

Newsletter

Oxford University Tennis Club



Winter 2023

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From the Chairman

Dear members,

I have to say a big thank you straightaway for all the help and understanding shown to Andrew and the club during the last few months. Andrew describes his health issues later in the newsletter, and as his illness developed and he had to take time out, this precipitated a crisis in the club as we were left with only one full time professional at the beginning of a very busy term. Welcome then to Jim Ludekens, who joins us from Cambridge, and a well-known real tennis family. He has recently completed the first part of his professional training and is settling in very well. I have already taken a lesson with Jim, and enjoyed his teaching style and learned a lot.



Andrew and Craig with our victorious Women's Varsity team

The prolonged recovery from the Covid pandemic still has an ongoing effect on working, sports, and home lives. The slow return to working in person in many organisations is mirrored in reduced involvement in the arts and sporting activities. If you have not yet come back to the club after a prolonged break you will be very welcome. You will find the tennis court busy and very lively.

The Simon Stubbings tournament, tried out for the first time in September, following the extraordinary bequest in his name to the club from former colleagues, was a great success. The formula was a first for the club, although similar to the Christmas doubles, and intended to encourage everyone to take part in the thrills and disappointments of a competition watched by a crowded dedans. At every stage each pair in the doubles matches were chosen at random, and the handicap for the pairing calculated. The winners were separated each time, and so even in the final the eventual doubles teams had not played together before. It sounds chaotic, but everyone really enjoyed the formula and the atmosphere. And it brought together players who had not met or played with each other before.

EDITORS INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the December 2023 edition of the Club Newsletter. Lots to catch up this time ... an update from the 'White Wolf' (aka Andrew) on his cancer treatment, reports on Club events and competitions as usual plus many special features – two starring world champion Camden Riviere. First there's a piece from the *Spectator* magazine of John Lumley's challenge for the World Champs against Cam and then there's a first-person account by Henry Henman on taking a set off doubles world champs Camden Riviere and Tim Chisholm. There's also a report of Henry and Roman's National League match against Prested Hall. Being

There was an equally successful Barber Lintott mixed doubles competition, Ron Mutton himself appeared to present the A1 RAM doubles trophy, and the Aberdare and Pamela Wallis are in full swing, to name but a few. And the student teams are getting themselves sorted out. As you'll read on page 6, nationally, the Brodie Cup team had a good run, narrowly losing 2-3 to MCC recently, and Roman Krznic and Henry Henman are playing well in Division 1. Both our Women's and Men's Varsity 1st teams were victorious too – see page 14.

So, it seems we are almost back to normal, but this could not have happened without the advice, encouragement, and support of our great tennis committee. We also have the following to mention and thank especially: Maggie Henderson-Tew and Nino Merola from Radley, Benedict Yorston former blues captain, Alana Davies and Julie Sachno who have, at short notice, taken over our book-keeping and payroll, and Chris Davies for the T&RA. Craig has stepped up to take on the bigger senior professional role magnificently.

The Club's AGM will be held in the clubroom at 19:30 on Tuesday 9th January 2024. Please do come along for more information on the Club and what we plan for the future. There's a free glass of wine to be had too!

I am sure you would want me to send all our best wishes to Andrew for a successful recovery. Wishing everyone a happy Christmas, and an enjoyable 2024 playing the game we all love.

Neil Mortensen

in the dedans to watch Henry and the young Prested pro Vaughan Hamilton battle it out was an awesome treat. Then there's an account from Michael Foord of our new sponsors, A Plan / Howden, on his first reaction to tennis. Victoria Harvey ('Vix') of Cambridge contributes a lovely piece on real tennis in the Renaissance.

The Club section includes Chris Lintott's usual great write ups of Not the Varsity Match and the Brodie Cup plus an introduction to our new assistant pro, Jim Ludekens. Read on...

Graham Harding

ANDREW DAVIS -

An update from the 'White Wolf'

As you may know, after a period of persistent ill-health, Andrew was diagnosed with non-Hodgkins lymphoma earlier this autumn. He's now in treatment and feeling optimistic.

Andrew writes;

“Many thanks for all the cards, letters and messages of support in what has been a challenging time not just for me but our whole family.

Hopefully we are past the worst and are now looking forward to better times ahead.

My chemotherapy is underway and thankfully so far the side effects are minimal. I am really hoping that I respond well to the treatment and all being well will be in much better shape by early Spring.

I am delighted to know that OUTC is running smoothly with Craig running the tennis – ably assisted by Jim Ludekens – and with Alana Davies having taken over the accounts and banking.

With very best wishes and hope that I see you all soon

Merry Christmas!”



Andrew, about to enter the Buckingham Palace gardens in 2019 as a guest of the Duke of Edinburgh Awards team who were showing their appreciation following the visit of Prince Edward to Merton Street as part of his Tennis Challenge.

MICHAEL FOORD

Michael is MD of the Oxford branch of Howden, the new name for A-Plan Insurance, a long-time fixture on Oxford's High Street and now generously sponsoring the Club's Summer League.



Howden's Oxford office in the High Street

We introduced Michael to Real Tennis in April this year, when he watched Henry Henman taking on Craig in a National League match and here's his first impressions of the game.

“I was introduced to Real Tennis for the very first time in April of this year and was very privileged to watch the future talent that is Henry Henman. I was amazed to learn the size of the sport, with around 40 active courts around the world. Being able to sit so close to the action was a real benefit of the game, even if quite nerve racking when a ball thundered into the net just inches away from my face. Learning all the terms and expressions used, such as 'rest' and 'chase' was also extremely insightful. I enjoyed the suspense of waiting for the ball to fall down from the 'service wall' as well as being in awe of the players when they somehow managed to save

the ball out of the corners – amazing! The club itself seemed to have a very loyal following and everyone was very friendly and welcoming. I look forward to returning again and am pleased to confirm our intention to sponsor the summer Champagne League.”

Howden is a major player in the world insurance market and they’ve now re-branded A-Plan – their UK network of brokers – under that global name. But the office in the High Street, and the

knowledgeable personal service, is still there of course and we encourage members of the Club to get a quote from them next time renewal notices come your way.

