

# Newsletter

## Oxford University Tennis Club



Winter 2016/7

Edited by Liz Leach

Welcome to the winter edition of the Club Newsletter.

I'm glad to report that we've had another busy year with plenty of good play and improvements—to the court with the new lights and to the clubroom with better broadband and video streaming. It was also satisfying that Matthew Alden's Guinness world record attempt was ratified after quite a wait.

### COURT LIGHTING

As, hopefully, you will have seen, we replaced the lights on court in September, changing over to a Cree Ledway Multi LED lighting system.

The whole process took the committee around a year to research and assess, whittling it down to the Cree system which was installed by IC Lighting, who

There's plenty to look forward to in 2017, with the Grant Bates Trophy 14-15 January, the Brodie Cup semi-final at home on 29 January, the John D Wood Trophy throughout January and February, and the 0-9 and Pro-Am tournaments 21-23 April. There is also the Varsity Match 24-25 February, and I would encourage all to take a trip to Lord's to watch some great match play and support our teams. *Derek Williams*

have also fitted LED lighting systems at Manchester, Hampton Court, and a number of other Real Tennis and Rackets courts.

In addition to supplying a better and brighter standard of lighting, the system is also much more energy efficient and should pay for itself over the next six or so years. The system is guaranteed for ten years, and the lighting





*We took the opportunity to fit colour-matched vanity plates over previous holes in the roof, which has improved its appearance*

units themselves are reckoned to have a useful life of around twenty years.

The vast majority of feedback received has been positive, and I hope that we will be able to enjoy good, maintenance-free lighting for many years to come.

The PIR sensors allow the lights to come on just before 08:15 and they are programmed go off at 22:35 when play must stop, with just two lights remaining on for safe egress only.

My thanks go to the committee for their support, and in particular to Ed Wigzell for his research and assistance. The Club is also immensely grateful to the T&RA, which assisted with the cost of the system to the tune of £5,000. The T&RA Chief Executive, Chris Davies, has written the piece below which outlines the many benefits the organisation brings to Real Tennis and I hope that all will bear this help in mind when considering membership of the T&RA,

## **T&RA**

*By Chris Davies*

**“...what have the Romans done for us?”**

I am occasionally asked “what does the T&RA do for me?”. Seeing how much hard work is done by the T&RA Team and volunteers, it is tempting to see this as somewhat like the question posed by Reg of the Grumpy People's Front of Judea (aka John Cleese) in *The Life of Brian*, “All right... all right... but apart from better sanitation and medicine and education and irrigation and public health and roads and a freshwater system and baths and public order”. That being said, for a lot of ordinary club members, the T&RA probably seems just as remote as Imperial Rome did to first century inhabitants of Palestine. And this is a pity, for far from being a conquering colonial power, the T&RA is simply made up of volunteers, many of them regular club members, who give their time to support activities that can be dealt with more effectively on a collective basis than as individual clubs.

Let me try and explain what I mean in a bit more detail. And I will try to avoid descending into a list of bullet points, which—as the Monty Python example illustrates—can happen when these types of issue are addressed. I will consider the Association's activities under four broad headings: infrastructure, insurance, development, and communications. Although this description by no means covers all the Association's activities, I think it will give readers a good idea of what we do.

Providing infrastructure—all those things that need to be done in order that the game should function—is a natural collective activity, and one which inevitably falls to a governing body. Included under this heading is the maintenance of the rules and standards of our game. Real Tennis is a traditional game so upholding our sport's traditions is important, and the T&RA's Fixtures and Tournaments Sub-committee receives and deals with numerous queries from tournament organisers each year. But in addition, we spend time considering the impact of new technology on the game, in the construction of racquets for instance.

We also coordinate safety in the game, providing advice to make the sport safer for you to enjoy and minimising avoidable injuries. The defibrillator scheme, which ensures that each court has this potentially life-saving equipment, was a T&RA initiative and partly funded by the Association's affiliated charity, the DBTRAF. Other crucial collective infrastructure provided under the auspices of the Association includes the critically important handicapping system, used by virtually every player in the game, allowing you to play anybody else with a handicap and have an enjoyable and competitive game. Many clubs also use the booking system maintained by the Association and benefit from a collective scheme for the purchase of ball cloth. Working together allows us to achieve more than we can do individually.

