

Newsletter

Oxford University Tennis Club



Summer 2024

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The Emperor of Japan comes to the Club – almost

We very nearly had a royal visitor to the court in June. On the occasion of the state visit of the Emperor and Empress of Japan to the UK, after a couple of days in London they came to Oxford. In the run up we had word from the University and the Japanese Embassy that Emperor Naruhito would like to look in on the Real Tennis Court on his way to Merton College where he was an undergraduate. We are not sure how much he played whilst a student, but it must have impressed him somehow. The Embassy officials and security detail came to the court to arrange the timing of the visit three weeks beforehand. In the end it was not

to be though. The schedule was too tight. We did however offer the Emperor honorary membership of the club – and one member of the security detail bought a T-shirt.

Andrew's return

After all the uncertainty around Andrew's illness, it is great to have him back settling into an enhanced role administering the club. You will have heard that for the coming year we have three pros on the staff, and we are using this opportunity to reset our bank, billing and IT systems, to modernise the Club workings, and to provide a better service to our members.

There are advanced plans for a membership recruitment strategy, and I see this as a golden opportunity for the club to be in good shape before the effects of the increasing parking fees and the planned bus gates exert a negative pressure on our members outside the ring road.

I do hope that all of you will try and interest and recruit colleagues and friends to our wonderful club. In this regard I am offering a prize of a bottle

of champagne for the member who has recruited the most new players this year.

New fee structure

The Committee thought long and hard about the new fee structure. I am very pleased to see that membership subs have held up in this renewal round, and I have had very little adverse comment on the subs or the proposed charitable donation. I am really grateful for the support, and I look forward to being able to let you know about our improved financial position in due course.

December party?

We are considering having a party on court in early December and combining that with an enhanced annual general meeting, moving this from early January. Please keep a look out for notification of a date in due course.

Enjoy the rest of the summer and at least we do not have rain stops play in realers...

Neil Mortensen

EDITORS INTRODUCTION

Plenty in this summer's Club Newsletter...

the almost visit from the Emperor and Empress of Japan – what an occasion that would have been!

A welcome return by Andrew and a welcome to our new third pro, Jim Ludekens. Some issues over fees and parking explained by Neil. On a lighter note, the men's 2024 Varsity triumph is hymned by

Quentin Guérault – a fabulous piece in the style of Lewis Carroll's Jabberwocky. Plus – of course – the usual reports on Club matches and competitions – and thanks to Club sponsors such as Howden. And please remember that all Newsletter contributions from members are welcomed – next edition coming this December.

Graham Harding

ANDREW IS BACK – HOORAY!

As most of you will know by now, Andrew has made a good recovery from his non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma. Very good news! And he has come back to the Club as of early May. He's not yet doing much on court, but he has taken back the admin load from Craig and is firing up the membership drive.

Here's his personal reflections on the necessary time out that he had to take.

"I returned to the club in May part-time before going back to full-time in June. Full-time has proved to be more tiring for me although I am gradually getting used to it. I'm cycling to help build stamina. I also have a Real Tennis related

knee injury which is frustrating but my physio (who I'm told is the best in the area) assures me I'll get there as long as I remain patient and do the exercises!

Treatment (chemotherapy and immunotherapy) was required over the Winter for a non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. Symptoms were not good last Summer/Autumn but I am pleased to say I am now feeling a lot better!

Having Jim at the club has certainly taken the pressure off me as going straight back into my normal quota of court time would have been too much. I have been asked to fulfil more of an administrative/managerial role at this point – there is more admin associated with running a

Real Tennis Club such as Oxford and more going on behind the scenes than one could possibly imagine!

A big part of this role is continuing with our membership drive – we certainly have fewer senior members than we did in 2019. We have a small committee who have input on this and have a coordinated, targeted approach which includes a free lesson (or free 2-hour taster sessions for bigger groups). We are aiming it largely towards residents of Oxford due to the increasing problems/costs associated with driving into the club. I have spoken to many members who are helping with recruiting

people/groups to take advantage of these offers. Beyond that we have ways into the game including a subsidised weekly course and a subsidised new member package. Things look positive at this point although this will take time. If you feel you have anything at all to contribute in this area please do get in touch with me.”

Andrew Davis

INTRODUCTORY PACKAGE: £400

Half price membership for the first year,
half price racket, 3 x 1 hour lessons,
and first three games free.