Editor’s note:

The Champagne League itself is now approaching its climax with finals day on 14 December but I’m afraid you’ll have to wait for the next Newsletter for full results and write up.



Camden with a very young Henry at Radley

Club, knocking up against Camden Riviere. The grace and effortlessness that both Camden and Tim possess on court, just shows how formidable a duo they are. Both Nino and I felt like we had to hit several ‘winners’ to actually get a point on the scoreboard, since they were just so comfortable and solid as a pair.

It was incredibly surreal to be on court with legends of the game, and they could not have been more supportive and humble, both on and off the court. It was a real pleasure to have been able to share the stage with the American duo, and certainly my most memorable game of tennis to date.”

Henry Henman

TAKING ON CAMDEN!

At the recent British Open, Henry Henman and partner Nino Merola of Radley took on Camden Riviere and Tim Chisholm, World Doubles Champs. Here’s Henry’s piece on playing his boyhood hero. After that, read on for another Camden story... and then an account of Henry’s Nat League match with Roman Krznicar against Prested Hall in November.

“Ever since the British Open Doubles draw was published, my partner and coach, Nino Merola, and I could see that there was the possibility of facing not only the best player in the world, but also a huge idol of mine, Camden Riviere, and his partner, Tim Chisholm. There was a bit to do before earning a place to compete in the quarter-final match against the World Doubles champions, but as we progressed through the stages, the opportunity to play Cam started looking like more of a reality, and my overwhelming excitement grew.

Just a couple of weeks after starting our campaign, Nino and I found ourselves on court at The Queen’s



At Queen’s for the British Open. Left to right: Nino Merola, Henry Henman, Camden Riviere and Tim Chisholm

REAL TENNIS FEATURES IN THE 'SPECTATOR'

Thomas Hodgkinson was a tennis player at Oxford a few years back and he now writes about the game. The piece below is an edited extract from his recent article in the Spectator:

<https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/inside-the-weird-world-of-real-tennis/>

The Club would like to thank both Thomas and the magazine for their permission to use his work. It was written in September of this year and published just as the world championship battle in Virginia hotted up.

Graham Harding

When John Lumley was a baby, his mother placed him in his carrycot and drove balls at him.

John was safe behind the Holyport dedans – and his mother was Penny, six times women's world champion: hitting those balls was part of her training.

Now John has seized the world number two spot. That's no accident John tells me, when I get him on the line from Philadelphia, where he works as a coach. 'This has been my life's goal: to make it to this point.'

'They always say you reach a golden period around 30. You have the experience. You still have the



Camden with his now trademark all black racquet in hand



John Lumley at the British Open

speed. I was never convinced by that. But now that I'm here, I can see it. Now I can have a bad day and still find a way to win.'

There has never been a real tennis world champion in his early twenties. It takes a decade to learn to play the game well. 'John has been touted as a potential next world champion for a really long time,' says Josh Smith, the head coach at Holyport. 'Because of the depth of technical skill in the game, it takes a really long time to get to the top. And even longer to get to the top of the top.'

According to Chris Ronaldson, 'the two primary reasons are that the ratio of skill to fitness required is much higher than with squash or tennis, and the more complex range of strokes and tactics takes longer to master.'

Lumley is a retriever. He is known as The Hare partly because he's so quick about the court and partly because he takes so much trouble over his hair. He has an impressive black thatch, which he thickly gels and combs back like a Teddy Boy, before applying TREsemmé Ultra-Hold Hairspray.

Riviere is not so exquisite. By comparison, he looks almost scruffy. But don't be fooled. The American is known as the Ginja Ninja. This is in tribute not only to his colouring but also to his kill skill. A retriever par excellence, Riviere hasn't lost to anyone apart from Fahey in years. And he hasn't lost a set in months – except for one or two to Lumley.

Real tennis operates on a strict handicap system. Each player has a handicap, which is updated after every game they play. John Lumley is at +10, which



John in full flow

is extraordinary. But Camden Riviere is way out ahead of the pack at +17.

What this means is there's a possibility, some would say a likelihood, that the finals will be a slow-mo whitewash. It's the best of 13 sets. A 7-0 victory to Riviere could be in the offing, and even then, if Lumley comes close to taking some of those sets, he will have done pretty well.

'John has got nothing to lose so he can come out swinging,' says his mother Penny. 'Cam has everything to lose.'

OXFORD V PRESTED – NATIONAL LEAGUE DIV ONE

As we go to press, Oxford sit at the top of the National League Div One table after beating Prested Hall 3-0 in a home match on 23 November. Here's the view from the dedans of an epic clash.

'Improve your handicap!' said Craig's blurb for this top of table clash between Oxford and Prested Hall. Marvel at what some players can do might be a better line...

This was a fabulous match, featuring two of the country's best young players, Henry Henman at no 1 for Oxford and Vaughan Hamilton at no 1 for Prested, backed up by Roman Krznic (for Oxford) and Matt Potter for Prested.

John has been adding new shots to his repertoire. 'I've changed my force. I've changed some stuff on the backhand side from under the Grille. I have a new shot from the serving end.' But 'it's going to be a big step. Everything is now that much bigger. I mean, I'm playing Camden. The crowd will be crazy. But I can't wait.'

Postscript. As you'll probably know, John did not get the better of Cam – this time. But he won Day Two before going down seven sets to three. And the betting is that he'll be back ... wait for it. Match report at <https://2023worldchampionship.com/>



Camden takes the World Championship victory 7-3

The top singles was a humdinger. Henry and Vaughan (ex-Brookes so not totally unfamiliar with the Oxford court) are both around 12 handicap and have similar styles of play, though Vaughan relied more on his precise railroad serve than Henry who mixed things up a lot more. Henry won the first two games but then Vaughan started to pull back. From 2-3 down, he won three games in a row to lead 5-3. Long rests in these games had the dedans spectators awestruck at the power and the retrieving skills on display from both men but it was Vaughan who was making fewer errors.

Then came Henry's fightback. Under pressure he was more focused in games 9 and 10 and put away some remarkable winners – including a winning gallery from the narrowest of angles in the

forehand court. Five all then, and one to win it. Wonderful tennis from Henry took him to 40-0 on serve and he then closed out the set with a winning chase to complete a remarkable comeback under pressure.