Unlike the everyday support described above, the second category of activities undertaken by the Association deals with insurance, making provision for the things we hope don't happen. The defibrillator programme mentioned above, of course, falls within this category. All clubs should have insurance to cover them for the many forms of claim they may face in our litigious age: indeed, some have clubbed together under an affinity scheme administered by the T&RA, obtaining a better deal than they might secure on their own—another example of the benefits of collective action. Although such schemes cover the club for claims, they do not necessarily cover the member. So, if you are responsible for injuring a fellow player in the normal course of taking part in a match in circumstances where no blame can be attached to the club, there would be no cover under its insurance in the event the injured party makes a claim. While individuals can, of course, buy public liability insurance and some clubs provide it for their members, the Association has a scheme that covers all its members. This is one of the reasons why the Association insists that players become members before participating in the many tournaments the Association organises. Another example of collective action is the financial support the Association provides to clubs facing major court restoration projects. Through a system of grants and loans, we have given help to clubs like the Hyde, Canford, Oxford, and Newmarket for work on their roofs, walls, and various internal features. I know that some of these clubs feel they would have been hard pressed to take on these crucial outlays without this support.

Until now I have been discussing activities that help our game to function—much like irrigation and the roads were for the Romans. However, many of the activities of the Association are intended to help develop the game and its players flourish. Naturally, in addition to helping keep our current courts in playing order, the Association is keen to see new courts being built. The path to new build is often tortuous owing to the complications of location, design, planning, and finance along the way. As a small Association, the amount of financial help we can provide is currently limited, but we can help with advice and finance to cover initial work through the Tennis Support Fund. We are also involved in funding and organising initiatives to get more people to take up the game, particularly young people, and in helping clubs to reach out to their communities, into schools, universities, and other institutions where young people are based. And we are working on bringing sponsorship money into tennis, to support tournaments, the drive to increase membership, and build new courts.

The organisation of tournaments should also be seen as an important development activity as many new players are keen to test their skills against others. Of course, many tournaments are organised and played at club level and these are an important aspect of our game, both competitively and socially. And, of course, many interclub matches are played each year offering plenty of opportunities to play interclub tennis and to meet fellow tennis enthusiasts each season. At the Association level, we receive over 1,100 individual applications to participate in competitions we organise, including the very popular team competitions (Pol Roger, Field, and Brodie), the category tournaments, various Masters matches and many junior events. And last, but hardly least, one of the flagship events of our year is the British Open, which requires substantial organisational input from our executive and volunteer team.

Crucial to the success of every club is the team of professionals who are involved in most aspects of Real Tennis life. Helping to create a through-life training package for your professionals is one of the key achievements of the Association in recent years. Professionals from 18 clubs have attended at least one course and courses regularly achieve average satisfaction scores in excess of 4 out of 5.

Another important Association activity, which clubs would find it difficult to meet individually, is to ensure there is a stream of good young professionals entering the game. With this in mind, the T&RA and the Young Professionals Fund (YPF) award grants to junior professionals as they start out on their careers, to help meet the costs of training and travelling. In addition, we, in association with The Dedanists' Society, part fund the British Academy, Development, and Junior training squads for the most promising young players—some of whom are already or go on to become young professionals—helping them develop their skills as players.

Finally, an important and growing aspect of the Association's activities is staying in touch with members. Historically, this was an annual effort via the Annual Report—and this still remains an important document of record. However, in the digital world, members are looking for more regular contact, which is achieved through regular e-Newsletters and emails, advising you on recent news and events. The Association also runs the T&RA website providing up-to-date information about just about everything in the world of tennis and rackets. Increasingly, we are also investing time and resources in new media, like Facebook, and web-streaming, which may not appeal to traditionalists,



but are central to how we communicate with younger members.

How much does all this activity cost? The Association spends about £250,000 each year.

If we exclude direct tournament costs, which are covered by the very generous sponsorship of Neptune, this leaves about £150,000 of spending on our other activities, including those described above. In addition, the Association and its associated entities like the DBTRAF and YPF spent a further £25,000 on development, including those described above. Given the diversity of our activities, I hope you will

agree this represents good value for money. Naturally, a substantial element of this relates to the salaries of our CEO, Chris Davies, and his team in the Association's office. As those of you who are involved in volunteer activities will know, the crucial role a full time secretariat plays in achieving focus and making the work of our many volunteers more effective.

I hope the case I have outlined is persuasive and produces some "general murmurs of agreement", as the script for the Life of Brian puts it.

Membership of the T&RA is available by going to [www.tennisandrackets.com/general-join.aspx](http://www.tennisandrackets.com/general-join.aspx)

## NEW WORLD RECORD!

*Derek Williams*

It seems like a long time ago now, but back in June, Matthew Alden attempted to break the Guinness World Record for most consecutive opponents at Real Tennis singles.

On 1 December 2016, Guinness ratified the attempt, making Matthew the new Guinness World Record holder, having played 28 consecutive opponents.

