternoon's golf was enjoyed on a remarkably warm and sunny November day.

Disappointing that we only managed to raise six players, but we only know of a possible 15 OUTC golfers at the moment. If there are any more out there that would like to take part next time please do let the pros know.

There were outstanding performances by our two guest players. Bryn Sayers [Queens Club] had a remarkable Stableford score with 44 points, playing off a 12 handicap, and a clear second was Ben Matthews [Leamington] with 37 points.

Best of the home players was Richard Alden who scored 31 points off a course handicap of 18. Richard therefore, became the holder of the Club trophy which he had previously won in 2017.

A close scrap for the wooden spoon was just won by Alan Oliver with 28 points compared with Craig's 29!

Alan Oliver



OXFORD COURT RENOVATION

Way back in January 2020, when the world was a different place, I'd volunteered to the committee that I'd lead a party to spruce up the court. Life and the pandemic saw fit to intervene, and it wasn't until the start of March 2021 that I thought about it again. The Club was closed due to lockdown, but there was hope on the horizon that play could start again, so now was a good time to make good on my promise. I wandered onto the court in mid-March to assess what was needed.



I'm sure there's a floor under this somewhere . . .

Normally, we just paint the bandeau and gallery ledges, and the chase lines, but as I was taking stock, I happened to take a look at the floor itself. I'd never



Ah, yes, there it is!

given it much thought as I assumed that the blackness that appeared in patches mainly around the edges of the court was some sort of wear, but when I took a closer look, I realised that it was good old-fashioned ground-in grime. I found a washing up sponge and, with some water and the scouring side of it, gently tested the theory that it might come off on a hand-sized area, which then quickly grew to an eighteen-inch square patch.

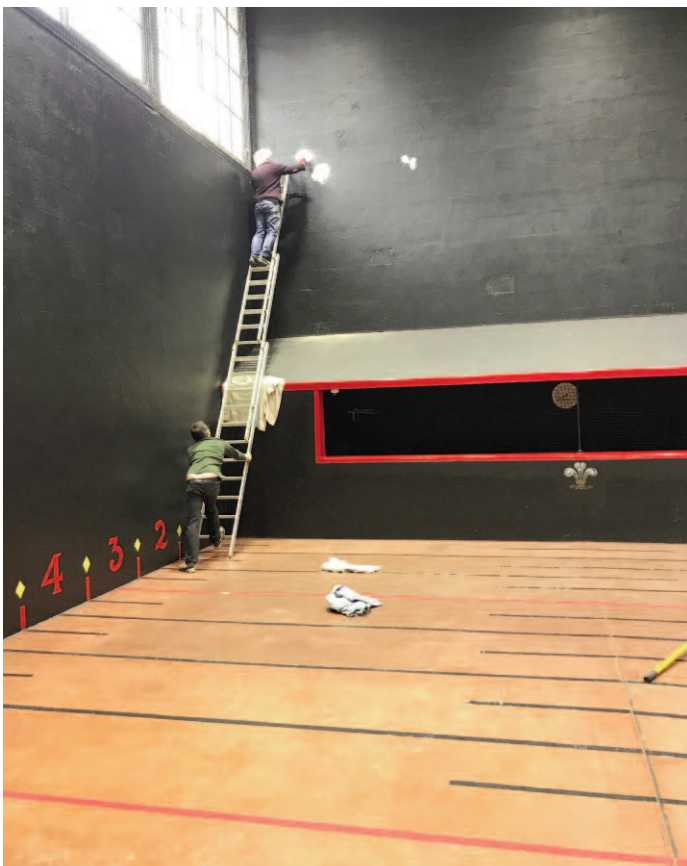
The difference was astonishing, and I arranged with Andrew Davis that he would come in and take a look with me. Andrew and I then trialled a few other patches, this time with fine wire wool and water (using any kind of





A little bit of masking tape and steady hands required here

detergent would have been a disaster as they leach the colour right out of the concrete) and found they cleaned up too to varying degrees. The decision was made and



Roger Nathan and Andrew Davis patching the wall

I undertook to clean the whole court. Andrew's son Jake was available to help us for a day or so and he focused on the court edges whilst we made a start on the service end just in front of the dedans.