In the second set, Vaughan raced to a 4-0 lead. The accuracy of his railroad serves, his dogged retrieving and a few errors from Henry gave Vaughan the ascendancy and though Henry pulled back a couple of games the set closed out at 6-2.

Now for the decider. Vaughan was still in the ascendant at this point, reaching what seemed like a decisive lead of 4-1, especially when Henry badly jarred his foot against the sidewall in an attempt to reach a near unplayable backhand from Vaughan in game 6. But another winning gallery from Henry rescued the game. Game 7 went to Henry and then a Fahey-style force off the side wall into the dedans made it four all. The next one went Vaughan's way though and Henry's foot was clearly troubling him. Our hearts sank. 5-4 down and looking difficult. Game 10 was the biggest battle yet with everything on the line for both players. Henry led to 40-0 but then Vaughan pulled back again to deuce with two hazard chases to be fought over. And Henry pulled through! Five all and one game to play. Henry, intent and focused, took the first two points but Vaughan pulled it back again. How long could these two keep up the pressure? In the end a fine chase of better than two laid by Henry proved too much for Vaughan to beat. It was 6-5 and over! An astonishing match between two players who could represent the future of British tennis.

Roman took the first set of the number 2 singles 6-2 but that score hardly reflects the seesaw battle between him and Matt. Again and again one player would pull away in a game only to be brought back into a series of almost endless deuces as the service changed and changed again. In the end, Roman's patient control, persistent accuracy, and endless concentration made the difference.

The second set was a rather different story. It started slower with fewer pyrotechnics than set 1 but built to a climax. Roman took the first game but Matt went to 3-1 up and then 4-2 before

NATIONAL LEAGUE IS BACK!!

THURSDAY 21st SEPTEMBER 6.30PM



Roman Krznaric



Henry Henman

Promo picture for the match

Roman once again made his consistency tell. There was a sense that Roman was thinking through every shot – and its consequences. Judiciously used power produced killing shots and even in the long deuce games the concentration never seemed to waver. Though Matt went to 5-4 he could not withstand Roman's last assault. 6-5 to Roman put Oxford in pole position for the doubles.

And so it proved. The patent understanding between the two Oxford players and the combination of Roman's accuracy and Henry's power was too much for Prested. By game 6, Roman was heard to mutter to Henry – "let's not lose a game". And they didn't. Some lovely shots on both sides but it was always Oxford who made them count and though the final score of 8-0 to Oxford was hardly a reflection of the effort that Vaughan and Matt put into the match, it was not unfair. They were out-thought and out-fought by the Oxford pair.

Our thanks to our sponsors – particularly Mark Savage who came to cheer the team – to both our players. They have our good wishes for future success and our hope that other members can find the time to see the next home match. We don't yet have the schedules but rest assured Craig will publish it as soon as we know. Do make a note in your diary.

It might (or might not) improve your handicap but it's bound to stir the blood!

The Editor

NOT THE VARSITY MATCH

For some years, Chris Lintott has organised an annual Not the Varsity Match (NtVM) game featuring Club members from both sides of the blue divide. It's by no means all Blues squad standard and Chris makes sure it's an event that any of us can play in – just volunteer... or turn up and support in September 2024.

The 9th 'Not the Varsity' Match took place at the club, as well as up the road at Radley, in September, with the usual mix of handicap singles, doubles and orienteering to get between the two courts. The event is kindly sponsored by Pol Roger champagne, whose products were enjoyed at the end, and foil from a Pol bottle forms the highly sought-after NtVM trophy.

One highlight was a showcase doubles on the Saturday evening, which featured in the dark blue corner Grant Miller and a certain Craig Greenhalgh, both making their NtVM debuts against turncoat Chris Lintott playing for the light blues with sub-20s handicapper Ed Hyde. A marvellous match with

much ping-pong of the ball around the court sent everyone off to dinner in fine spirits.

With 45 matches over the weekend, it usually takes a while for a frontrunner to emerge. This year, though, Not the Light Blues got ahead early, and there they stayed, despite an Oxford rally on the Sunday morning. A variety of tactics were employed, including one NtDB player who, conscious of his lack of backhand lurked under the grille or in the server's corner between every point, emerging to hit forehands before returning to base.

Performances of note included a spectacular debut from Chris Morton, selfless play by Jackie Siu who took early morning slots at Radley on both days, and Oxford skipper Chris Peri who produced a plethora of pies to keep everyone going.

Next year's fixture is the tenth in the series, and plans are afoot to make it special. Mark September 14th and 15th in your diaries, please – whether you're Dark or Light blue.

Chris Lintott



Nt Light Blues captain Jonny Bailey (left) and Chris Peri, Nt Dark Blues Captain plus plenty of empty Pol Roger bottles - as there should be!

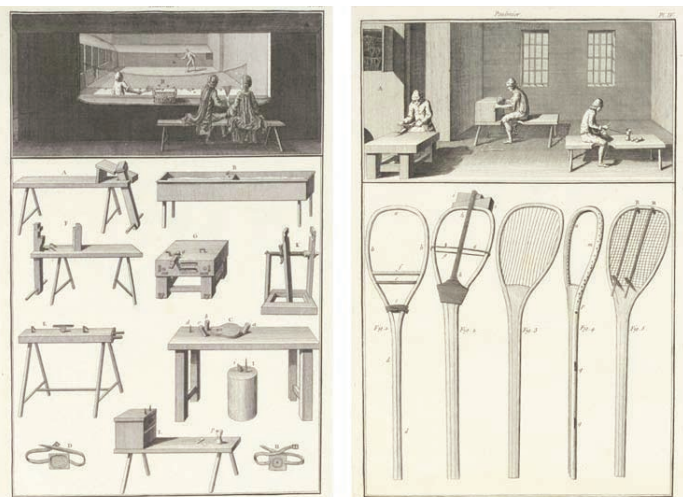
VARSAITY DINNER 28 FEBRUARY 2023, LORD'S

At this year's Varsity dinner, Victoria Harvey of Cambridge combined two of her passions – the Renaissance and Real Tennis – in her speech. Recovering in hospital after a tennis injury and, she says, well-dosed with morphine, she started to think about tennis and the centuries of injury in the time that this game has been played.