The story of how this came about starts back in October 2015 when Matthew and I were chatting about the various extreme challenges that he has completed—such as 300 kilometre bike rides and a relay Channel swim—and I said to Matthew that maybe his next challenge

should be Real Tennis related. Whilst we chatted about this, I wondered if there were *any* records for Real Tennis, went on-line and found that there were two and suggested to Matthew that he should try to break one. Matthew's retort was, "if you'll organise it, I'll do it!".

Within an hour, I'd registered the challenge with Guinness and I set about finding out what Matthew actually needed to do!

The holder, at 26 consecutive opponents faced, was Will Stephens of Prested, and I noticed that he also held the other Real Tennis World record, the one for doubles, with Richard Ramjane. I know Richard through National League matches and got in touch to let him know of the challenge, and Richard sportingly provided me with a lot of information and some healthcare tips too.

Initially I'd thought that the matches were probably just a single set, but no, they were best of three sets off handicap. The instructions were also strict regarding continuous play, but thankfully allowed for rest to be accrued at 5 minutes per completed hour of play.

I thought about having a Guinness official in to oversee the attempt, but very quickly ruled it out as the quote from Guinness was £4,500 plus VAT for the day. This meant that we were going to have to submit our own evidence and make a water-tight case for the record attempt to be a legitimate one.

A date in May was set, but eventually ruled out as playing through the night in term-time was thought to be potentially too disruptive by the college, so the weekend of 25-26 June was agreed instead.



*Fit and ready!*



*Me flanked by Matthew and his first opponent, Tim Goodacre*

Matthew had also decided to use the event to raise money for two charities that are close to his heart: Keen Oxford, which provides social and recreational activities for people with special needs in the Oxford area, and Many Hopes, which provides homes and education to abused youngsters in Kenya—a charity, founded by Matthew's school friend, Bradden Young, who sadly died in 2014.

Matthew had experience of the occasional two- or three-hour tennis session, but knew that he needed to test himself further. He organised fourteen hours of continuous court-time to see how his body would react. A wide range of handicaps signed up for the practice session with Peteris Zilgalvis at the upper end as Matthew's 13th hour opponent. I'd already signed up to be the last to face Matthew that day as I wanted to see how he was coping. I also took pity and marked his match versus Peteris, as it was off a handicap of something like receive 30 owe 40, one serve, banned tambour and banned chases worse than 2 and 3. Despite having been on his feet for a dozen hours, Matthew still had sufficient focus to win this game—and beat me afterwards too!

Matthew learnt a lot that day, particularly about nutrition and rest breaks, and it gave him the information he needed to plan how to tackle the attempt.

Behind the scenes, the enormity of the task of organising the event was starting to hit home. I needed at least 27 players plus a couple of reserves, sufficient markers, and independent witnesses, of whom there needed to be two on duty at all times, and none were allowed to witness more than four consecutive hours.

Getting players was relatively simple as I had enough volunteers from the outset. Similarly, I had plenty of offers of help for marking, but independent witnesses

happy to watch a game they had no understanding of at some pretty unsociable hours was a more difficult ask. Thankfully, through membership of Rotary and being a former member of Round Table, enough were found, and I had a complete spreadsheet of volunteers about a week ahead of the attempt.

I'd also managed to persuade Adam Jeffrey to be my deputy, Jonathan Clark to take charge of technology, and Freddy Adam to run back-up video and take photographs. Andrew and Craig had also offered their time and help gratis.

The evening before, Adam, Jonathan, Freddy, and I set up the equipment and set the alarms for silly o'clock on Saturday morning. As it was, I barely slept, so the alarm proved unnecessary and we were at the court by 06:00 prompt and re-checked our equipment and paperwork. Matthew arrived at about 06:30 and we were all grateful to see his first opponent, Tim Goodacre, arrive 15 minutes later.



*Our first marker of the day, former Oxford Senior Club Professional, Alan Oliver*

At exactly 07:00, the first ball was struck and Matthew won the first game 2 sets to one. Mark Fischel was next and it turned out to be another tense three setter that went to 5 all, 40 all in the third set, with Mark striking the (slightly serendipitous!) winning shot. So far, so good. Two matches gone and ten minutes ahead of schedule as we'd planned around an hour for each match. The only glitch was that Matthew's brand new tennis shoes had failed, with a lace holder tearing off, but he'd decided to play on, not wanting to take a break at this point.



*Let's go! Note clock protected by plexiglass screen, guaranteed to withstand everything except Daniel Baltzer's volleys!*

Daniel Baltzer was next up and an indication of future problems started to become evident as Daniel beat Matthew in just over half an hour. All players were asked to arrive an hour before their allotted time, but we were already perilously close to having to use a reserve.