Unfortunately Andrew was still suffering from tiredness – the after effects of a dose of Covid that both he and his family had endured, so over the course of the next couple of weeks, I set about cleaning the rest of the court myself. I'd quickly figured out that doing it on hands and knees wasn't the best of ideas, so I affixed wire wool to a small, stiff broom. I did it in two-yard strips, as the photograph below shows, with each strip being soaked, agitated with the broom and then mopped and dried with old towels. Once an area had dried, the mopping and drying process was then repeated, sometimes several times.

In the meantime, I'd recruited Adam Jeffrey, Chris Peri and Roger Nathan to assist with the rest of the work and thankfully Andrew had recovered sufficiently to lend a hand too. The brief had grown a bit to include; repainting all the court walls up to bandau height and then the whole of the service and main walls, repainting the corridor walls and wood panelling and the door to the court, repainting the chase lines and markings on the

wall as well as painting all chase lines, the bandeau and gallery ledges. With help from Maria, the Club's long-serving cleaner, we also cleaned and reconditioned as best we could the sofas in the Clubroom, and with Andrew's partner Emma's help, we deep-cleaned the Clubroom and had the carpet cleaned too.

I'd purchased a three-metre extension pole and extra-wide roller for the black paint on the walls, but we still needed bravery from Andrew, Roger and Adam to balance on the penthouses and fill and paint down to where the walls joined the penthouse. In all, we used about a kilometre of masking tape, the majority of it for the chase lines. We also noticed that a few chase lines and the yellow diamonds on the walls at the hazard end had been lost through being over-painted which we reinstated.

We also discovered that over the years, the markings themselves have changed and if you look carefully, you can still see in relief on the walls that some lines had circles painted above them. It also looks like many more of the wall markings originally had a "skittle" shape to



Chris Peri and Andrew Davis turned the corridor white again

them rather than the straight lines we now have, and where we found a thick paint chip, it also looks like some may have been green once upon a time.

In all, I reckon a couple of hundred hours went into bringing the court back to the condition it's now in. Huge thanks go to all that helped!

Derek Williams



Floor complete, walls and markings, corridor and bandeau painted. Just the chase lines to do; Adam Jeffrey giving his back a good work-out!

2019-20 EVENTS – PANDEMIC-DELAYED FINALS!



The Aberdare Cup 2019-20 was won by Bruce Morrison (right) who beat Jean-Francois Bellec (left) 9-3.



The Beard Cup saw Roger Nathan (pictured) win 9-4 against Freddie Freeman



Stewart Licudi (pictured) beat Mike Henman 5-6, 6-3, 6-5 in a closely fought final of the Knight Cup.



Jeremy Garson beat Mary Joyner 9-2 in the final of the 2020 Pamela Wallis.

AND THE 2020-21 FINALS . . .

Now it's the turn of the delayed 2020-21 finals – shortly to be played but no date as yet:

Aberdare Cup –

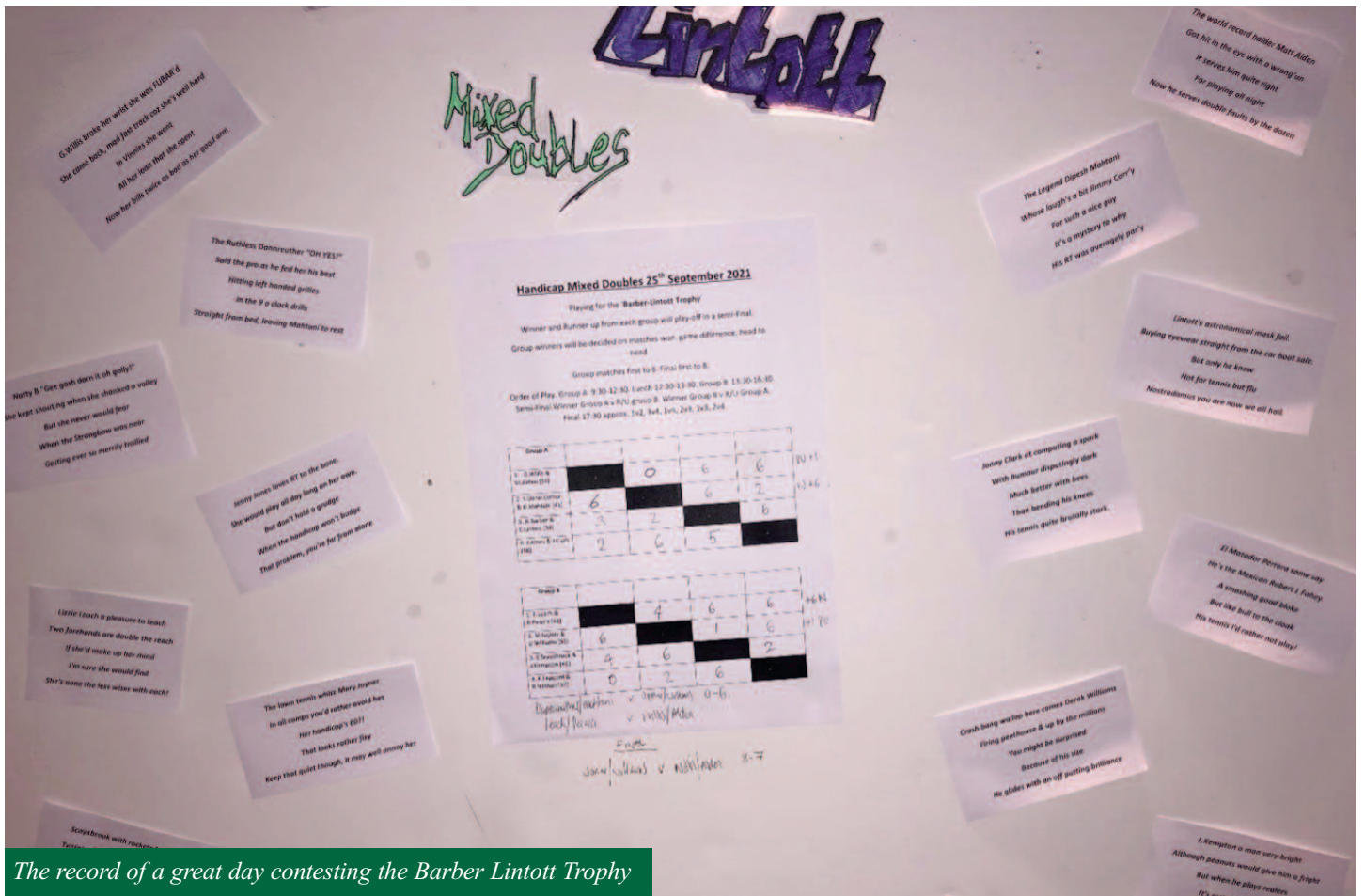
Charlie Lane-Fox v Ewan Smith

Pamela Wallis Trophy –

Bruce Morrison v Tim Goodacre

Beard Cup –

Henry Henman v Natalie Barber



The record of a great day contesting the Barber Lintott Trophy

BARBER LINTOTT TROPHY

The Barber Lintott Trophy [mixed doubles] currently held by Natalie Barber and Chris Lintott was played for on Sept 25th. Craig writes...

“The Barber Lintott was again contested between eight pairs of mixed doubles in what was a fun and competitive Saturday. It wasn't to be for the two-time winners and holders Natalie Barber and Chris Lintott who fell in the group stage.

This gave them plenty of time however to write their presentation speech!

The final was contested between last year’s runners-up Mary Joyner and Derek Williams vs new pairing Matt Alden and Georgie Willis. Joyner and Williams going one better this time round taking the trophy 8/7. Thanks to Chris Lintott and Natalie Barber for doing (as ever) a great lunch and dessert. Look forward to more mixed doubles next year.”



Winners Derek Williams and Mary Joyner, flanked by previous holders and hosts Chris Lintott and Natalie Barber

THE BRODIE CUP – PRELIMINARY ROUND: HOME VERSUS ORATORY

The Unicorns proud recent record in the Brodie (the T&RA's version of the FA cup for 30-50 handicappers) took a dent in the last running of the competition when we lost in the first round to Wellington. The 2019/20 champions turned out to be Seacourt, who tumbled out of this year's competition at the first possible hurdle, losing 5/0 to a Moreton Morrell team making use of their new floor.

I mention this to underline the fact that there are no easy matches in the Brodie and we knew our Oxford team would have to be ready for anything when facing the twin challenges of (a) a resurgent Oratory team, coached to within an inch of their lives by Greenhalgh-wannabe Rob Fahey and (b) reaching the court during the Oxford Half Marathon.