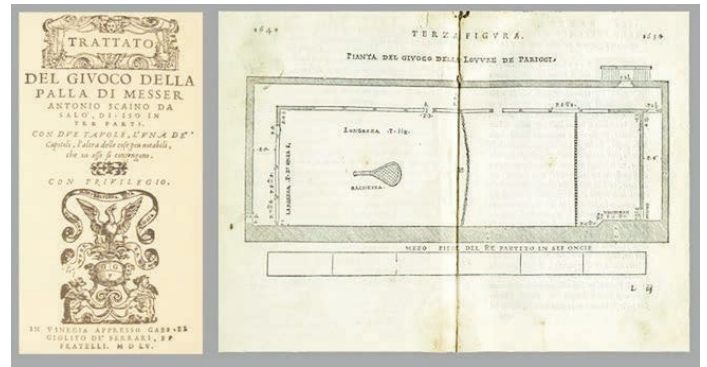
“In the 16th century when Paris alone had 250 courts employing 7000 staff, considerable thought had been given to how best to stay well when playing tennis.

Antonio Scaino, the Italian who first wrote down the rules of tennis in 1555, had plenty of advice. Firstly, those of slender body and delicate constitution should avoid playing on an empty stomach. On the other hand, those with a strong and sound constitution should play before eating in order to sweat out their thick humours. No-one should eat immediately after exercise, but rather should wait until cooled off. Scaino also recommends a rub down and a rest post match.

Fast forward a couple of hundred years, to the age of enlightenment and we find Francois de Garsault detailing a similar post match strategy: “at the end of their game, the players go upstairs to a room where there is a good fire. When they have stripped, the court attendants rub them down thoroughly and dry them.”



However, Garsault goes on to explain that “the beds are no longer supplied on account of the number of fatalities which have befallen players in the past, who, having over exerted themselves at their game, have dropped off to sleep, despite the fact that they



have been massaged and given every attention”. The bodies of people when unconscious can become numb with cold, which explains why some of these unfortunates never woke up again. Victoria urged today’s players to heed Garsault’s message: this danger should “discourage forever the practice of equipping tennis-court changing rooms with beds.”

Around the same time, the Royal Academy of Sciences recommended that “combatants [that’s us] array themselves in linen suits and shirts, with vests, drawers, and caps, stockings of lisle or cotton, and soft shoes which yield to every movement of the foot. And lastly they improvise a broad sash from a towel and tie it with a double knot across the back, and this light armour once donned, battle can be joined. It is important that this sash should in no wise be forgotten, for the strapping lends support to the body and to the internal organs, protecting the liver from the effect of the frequent running and jolting that occurs in play.”

And on court?

“A man must give his all to it; his eyes are ceaselessly on the alert, his arms ever ready for action, his hands clenched, lungs pounding, and breathing agitated; his body and back, due to the frequent twisting and turning demanded of him, his feet and legs, through much running with rapid strides, and finally his mind – all these must be stretched to the utmost to work out the different ruses he must employ in order to rob the enemy of victory.”

Don’t forget that armour next time you’re on court ...

Victoria Harvey



THE RAILROAD CLUB

Thanks to the efforts of Georgie Willis, we had a second edition of the Queen's autumn event for members of the Railroad Club. Despite go-slows on the transport links a good number of Railroaders turned up from around the country for a day of social – but distinctly competitive – doubles. Our thanks to Queen's of course – and all being well we'll be back there in autumn 2024.

We are also exploring the possibility of an exhibition match between top Oxbridge players at Queen's next year – possibly plus a dinner to follow. Watch this space.

Railroad support of the Blues squads with top level coaching from Rob and Claire Fahey will continue next year. It made a real difference this year – and we're hoping for the same next year.

Graham Harding



Matthew Pugh in action at the Railroad event at Queen's

BRODIE CUP REPORT – 2023: OXFORD V MIDDLESEX

Anyone who is a sport fan - and I mean a fan of a particular team rather than someone with an aesthetic appreciation of the long drive or the pressing game – knows that you look for omens where you can find them. It doesn't matter if you're reduced to claiming that your team win the league when the year ends in one, have to wear lucky socks, or believing that your team are plagued by a convoluted curse involving goats, either way precedent is important.

We last played Manchester in the Brodie Cup – the knockout club tournament for 30-50 handicaps – in 2018/19, the year which we won it. So being drawn at home against Manchester was a good sign, made better by the fact that Matt Alden won his rubber by turning up for lunch, the opponents having failed to stand up an opponent.

So 1/0 Oxford, before we started, but the first match was the first string doubles. We fielded Harry Burn – on target-hitting form – and Wayne McLennan, member of that winning team, was promoted to the lofty heights of first doubles for the first time.

The first set was tight. At 3/3 Harry managed to get the ball to cut to worse than two (described by the dedans, harshly, as 'the first tennis shot they've played'). This shows a lack of appreciation for creative shots, aggressive hitting and a fine understanding of when to smack the ball, but perhaps has a certain truth. A crucial game went back and forth, causing grimacing on the opposition side of the net, and it ended up 5/3 Oxford. At 40/0 up we were cruising. And then it was deuce. And then Manchester advantage, with our heroes were defending better than 3. Harry left it – Craig's verdict: chase off. Phew. Back to deuce. The highlight was the communication between the Oxford pair: 'I've got it' screamed Harry. 'Sure did' said our dry Australian as they took the first set 6/3. Some amazing shots in the second – including a low backhand into the base of the tambour from Harry which will live long in the memory, and Wayne leaping like a salmon (no – Ed.) – gave them the second 6/3 too.

Next up, William Rowsell and Henry Taylor. This pair, featuring a contrast in styles, were on it early. Their opponents were discombobulated enough that they celebrated – with a high five, no less – setting

chase the line. It didn't halt an Oxford procession to the now traditional score of 6/3. In the second set, we found ourselves in jeopardy, 1/3 down. Some lovely shots floating along the wall and a shot by Henry to the base of the Oxford tambour made it 4/3. Will had begun to pump his fist in the manner of Tim Henman's early Wimbledon appearances. A classic came at 5/4 up when he volleyed instinctively into the winning gallery; the fist pump said 'match point' and the expression on his face said 'did I mean that?'. Either way, the Oxford pair quickly converted their advantage, securing the rubber and the tie.