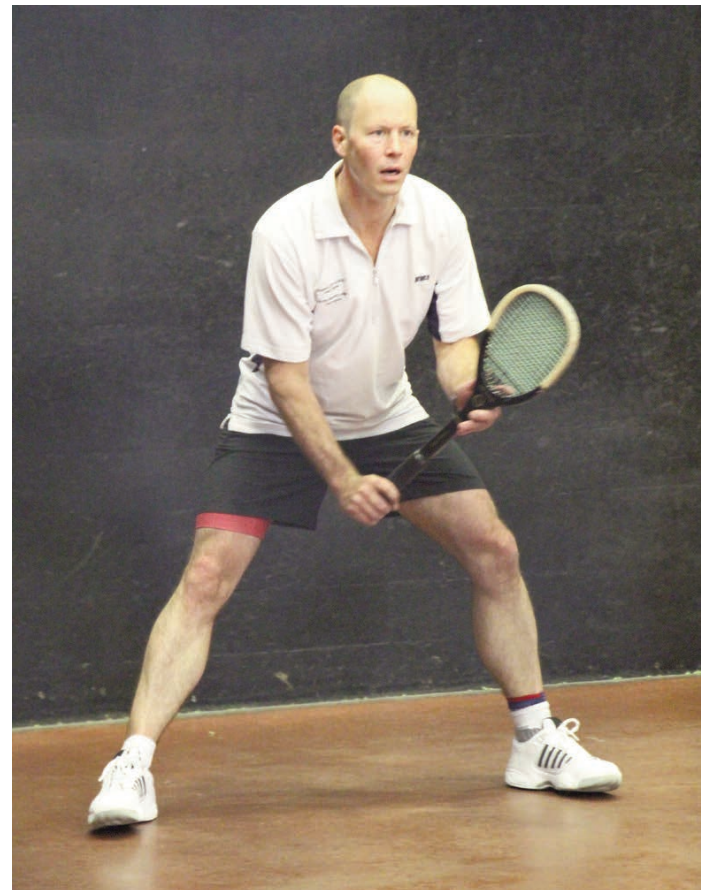
Daniel also gave me a bit of work to do. I'd put a lot of thought into the time-clock for the event, settling on a robust timing device used to time rally stages. I also built a plexi-glass screen at the front to protect it, but Daniel managed to volley a ball so hard into the roof of Last Gallery that it bounced directly down onto the clock, rendering it useless. Thankfully, I had a couple of analogue spares and quickly swapped one in, but Daniel felt so guilty, he went out and bought another just in case!



*New clock, very kindly provided by Daniel Baltzer (centre), which now resides in the dedans*

Ian Barry, Mark Savage, Rob Dance, and Craig Greenhalgh followed, but by now we were way ahead of schedule. Thankfully, Miles Jackson had dropped by earlier and gamely went home, grabbed his gear and played, followed by Zac Eadle. Even with Miles, we still had issues and used the first of our subs, Chris Peri, but I knew that if we couldn't lay our hands on more players, all would be lost, especially as John Stevens had called in sick for the 19:00 slot.

Stewart Licudi, Marty Burn, Guy Fielding, and John Simms played whilst we frantically rang around. John arrived an extra 15 minutes early and we were able to put him straight on court, being literally 30 seconds from having to force a break of play on Matthew. Jean-Francois Bellec, who wasn't due to play until the following morning, came in, and we managed to get hold of Charlie Defries who was on his way to Oxford on a train for a black-tie do, but he put his plans on hold and played, finishing his match at 18:59—about a minute before he was due elsewhere!



Whilst we were scurrying around for players, we also had to keep on top of all the form filling required and make sure that the witnesses and markers were recording the event correctly. We also had many



*Jonathan Clark keeping an eye on the live streaming video*



*Matthew's secret weapons ready to work their magic*

spectators in and out during the day, cheering Matthew on, including many of his family members, and his friend Bradden's parents.

And what of Matthew? Whilst pandemonium ruled in the Clubroom, he was carrying on exactly as he'd started—in truth, I'd kept him completely unaware of the issues we had. He'd had his first break after playing eight hours straight at around 3pm, pretty much on schedule, spending much of it on the massage table with his two professional masseuses working on him. A change of kit and 20 minutes later he was back at work. Remarkably, he still looked fresh as a daisy.

Katie Leppard arrived early for us and was followed by our second reserve, Julian Fox then Adrian Fawcus, Bruce Morrison, and Nick Owen. We then had to switch in Roger Nathan as we were still an hour ahead.

We also had to change the order of the markers constantly as some that marked played, and extended stints were put in by Alan Oliver, Adam Jeffrey, Julian Fox, Freddy Adam, and Nick Manby-Brown.