First up, less than 24 hours after being drafted and fresh from a month-long break from the court was Jean de Pourtales. Jean plays a stylish brand of the game, French polish coming up in this early match against a very, very Scottish opponent, whose pained cries of 'JIMMIE' echoed around the walls. The shouting didn't help much, and Jean took the first set 6/2. A force scored a direct hit on Clare the Brodie Bear, but there was no immediate sign of the curse that usually follows.

Either JIMMIE's shouting or the Bear must have done something, though, as Jean's comfortable 3/1 lead became 3/3 and then 5/5 after some desperate scrambling and more deuces than you could shake a racket at. Jean had chances in that critical game, but JIMMIE rallied to take it after yet more deuces. We were now running late enough to turn Andrew's hair white(r), so it was good on two fronts that Jean rushed to a 5/0 lead. Three of those were from deuce, and when JIMMIE scraped one the dedans - now bolstered by the Oxford Brodie Supporters club - felt momentum shifting. From 5/3, the Oratory beanpole took the next two games to love. Pressure is a funny thing, though, and a double fault and fine play from Jean suddenly made it 40/0. One match point saved, but the next converted to put us in the lead.

Next up were Wayne McLennan and Bruce Morrison, both Brodie veterans but playing together for the first time. Over the last few months, I've been following online the adventures of Wally the Walrus, a meandering

mammal who has ventured far from his normal feeding grounds to visit the French coast, the Isles of Scilly (where he sank a few ships) and the west coast of Ireland. It was similarly fascinating to watch Bruce cover the court, popping up in locations as varied as at the net in the middle of the service end, or scrambling shot after shot out from in front of the grille, or hitting a spectacular volley from in front of hazard the door. Wayne was similarly active, and with good comms and sensible play our pair took the first set 6/2 without ever looking really comfortable.

The Oratory pair were experienced, and though frustrated enough to remark on how often the Unicorns were 'apologising' for 'lucky' 'shots', had begun to settle. The start of the second set is often dangerous territory, and sure enough Bruce and Wayne never managed to recover from being 0/3 down. The set was lost 4/6, at which point both pairs took an extended break that left this reporter expecting Robinsons squash to be provided under a purple and green umbrella (did I mention we were hours behind?). The break made little difference, and Oxford were soon in a 2/4 hole, but growing more confident. A change of server had restored the menace of Bruce's fizzing sidewalls, and sticking to the service end they reeled in an increasingly frustrated pair. A great grille brought up a second match point and duly converted. 2/0 Oxford.

Matt Alden took the stage for the premier singles, flinging himself round the court as if to illustrate to his opponent - Oratory captain Mark Candlish - that there was just no way through. A 4/0 lead followed, but this was not a day for easy wins, and a run of close games and time spent at the hazard end made it first 4/4 and then 5/4 Oratory. Matt was getting drawn into long rallies, but dug deep to save three set points before hitting the galleries (GOOD TENNIS) to take the service end. The shot of the day was a thoughtful boast that left his opponent twirling on the spot, nowhere near the ball, and the set was ours 6/5. The pattern repeated in set 2, Matt 4/1 up and cruising before being pulled back to 4/3. Once again he regathered his energy, sending the balls skidding toward each corner. 'It'd never cut like that at the Oratory' said our opponents. Indeed not, but playing the court you're on is a good idea and Matt took the second set, the match and the tie for Oxford 6/3.

Dead rubbers are occasionally a damp squid (enough mention of sea creatures - Ed), but Liz Leach and

Gordon Tanner served up an intellectual feast. Gordon knows the Oxford court of old, and hit line and length to perfection as Liz struggled to get into the match. The pace was measured to the extent that Liz put clothing on during the match to stay warm. Gordon gave deep consideration to all that was happening, nodding at Liz's best shots and dispatching anything loose comfortably to the corners. Whether it was this thoughtful approach or the fact he had his racket strung lawn-tennis style he had no trouble taking the first 6/2. Liz fought back magnificently in the second winning 6/1, but Gordon was not to be denied and took the last 6/2. Gordon enjoyed the experience so much he (re)joined the club – I make that the second convert from a Brodie match in three years!