Chris Morton was up next, fresh from the Oxford half-marathon (supporting a partner, rather than running himself, as was Harry). Playing miles better than his handicap, Chris was quickly into the lead against a Manchester opponent who had a distinctive Eric Morecambe look about him. He was competitive, playing all the right shots if not necessarily in the right order, but despite a wobble from 5/2 the Oxford man took the first set 6/4. Similar was to follow in the second set, as Chris romped to a 5/1 lead, only to feed his opponent's strong backhand and occasionally hit

into the net. A long groan (my notes have 'aaaaaaaaaagh') accompanied a shot into the net, another match point was dispatched with a lob to beat half a yard, but eventually Chris prevailed.

Could Izzy Marshall, making her Brodie debut, make it a clean sweep? This was the battle of the headbands - Oxford white playing Manchester blue, with Craig - who had been marking all day - predicting best of three sets. Izzy did well to hold the service end, more than once having to grab a basket of balls because they'd been there so long. There were some spectacular points - in particular, the defence of the tambour from Oxford - but in the end Izzy was too strong for an opponent who'd graciously waited all day.

5/0 Oxford in straight sets (if we count the walkover) and a very impressive result. The only disappointment was that cheese consumption was significantly reduced from the last time I ran a Brodie match. Hopefully not an omen. Middlesex away next, in the last 16.

Chris Lintott

THE STUBBINGS SHIELD

In October, the Club held the first edition of the new Stubbings Shield in memory of Simon - variously friend, colleague and playing partner for many of us.

In life, Simon delighted in tennis and the Oxford Club. It was ever his goal to widen participation and to foster the spirit of the Club.

To remember Simon, the Club held the first edition of the Stubbings Shield doubles tournament on Saturday 14 October. Ably organised, promoted and marked by Craig, this quickly generated the needed 20 players - all ages and all handicaps welcomed.

We were organised into two ten-strong groups with pairings randomly allocated from round to round. Each match was 20 minutes long with a point each to the winners. The result? Four games each for most of us with the highest-scoring four from each group going forward to the semis - this time played as a single six-game set.



Runners up, Mary Joyner (left) and Abby Hayton



Winners Neil Mortensen and Seth Whidden

The four leaders from the morning group were Chris Lintott, Seth Whiddon, Mary Joyner and Ivan Shatrov and they were joined in the semi-finals by Abi Hayton, Lesley Smith, Peter Norris and Neil Mortensen.

BUSINESS NETWORK INTERNATIONAL

Also in October, we put together a 'Welcome to Tennis' event for local members of BNI (Business Network International). This includes some of the A-Plan team – and Craig put them through their paces on court.

Through A-Plan/Howden, sponsors of the 2023 Summer League, Neil Mortensen and Graham Harding were invited to a Business Network International (BNI) session during the summer. Evidently the BNI guys were intrigued by the presentation we gave on Tennis and, as a result, they were keen to have a go for themselves.

A fresh draw set up the two semis. Chris and Ivan took on Neil and Mary. A big disparity in handicaps meant that despite energetic volleying, plenty of 'good tennis' calls from Chris as the ball found the gallery and adept retrieving by Ivan, the set was lost by 4-6.

In semi no 2, Abi and Seth bested Lesley and Peter by 6-4 – another close match.

The final pairs – drawn by Chris – set Neil and Seth against Mary and Abi. The men raced to a 5-0 lead but then the fightback began. Mary and Abi made the most of their owe half-15 handicap to pull back first one, then two and finally three games. The pressure was starting to tell. But a miracle recovery it was not to be. Neil and Seth finally made it through, winning a 40-40 game to take the set 6-3 and become the first holders of the Shield. But not the last. It will run again next year.

Speaking after the event, Neil paid tribute to Simon. This, he said, was a moment that Simon would have loved – the Club together with a glass of decent wine (courtesy of Mark Savage). Vale, Simon – and thanks for memory!

The Editor

On a rather wet night in October, six of them came over to the Club (including our current locksmith, Jason Priest). After a brief intro to the court and the game, Craig got them on court ... and they had an absolute blast. Thanks to his coaching and his explanation of chases and when to change ends, they played out a mini-doubles tournament before the reward of beer and pizzas.

Craig did a brilliant job and the format worked wonderfully. So ... if you can muster a group of 6-8 people we know we can show them a really good time for a very reasonable cost. Just talk to Craig for further details on logistics and costs.

'SUNDAY CLUB'

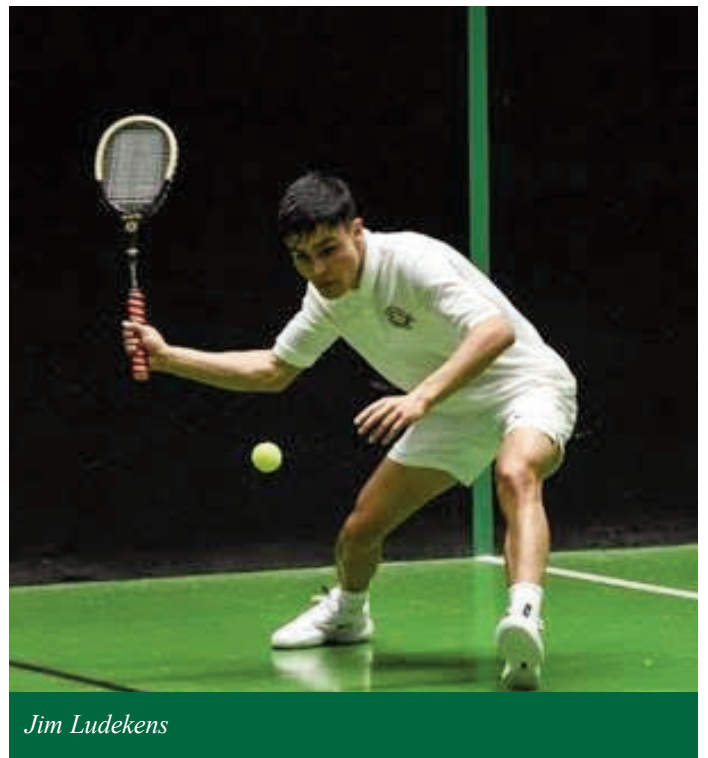
Jim Ludekens has set up the 'Sunday Club'. Turn up anytime from 10-30 to 12.30 for a singles or doubles.