Matthew had food and drink in Hazard the First and snacked away, but was starting to look weary so we



encouraged him to eat and drink to keep up his energy levels. A couple of short rests and another massage were taken, but I rigidly kept 10 minutes' rest in the bank for Matthew in case of anything unplanned and, at times, I knew this was tough on him, which made me feel bad too, but he never once complained.

Then followed one of the highlights of the event as former World Champion, Chris Ronaldson, stepped on court to face Matthew at 23:20—a time that even Chris will admit is not entirely usual for him. It turned out to be a fascinating three setter with Matthew the eventual winner. Maggie Henderson-Tew, Andy Dunn, and Ron Mutton were next, Ron and Andy having come in much earlier than planned, but we were still ahead of schedule and I'd taken the decision to phone Andrew Davis and ask him to crawl out of his pit at 01:00 and report for duty.



*It had been quite some time since our court had been graced by former World Champion, Chris Ronaldson, who started his professional career at Oxford*

So it was by a quirk of fate that match number 27 was played by Andrew Davis. Matthew knew that this was the one and brightened up immediately, taking the first set 6-2. Andrew was determined not to make it easy and took the next set 3-6, but Matthew rallied and took the third set 6-1 to break the record.

There were still a surprising amount of spectators and all gave Mathew a standing ovation, but Matthew wasn't done yet and I already knew that he wanted a 28th opponent just to be sure—he clearly didn't trust my maths! Adam Jeffrey then became Matthew's 28th opponent and beat him 6-3, 6-1, with the final ball struck at 03:35, some seven hours ahead of schedule.

Just as we were celebrating, I suddenly realised that I hadn't told Danny Dawson that he didn't need to come in and I was just dialing his number to tell him when he



*Adam Jeffrey, Matthew's final opponent, earlier in the evening. He didn't have that stubble at the start of the event!*

knocked on the club door having travelled all the way from North London. Sorry again Danny!

What an incredible day. 28 matches in 21 hours and 35 minutes with 8 wins and 20 losses, but that really doesn't tell all of the story.

Every game Matthew played was approached in an incredible sporting spirit, with a smile and a handshake at the start and the finish regardless of how the match went, and a kind word to all, even to his torturer (me!) at the end.

Remarkably, he also looked very little the worse for the experience and enjoyed a glass of champagne afterwards, brought in by his father Richard. I'm also informed that he just slept for an hour or two on the couch, had a full English breakfast, and then took his dog for a walk!

After making sure the paperwork was in order, I eventually got my head down at about 05:30 before returning to the club rather bleary-eyed at around noon with Adam and my wife, Jane, to clear up the club room



which was, unsurprisingly, a sea of sweet wrappers and empty bottles and cans—except for Matthew's bits, which he'd already tidied up!

I was due on holiday a week or so after and I couldn't bring myself to look at the paperwork before I went. The day had been a complete blur—in fact, I can't remember ever being as entirely focused for such a period—and I was so sure that I must have made an error somewhere.



*Richard Alden, rightfully proud of his son's achievement*

On my return, I checked and thankfully there was just one time that had been signed for incorrectly by three minutes and this was inconsequential as it was proven by another cross-checked record.

It took quite a while thereafter to compile the video evidence and it took several attempts to submit to Guinness in the way they wished for, which I suppose is reassuring on reflection—preparation of evidence for this sort of thing should not be easy.

I was quoted a lead-time of 12 weeks for ratification or otherwise and I was starting to get nervous, not wanting to chase as the deadline approached, so I was delighted when I finally got an email stating that Matthew had



been awarded the record. I always knew that he'd done it, but due to my own paranoia, at no time was I certain that my evidence was sufficiently robust to convince Guinness.

I'm not sure that "well done" entirely covers it, but well done Matthew, an epic performance. You really are, in the words of Guinness World Records, "Officially amazing".

I'd like to thank The Warden and Fellows of Merton College for allowing us to play through the night, and a big thank you to all those that took part and, in particular, to Adam, Jonathan, and Freddy—it would not have been possible without you.



*Matthew receiving his Guinness World Record certificate*

### **Match Report: 25 September NOT THE VARSITY MATCH, 2016**

*Chris Lintott*

Members may have noticed the handsome vase currently adorning the windowsill in the club room, one of the trophies from this year's second ever 'Not the Varsity Match'. The match, against Cambridge, is open to anyone with even the loosest connection to either university who didn't play for the blues as a student. The stretchiness of the rules meant some slightly dubious (or was it artful) captain's picks (step forward D. Williams and R. Mutton, seen playing for Oxford) and a total of 17 matches split between our court and Radley.