The tie had somehow saved the best for last. A stellar top tier doubles saw Georgie Willis and Nat Barber take on highly rated (by his dad, loudly) Max Wetton and Oxford fresher Alfred Backhouse. Wetton senior was streaming the action via a mobile phone to Facebook to an audience of literally nobody, but those in attendance loved what they were seeing as the ball pinged around the court at ridiculous speed, with none of the quartet

willing to give up on anything. Communication between Georgie and Nat was especially impressive, with ball after ball being retrieved from the Zone of Uncertainty around tambour and grille and sent back with venom toward the dedans. Georgie also dealt with equanimity a few lucky bounces and the extremely accurate marking of me, as Andrew had gone, presumably to have a lie down. It was a wonderful exhibition of high intensity tennis, watched by a growing band of freshers here to try the game and confused to see a match still going on. After dropping the first 3/6 and taking the second in the fourth 6/5 set of the day, they were very unlucky to be edged out 6/5 after leading 5/3 in a short third set.

The match finished nearly eight hours after it started, and Oxford had performed brilliantly: going 3/0 up to secure the tie before granting our opponents a couple of close consolation wins. I note cheese consumption notably down on previous years; perhaps I should canvass on providing something light like a salad for the next match - home against Hardwick on 14th November. Up the Unicorn.

Chris Lintott (Brodie captain)

THE WINNING LIMERICK ...

The T&RA limerick competition, organised by OUTC member Tim Harper, was won by John Elford. Here's his entry:

*The first chase was better than four
The second one - was it the Door?
The score's fifteen love
But - Heaven's above
To you or to me? I'm not sure.*

And here's a selection from our very own Craig's skilful pen.

*Down the dark cobbled streets of old Merton.
A howl you would hear for certain.
Sporting shaggy white hair
Prowling in his pro lair
Sending hundreds of emails per person*

*Natty B "Gee gosh darn it oh golly!"
She kept shouting when she shanked a volley
But she never would fear
When the Strongbow was near
Getting ever so merrily trollied*

*The world record holder Matt Alden
Got hit in the eye with a wrong 'un
It serves him quite right
For playing all night
Now he serves double faults by the dozen*

*Left right lefty the runner A. Jeffrey
Telling all that will hear that he's healthy
But I saw you last night
In the Bear with 10 pints
Adam Jeffrey you're rather quite stealthy...*

*Crash bang wallop here comes Derek Williams
Firing penthouse and up by the millions
You might be surprised
Because of his size
He glides with an off-putting brilliance*

*The ringer they call Irwin-Singer
Serves aces without lifting a finger
Thinks he's dressed to impress
It's a colourful mess
Pink and green shorts? A bit of a stinker*



Left to right: Henry Henman, youngest ever winner of the the Knight Cup, sponsor Roland Knight, and runner up, Matthew Alden

National League matches

Talking of Craig (as we were above) ...

He and Roman are representing Oxford in this year's Division One National League. As he says, "it will be great to finally take to the court after almost two years of from competitive play". This year's matches will include Manchester, Queens, Petworth, Jesmond Dene and Oratory – and the Pros will make sure that details of games and provisions for spectators will be sent out in time to come and support.

Other fixtures:

Division 6 [25-30 handicap]
captained by Ashley Deakin

Division 7 [30-35hcap]
captained by Chris Lintott

Division 9 [40-45hcap]
captained by Danny Dawson.

Fixture Card

The Fixture card is now available and includes Oxford's entries into the Field Trophy [inter-club knock-out Division 2], captained by Geoff Baker, and The Brodie Cup [Inter-club Knock-out in handicap bands], captained by Chris Lintott.

The Knight Cup

This is the Club Seniors level singles championship which was previously held by Stewart Licudi. It was played over the weekend of Oct 2nd and 3rd.

The new Club champion is Henry Henman. Congratulations to the youngest ever winner of the Club championship – full report and photos in next Newsletter.

Pre-Christmas tournaments:

The A1RAM [40+handicap doubles] on November 19th and 20th Currently held by Jenny Jones and Nina Ludekens and last but not least...

The J.C. Trophy [Over 60's Doubles] is currently held by Adrian Fort and Andrew Johnson but up for grabs on Saturday November 27th.

Put them in your diary...

The Editor

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