Croissants on offer and guests welcome. There'll be a weekly email but you can sign up in the Clubhouse. Thanks, Jim!

INTRODUCING JIM LUDEKENS

Jim joined the pro team earlier this autumn to support Craig in Andrew's absence and you've probably already met him at the Club. Here's his own intro if you haven't.

“Hi I'm Jim Ludekens – I'm the new Pro here at OUTC. This is a little bit about me. I'm 22 and I love all sport – especially real tennis! I completed the IiP real tennis apprenticeship at Cambridge last year and developed a passion for the game throughout my teenage years when growing up there. My family is quite involved in the game. You may know my Dad, Kees, who is head pro at CURTC and used to work here at OUTC. Now I'm at OUTC and enjoying coaching the team for the up-coming varsity match. I'm looking forward to taking him and his team on! Please come say hi or book me for a lesson.”



Jim Ludekens

INTERNATIONAL ROUND TABLE VISIT

Years ago, I was a member of Round Table which is an international charitable organisation, and I still maintain close links with them. Oxford's Round Table is “quadded” with Tables in three other old university cities; Padua in Italy, Montpellier in France, and Heidelberg in Germany, and each city takes a turn to host a yearly event that we call Quadrimalage. 2023 was the 50th anniversary of the foundation and Oxford played host. I was asked if I could organise something for the Saturday morning and for me, that was an easy choice!

It was optional to attend, so I was amazed when most of them turned up, despite some (how shall we say) “enthusiastic patronage of Oxford's hostels” the night before. They all had a great time and Craig did a fantastic job of keeping them well entertained. Chris Peri helped me out too and we finished with a Grille hitting competition. I'm embarrassed to admit that two Italian Tablers (who I later found out were high-standard Padel Tennis players) bettered Chris and I. A great couple of hours and thanks again to Craig for his help.

Derek Williams



Round Tablers from the UK, Italy, France and Germany. Organiser Derek Williams (far left) and helper Chris Peri (recumbant!)

THE VARSITY MATCHES

an Oxford double!

Held at Lord's as always these resulted in two very hard-fought wins for Oxford: 4/3 for the men and 4/2 for the women.

The men's came down the last match, the lead singles, when Ben Yorston for Oxford beat back the challenge of the talented Patrick Smart. In the ladies, superb performances in both singles and doubles – and the first ever deciding ladies' doubles – by Izzy Marshall swung the match Oxford's way.

Congratulations to the teams, to Andrew and Craig for their training – and thanks to the great Rob and Clare Fahey!

Why the Faheys? Well, shortly before the matches, we organised two masterclasses for the squads – thanks to the generosity of Railroad Club members. The team members found these classes with the Faheys highly effective and highly inspirational.

We are now just behind Cambridge in the post-war tally so the plan is to have Rob and Clare's support again next year as part of the push to pull level in this long-running rivalry.

THE WOMEN'S MATCH

Oxford clinch a cliffhanger in the deciding doubles

The following players represented the Oxford Women's' Team at Lords in the Blues Real Tennis Varsity; Izzy Marshall (New), Mary Strevens (Magdalen), Cora Hill (Queen's) and Louise Fitzpatrick (Trinity) with Abby Hayton (St John's) as reserve.

The first day of the match kicked off with Louise taking to the court to play her singles at 4th string. After breaking her wrist (racket-hand) in November, Louise had missed out on months of training and matches but had worked very hard over the previous weeks to get on court and find opponents to practise against. After losing a tight first set 6-5, Louise showed some true grit to battle back the second set 6-2 and confidently took the third 6-1 and the match. Oxford were 1-0 up.

Next up was Mary playing her singles at the 2nd string. She faced a formidable opponent, Ellie, squash at the number 1 position for the Light Blues who had a lot of power on shots off the back wall. Mary took the first set 6-3 but her Cambridge opponent battled back in the second and used her power to take the next two sets 6-2, 6-1. The overall score was now level at 1-1.

Mary and Cora then went on to play their doubles at the 2nd pair position, facing not only Mary's opponent but also her partner Anna, a familiar opponent for us Lawn Tennis players who plays at the number one position for the Cambridge Blues on that team. The combination of their flashy volleys and powerful back-wall shots proved to dominate the court. The first set was close with Cambridge just managing to win the 11th game and take the set 6-5. Despite a commendable Oxford effort, Cambridge played more aggressively in the second set and took the match 6-5, 6-1. The first day of play concluded with Cambridge 2-1 up.

The second day began with Izzy taking to the court for the first time for her singles at the 1st string. Despite a nervous start against Ulla, the Cambridge captain, who showed some incredible pick-ups out of the corners, Izzy took the first set 6-2 and managed to find some momentum in the second set and take the win 6-2, 6-3. The overall score was now level again at 2-2.

Next up was Cora, playing her singles at the 3rd string. We knew this was going to be a tough match after seeing how well her opponent hit the ball in the doubles the day before. The lefty serve and cut volleys proved too much, as Anna from Cambridge seemed to get better and better throughout the match. Cora put up a valiant fight to the dying end, digging balls off the tambour and out of the corners but Anna eventually took it 6-2, 6-1.

We were now 3-2 down with one more match to play to stay in it. Izzy and Louise took to the courts to play the 1st string doubles. After a close start, the Oxford pair managed to pull away, with Izzy's serve and Louise's volleys working effectively together to stay at the service end and keep our opponents pinned into the walls.



*Women's Varsity Ists from left to right. Professional Andrew Davis at back.
Cora Hill, Izzy Marshall (captain) and Louise Fitzpatrick. Not pictured: Mary Strevens*

Eventually, Oxford took the match 6-1, 6-1.