As the day got underway, Oxford started strongly thanks to home court advantage, with Roger Boning, Chris



*Roger Boning getting ready to commence hostilities!*

Peri, and Jean-Francois Bellec all winning their first singles. Hopes of winning a first NtVM title, though,



*Jenny Jones and Felix Richter on their way to a storming two set victory 6/1; 6/1*



*Cambridge Captain, Christie Marrian (left), and Oxford Captain, Liz Leach, striking a pose*

were damped by news from Radley, where Cambridge won their first three matches. With most people playing at both venues, the real challenge was transport, further bolstering home advantage—though thanks to the strong academic transfer market plenty of OUTC members ended up on both sides.

At Radley, we were treated to two spectacular three-setters. The first featured Graham Piddock partnering the wily John Trapp for Cambridge, and outlasting Paul Brown and Nick King, 4/6 6/5 6/5. The second, a singles, saw Cambridge's Richard Bowers recover from dropping the first set 6/2 to beat Mark Savage 2/6 6/4 6/4. Before too long it was 8 matches all, and almost all

the players made it back to OUTC for the final Captain's match upon which all rested.

Oxford Captain, Liz Leach, had got the better of Cambridge's Christie Marrian last year, but a packed dedans saw her quickly concede the first set, losing six games without reply. At this point, something clicked, and a devastating spell of serve and volley (return) tennis gave Liz the second set 6/3 and the upper hand.



*Sadly, Cambridge did not play badly at Radley!*

The third set was a thriller, and both could have won but in the end Christie took it 6/5 and with it the trophy.

The vase in the clubroom is actually the second place prize—the main award, fashioned from Pol Roger foil



after the first match—was presented to Cambridge by Derek and now sits in their trophy cabinet. Pol Roger also graciously supplied two magnums (magna?—ed.) of champagne for thirsty spectators, and so anyone wishing to help OUTC claim the NtVM prize, help Cambridge defend it or just drink some champagne should mark 24 September 2017 in their diaries.



*Not the finest-looking trophy, but incredibly well looked after, arriving in a custom cotton wool lined plastic box*



*Chris Lintott with the champagne Pol Roger kindly donate on the proviso that it is polished off immediately after the match*

(OUTC members who played for Cambridge may be interested to read the parallel report by Christie Marrian at <http://www.curtc.net/wp/the-second-not-the-varsity-match-ntvm2-oxford-and-radley-25916/>).

## **KNIGHT CUP**

**1-2 October**

There was a good entry of 11 players this year.

In the first semi-final Stewart Licudi just beat Mike Henman in an epic match. It went to five all and 40 all in the final set, with Stewart hitting an unlikely dedans to win the match.

The other semi was also a three-setter with Anthony Bewes edging out Adrian Fawcus.

In the final Anthony was playing really well until 3-3 in the second set, having won the first. Stewart then produced his best tennis and literally wore Anthony down. His superior fitness ensured he won the final set 6-0, thereby retaining the trophy.

Congratulations to Stewart, who was unable to play for quite a few weeks afterwards due to aggravating an injury during the tournament. Our thanks again go to Roland Knight for his continued sponsorship of the event.



*Runner-up Anthony Bewes (left) with winner Stewart Licudi*

## Match Report: 20 November

### BRODIE 1ST ROUND AWAY TO ORATORY

*Chris Lintott*

Playing on a strange court can do odd things to even experienced players, and when some of our team started talking about the nice green walls of the Oratory playing well as if studying a cricket pitch I was worried.

An intrepid group had set out from Oxford at 8am on a Sunday, no mean feat for a bunch of students and academics, determined to do well despite the long history of Brodie matches which favours the home team.

The first game was a nail-biter, as Doug Holden and George Peel repeatedly got themselves into a winning position, only to have their opponents beat chase 2 and 3 (twice) and chase 1 on the floor. They ultimately prevailed, and George in particular, resplendent in a very professional looking bandana, resolved to have no more such nonsense. A slightly shell-shocked Oratory pair were swiftly disposed of to the tune of 6/0 6/1.

At 6/0 and 2/0 up Liz Leach and Archie Cornish were strolling in their match, with the openings repeatedly hit by both players. An impressively solid pair at the other end danced with joy, though, on winning the match's ninth game, and found the experience so exciting they took 11 of the next 13. Liz and Archie did their best to

cling on, changing tactics and serves, but had no answer to careful cut shots and aggressive play.

If Oxford nerves were wobbling, then we were restored by Mark Fischel, who dispatched his opposition 6/1 6/0. Frankly, the score flattered the Oratory player after a superb display by Mark, and I heard one of the more experienced home team mutter that 'even when I had a handicap of 20 I wouldn't have got near that'. I then scraped a scrappy victory, securing passage to the next round and leaving only Graham Piddock to put the cherry on the icing on the cake with the match of the day.

Facing a player sporting a spiky mask that Hannibal Lecter would envy, Graham stuck to his guns and took the first set 6/3. At 5/1 in the second he realised that another two set hammering would appear rude, and gifted his increasingly vocal and often erratic opponent the next five games. Finding a second lease of life, though, he took the third if not with ease then with a very professional 6/0.

So 4-1 to Oxford and with thanks to Oratory we rolled on to a home quarter-final on 11 December. With the advantage of the Oxford Tambour, the team was quietly confident of getting to a second semi-final in three years.

## 15th December

### CAROLS ON COURT

The Club was approached by Chris Hancock and Anthony Bewes to see if we might be interested in holding a carol service on court along with a short Christmas message. In the past, we've had Club dinners and even a medieval music-themed evening on court,

but to our recollection, we've never had carols performed on court before, so we were pleased to give it a go and see how it worked out.

The whole event was a delight and whilst most would admit that their voices fall somewhat short of angelic, the overall sound was quite something, and the singing



of those that could was easily heard over those that couldn't! Jenny Jones, (who does have an angelic voice!) accompanied us on the electric organ. The acoustics were pretty good and the 30 or so of us who attended were able to generate quite an atmosphere.

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## SILVER RACKET

Our top two Blues boys put on another great show in early November competing for the coveted OUTC Silver Racket. With a packed dedans, the match was tight, with George Peel just sneaking it over Mark Fischel 8-5. Thanks again to Richard Alden for supporting a great event.

## OVER 60'S DOUBLES

The 'Non-Oxford' team of David Prophet and Paul Brown defeated Julian Eeley and Richard Youdale 8-3 in the final of the over 60's doubles to claim the J. C. Smith Plate.

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## Match Report: 11 December

### BRODIE 2ND ROUND AT HOME TO PRESTED

*Chris Lintott*

Our quarter final opponents, Prested, had taken their two previous matches without losing a rubber, and having traveled up early to train on the court ahead of our match they were clearly taking things seriously. Though a sweaty court prevented formal practice the day before, an hour's serving paid off with each member of their team capable of several difficult variations.

First up were George Peel and Jean de Pourtales who, thanks to parking and the Santa Run which blocked access to the court, had met literally while running onto court. Luckily George, though perhaps playing within himself at first, was able to cover the back with speed, which meant that the excellent net play of Jean produced a 6/2 6/3 victory that in the dedans felt much closer than the score suggests.

The second doubles produced the game of the day, with Grant Miller and Clare Bucknell facing a very solid Prested pair. Grant and Clare let discretion be the better part of valour, letting their visiting opponents take commanding leads in both first (which was won by Oxford 6/5) and second (Prested, 6/4) before fighting back. As we entered the third set, Clare was playing well and Grant had moved from volleying everything, albeit successfully, to realising that back walls exist for a reason. From 2/4 down in the third, the Oxford pair

Chris Hancock's Christmas message added to the sense of occasion and all present enjoyed the event, helped along by Anthony Bewes' generous offering of mulled wine and mince pies. Thank you, Chris and Anthony, for giving the Christmas season at the Club a welcome start.

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## A1 RAM DOUBLES

A record number of pairs saw the A1 Ram spread over two days, with a group playing Friday evening.

The final saw a pair of second team blues ladies, Jenny Jones and Aurore Lyon, pitted against the ever-so-steady old guard of Andrew Johnson and Ian Barry. The Blues Ladies just had enough in the end to win the title 5/3.

Thanks To Ron Mutton for his continued and generous support of the event.

fought back to 5/4 up and when opponent Richard ran for a shot dropping at the door only to hit the net convincingly the crowd were convinced they were home and dry. Alas, the final set fell 6/5 to Prested and a magnificent fight ended.

From there the day proceeded quickly. Mark Fischel of the Blues was 6/0 2/2 up when his opponent pulled a muscle and wisely discontinued. Mark's presence in the team, along with fellow student George, is much appreciated by the crustier members of the squad and even in unfortunate circumstances it was nice to watch him improve his Brodie record to 2/0. As captain I followed; the first set I won 6/2 without incident and the second was most notable for a ball (on the fourth rally on chase 2!) which bounced off the penthouse, then the floor, then into the winning gallery. This coup d'Oxford finished my opponent off, and besides suggesting while changing ends that I should buy a lottery ticket he had no answer.

So we were through to the semis, and only Graham Piddock remained. Distracted by the prospect of a second dead rubber in as many matches, Graham struggled to get going against a hard hitting junior who will surely be good enough to challenge for major honours soon. Luckily, the loss was inconsequential and we're looking forward to a home semi-final - the first for many, many years. It will be on Sunday 29 January—please come and support!