We were now level at 3-3 and, for the first time in the history of the Women's Blues Varsity Match, the winner would be determined by a deciding doubles match. The pair must be made up of two players who have not already teamed up to play doubles and so Izzy and Mary took to the court against Ulla and Ellie. After racing to a strong lead, the power from Ellie's back-wall shots began to force errors from the Oxford pair. We decided to mix-up the strategy with Izzy every so often taking the galleries and Mary the back. This proved to throw off our opponents and bring the control of the match back into our hands. Finally, with consistent and tricky serves giving us the volleys we wanted, Oxford took the match 6-2, 6-2 and we were the Varsity 2023 Champions.

We were delighted to be crowned champions but, of course, could not have done it without the hard work of Andrew and Craig training us, finding practice matches for us, and supporting us throughout the weekend.

Mary Strevens

MEN'S VARSITY

Another Oxford triumph!

The first match of this year's varsity for the men was the no.1 doubles, which saw Benedict Yorston and Isaac Wighton take on Patrick Smart (hcp 20ish) and Jack Wilson-Smith. Though the latter is only a recent addition to the CURTC, he is a former Cambridge lawn tennis captain and current blue, so we were uncertain what kind of challenge this pair would present. Unfortunately, the Cambridge pair came out flying – Wilson Smith energetically crossing to make some brilliant volley interceptions paired with Smart's solid, yet aggressive, hitting from the back proved an effective combination. Despite some incredible rallies, Yorston and Wighton fell to what was a slightly unusual style of play from the Cambridge no.1 pairing in three tight sets, 6-2, 6-5, 6-4.

Next on was Alfred Backhouse at no.2 singles. With a roughly 15 point handicap difference compared to his opponent, Alfred proved far too strong for his opposite number in what was the swiftest match of the weekend. With a confident 6-0, 6-0 win, Alfred set us back on the right track



Men's Varsity Firsts from left to right. Back row: Alfred Backhouse and professional Andrew Davis. Front Row: Benedict Yorston, Louis Manson (captain) and Isaac Wighton

with some rapid volley returns and a healthy amount of balls clattering into the grille.

The final match of the first day was no.3 singles, played by Louis Manson, this year's captain. With a similarly large handicap difference, Manson got off to a strong start winning the first set 6-0. However, as he has a tendency to do, the captain lost his concentration slightly in the second making for a tighter set than perhaps could have been the case at 6-3, though his Cambridge opposite number also raised his level. Thus, the end of the first day saw Oxford leading 2-1.

First on for the men on Saturday morning was Isaac Wighton, whose match was scheduled for this time so he could get back to Oxford to lead the second part of his double life as a budding actor. Up against Wilson-Smith, all were interested to see how his doubles would translate to singles. In the first set, the Cambridge man came out flying and made the most of his lawn tennis abilities to showcase some prolific volleying and hustling around the court, helping him to edge a tight first set. Isaac, however, came back strongly

in the second, demonstrating his natural ball-striking skills to lead comfortably throughout. All square and into the third... With the rubber, and indeed overall match, on a knife-edge, the Cambridge no.4's excellent volleying and energy proved slightly too much in what was a thrilling encounter, levelling the overall tie at 2-2 going into the final afternoon.

The second string doubles, thanks to the large handicap difference, followed a similar vein to the singles. Dropping just one game in three sets, Oxford's lead was restored going into the final match of the fixture, the coveted no.1 singles.

Having played same opponent last year – and delivered a storming victory – Yorston went into the match knowing what he had to do to secure the Oxford win. In an edgy first set that saw some excellent retrieving from the corners, Yorston pulled through to take it 6-4, a lot closer than the previous year's bagel. In the second set, however, Smart played some inspired tennis. Hammering the ball into the corners at the same time as finding the tambour and grille with regularity off both

wings, he hurried through the second set taking it by an impressive six games to one. Going into the final set, then, everything was on the line. An Oxford win, and it would all be over... a Cambridge win, and the tie would go to a shoot-out. Relishing the pressure, Yorston appeared unaffected by the occasion and delivered a superb, steady performance in the last set to clinch victory by a comfortable margin of 6-2. Then we all got to see what we had been waiting for, the patented Yorston victory celebration: racket in the left hand, right arm outstretched with a 45 degree angle at the elbow, and a clenched fist pump. A great way for the 4-time varsity player to go out on his Oxford real tennis career.

Afterwards we were treated to an amazing black tie dinner in the Long Room at Lords, for which we must say an enormous thank you both to the MCC for hosting us the entire weekend (and Brian in particular for putting up with my annoying emails at all times of day asking for rescheduling), and to Pol Roger for sponsoring the event.

As always, the team owe an enormous debt of gratitude to the senior committee for keeping the club running, and particularly to Andrew and Craig, who not only run the club on a day-to-day basis but are extremely helpful in organising fixtures, training (including the Fahey

masterclass), and generally helping to create an atmosphere which makes real tennis at Oxford so enjoyable.

Louis Manson



Captains Louis Manson & Izzy Marshall and the silverware!

ENGLISH HERITAGE OPEN DOORS

This was the eleventh time I've run this event for the Club and was, as ever, great fun. As part of the English Heritage Open Doors September event, we open the Club up to visitors, many of whom have never seen the game played before.

Visitors started arriving at 10:30 and Lesley Smith kindly let us use her regular Saturday doubles match be a part of the experience. It's actually a bit disruptive if you're not used to dozens of people all chatting and moving around, so a big thank you as I'm not sure all players were fully prepared!

We then had four doubles matches where the players knew exactly what to expect, and the spectators were in for a treat as some very competitive doubles was played until we shut the doors at around 15:30.

I reckon 300-400 people visited the Club through the day. Players about to go on court and those coming off all took the time to help to explain our game to the bemused and beguiled visitors, and we had some lovely feedback from many as they left. A really worthwhile and fun day and, for most of us, a rare chance to play to a packed dedans and galleries. There was lunch and wine for the players too and thanks go to all that played and helped.

Over the years, we've picked up a few new players from the event and it was particularly pleasing that one of the doubles teams was Ian Barry and Rob Brown, who both came to OUTC through attending an Open Doors event at Oxford. We always put out an e-mail to members a month or so before to participate, so if you get the chance, sign up for next year's event.

Derek Williams

CLUB EVENTS

Our top team (see page 6 for our match report) currently stand at the head of their division at the half-way point. If they finish top we will have a home final scheduled for 17th May.



Left to right: Sponsor Matthew Alden, silver Goblet winner Mary Strevens and runner up Abby Hayton and Silver Racquet winner Beau Swallow

Silver Racquet & Silver Goblet

The silver racquet and goblet games are one of the flagship events in the student calendar. It pitches the top two players from both men's and women's teams playing off for the silver racquet and the silver goblet. This year Beau Swallow beat our captain Alfie Backhouse 8/5 in a thrilling match for the racquet while Mary Strevens, our current captain, beat our seconds captain Abby Hayton 8/4.



Silver Racquet and Silver Goblet ready for presentation

Thanks go to Matthew Alden, and Alden's Butchers for their continued support of the event and providing snacks and drinks throughout the evening. Thanks Matt!

Knight Cup

Mike Henman continued the Henman dominance by beating Geoff Baker in straights sets. Unfortunately, we can't find a picture of this year's competition.



Over 60's Doubles: Jim Ludekens (centre) flanked by winners Lesley Smith and Adrian Fort with runners up Willie Alden (left) and Julian Knight (right)

Over 60's doubles

The over 60's was won this year by Adrian Fort and Lesley Smith beating current holders Willy Alden and Julian Knight in the final 8/5.



A1 RAM: Anisha Charania (left) and Alex Thomson flanking the competition sponsor, Ron Mutton

A1 Ram

The A1 Ram was won by the Headington School teacher duo of Anisha Charania and Alex Thomson who beat regulars Lesley Smith and Willy Alden in

the final 6/3. It was also great to see Ron Mutton back in the club to present prizes and give some chirpy words of advice to our finalists from the dedans!

Barber Lintott

Our mixed doubles event continues to go from strength to strength with a record nine pairs entering this year. We also saw new finalists which guaranteed a new winner on the trophy.

Izzy Marshall and Ross Martin proved too strong for Araminta Oldham and Henry Taylor beating them 8/1 in the final. Thanks to committee member Chris Peri for presenting the prizes.



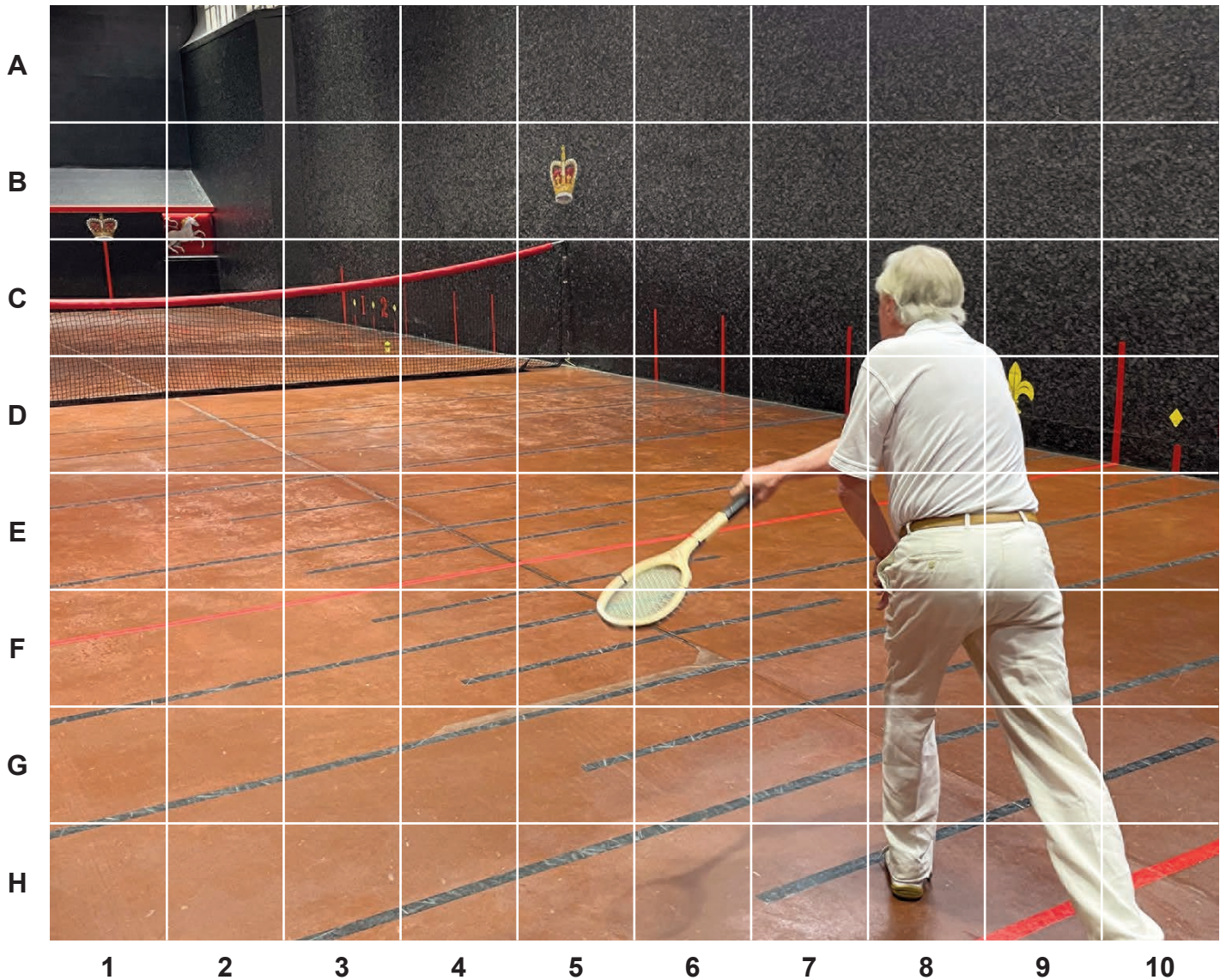
Barber Lintott winners Izzy Marshall (left) and Ross Martin

SPOT THE BALL NUMBER 2

Here's John on court and he's just struck the ball. But where's the ball? Use your skill and judgment (of course) to work out the best answer and send an email with the square coordinates (eg A1) to

pros@outc.org.uk. And no, it's not the one on the floor! All correct answers received by 31 January will go into the hat and Neil will draw the winner who'll get a bottle of champagne.

Graham Harding





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