## SIMMS CHAMPAGNE LEAGUES

### Finals played 12 December

We had 77 entries this year, and listed below are the players who won their groups and received a bottle of Champagne for their efforts: M.Bailey, A.Flint, P.Brown, M.Burn, G.Miller, I Barry, J-F Bellec, B.Morrison, M.Joyner, N.Owen, M.Alexander

The finals were played on Monday 12 December and the finalists were: Ewan Smith who played Bruce Morrison in Group B, and Marty Burn who played Natalie Barber in Group A.

In the Group B final, Ewan played some remarkable shots in the warm-up but unfortunately was unable to bring them to the game itself. Ewan made a nervous start and Bruce was able to take advantage of this, racing to a 4-0 lead. Ewan then rallied, but despite getting to game point several times, wasn't able to take a game, leaving Bruce to take the match 8-0.

The Group A final was a topsy-turvy affair. Marty came out firing on all cylinders and left Natalie reeling at 4-1. Those watching were puzzled as it didn't look like Natalie had brought her usual game to the court. Marty must have been puzzled too as he suddenly seemed to lose his confidence, double-faulting twice at set point

## CLUB CHRISTMAS FUN DOUBLES

### Played 29 December

The Christmas Fun Doubles was won by William Rowsell, who just pipped Katy Leppard and Mark Partington to the post on countback. A fun event as ever and very close this year with a great day had by all.

The picture opposite shows Jonathan Clark (right), presenting William with his well-deserved bottle of Pol Roger champagne.

## National League

This year, just three Oxford teams have entered the leagues this year, in divisions 6,7 and 8. Our Division 6 team are currently lying a close fourth with Ed Wigzell in joint second in the MVP ladder. Unfortunately, we're second from bottom in Division 7 and third from bottom in Division 8. Good luck to all teams in the second half of the year.

## Juniors

Once again the junior programme has expanded the number of players, with a further few juniors attending



*Sponsor, John Simms, flanked by Bruce Morrison, winner of Group B and Natalie Barber, winner of Group A*

and passing the initiative to Natalie who stepped up her game to full effect. At 4-4, Marty went on the offensive, but this played further into Natalie's hands as she struck her volleys crisply to a length and retrieved well to take the next 4 games and close out the match 8-4.

Thanks again go to John Simms for his kind sponsorship of this very enjoyable event.



the Wednesday junior night. We finished the most recent block of sessions in early December and will restart on 11 January. Many thanks to the OUTC Seniors and the Dedanists for their support of junior tennis.

## Bicycle and motorcycle parking at Merton

Please could I remind all that we are not allowed to park bicycles and motorcycles beyond the car-park barrier or along the walls outside the club. There is a lockable shed in front of the Pro Shop for bicycles and motorcycle parking places opposite Oriol college.

## TENNIS IS GOOD FOR YOU!

*Bruce Henning*

From "The Times" Saturday December 3, 2016

Letters to the Editor (now quoted verbatim).

### GOOD RETURNS

*Sir, Guy Adams has historical support for the benefits to health from tennis (letter Dec 2). In 1584, when a plague was rampant in Oxford, Thomas Cogan*

*published, "The Haven of Health", in which he advised students there that the best way of avoiding the disease was "to play with the little ball which we call Tenise. It doth exercise all parts of the body alike, as the legges, armes, neck, head, eies, back and loynes, and delighteth greatly the minde, making it lusty and cheerful."*

The letter was signed, Edward Hill, London W8.

### THE RESTORATION FUND

*Simon Wratten*

I devised this in-house lottery in 2003 to contribute some extra funds towards the regular maintenance of the court and since then over £7,000 has been raised through the generosity of the 20 or so members who have loyally supported it.

#### **New member subscribers are now needed!**

Our venerable court always requires a lot of maintenance to keep it in good playing shape, and there are several major projects on the wish list when funds allow. The attached application form explains how the fund works and the prizes offered.

We tend to make the draw for all the year's prizes just before the AGM in January, so get your application in quickly to be eligible – you may be the lucky winner of the bumper prize of £200! Just drop it in to the pros shop marked for me. Standing order contributions only please.

## PRO SHOP AT OUTC

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## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

**14-15 January:** The Grant Bates Trophy  
(Club Handicap Doubles Tournament)

**29 January:** Brodie Cup semi-final at home

**January and February:** The John D Wood Trophy  
(Team evening pennant competition)

**4-5 February:** The Wroth Cup (Club Level Doubles Championship)

**24-25 February:** Varsity Match at Lord's

**4-5 March:** Varsity 2nds at Cambridge

**21-23 April:** 0-9 and Pro-Am tournaments

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