AMENDED CLUB FEES

Our finances

The Club made a loss of around £30k last year and we have a deficit budget again this year. Whilst we have the reserves to cover these losses, we have to return to a breakeven budget as soon as we can. Our current income is around £115k, which includes rent paid for the flat at the top of the stairs, and our expenditure is in the order of £140k.

Why the current deficit?

Just as in any other business, increasing energy prices have hit hard. Heating the court and premises, and dehumidifying the court is expensive. We have had an increase in our rent paid to Merton College and the lease requires us to decorate the outside of the court every 5 years. This time around, with scaffolding, it will cost nearly £20k. There are a number of other legacy electrical, and health and safety, and IT issues to catch up with too.

We subsidise student tennis and no longer receive any support from the Oxford University Sports Federation. I repeat, we have no financial support from the University of Oxford whatsoever.

Sponsorship from alumni and business has also been more difficult to secure.

Andrew Davis’ illness has meant an increase in costs as we have taken on a locum pro and increased our back office and accounting staff contribution.

Your committee have looked at ways to reduce expenditure wherever possible. We have looked at the various alternatives and compared our fees to other clubs around the country. We are in the lower

quartile of charges. The new charges are being implemented in July 2024. Regrettable of course but we hope that you will regard them as reasonable.

Therefore, we feel that the following strategy is a reasonable proposal for securing a healthy financial future for the club:

1. Restart membership drive and use Stubbings monies to encourage new members.
2. Increase membership fees, currently £250 for full membership to £275, and add to this a voluntary or non-obligatory donation of £75 to go into our charitable funds, OUTF, attracting tax relief, and adding up to £350 in all. To be clear, this is a voluntary donation, and an appropriate mechanism will be available for those wishing to opt out. These accumulated donor funds will be used for major projects, such as for building works or IT projects, rather than day to day running costs.
3. Increase court fees and charges with appropriate attention to special situations.
4. Continue to try and attract sponsorship, donations, and support for competitions and varsity teams.
5. Review budgets and balance sheets in December 2024.
6. Increase efficiency with new banking and accounting systems.

*Neil Mortensen,
Chair*

PARKING AT THE COURT – IMPORTANT

Recently, the pros kindly gave up one of their parking spaces in the Merton forecourt to ease parking pressures for members. However, this does not come without some potential problems. The changeover can be fraught so please consider the following.

If you have parked in the space, be prepared to finish your match on time, forgo any post-match chat, and immediately move your car so that any following players can use the space. Please be as considerate as you can. If you have the choice, please use a small car when you visit the court so that access is not blocked or impeded.

And do keep in mind our sensitive relationship with Merton. There was an incident in mid-June when their financial bursar found the access to the college carpark blocked. He was also spoken to completely inappropriately. We have apologised but in the light of such behaviour and concerns over safety issues such as access for emergency vehicles, the college could reasonably say in the future that the spaces we rent from them can only be used by the pros – and not by members. We hope this doesn't happen but without sensible use of the parking it's a major threat. Please help us keep things sweet!

Neil Mortensen and the Pros

MEMBERSHIP REPORT

Neil's remarks about fees underline that one of the most important things we need to do is to keep up the flow of new members. Now that Andrew is back, we are re-starting our Membership Drive but what we have already identified as the most successful tactic is the small group 'taster' sessions run by Craig and Jim.

These introduce a group of 6-12 to the court and the game (and the scoring), give everyone a chance to practise the key shots and then set up a mini-tournament. After that it's pizza and a drink or two. Everyone who's had a go has come away highly enthused.

Thanks to the generosity of the late Simon Stubbings and the Stubbings foundation these

sessions are free. There's no equipment needed except suitable footwear and clothing – everything else we provide.

Members: can you have a think about any groups you might be able to recruit and put them in touch with the Club. Andrew, Craig and Jim will do the rest.

The evenings that work best are Wednesdays and Thursdays from 5.30-7.30pm or 6.30-8.30pm, though Tuesdays could also work if that was a much better option for people. Saturdays work too and Jim could also do most Sundays.

Weeks commencing 5th August and 26th August don't work so well – holidays – but September is looking good bar the 14th.

Graham Harding

ON THE BENEFITS OF INJURY

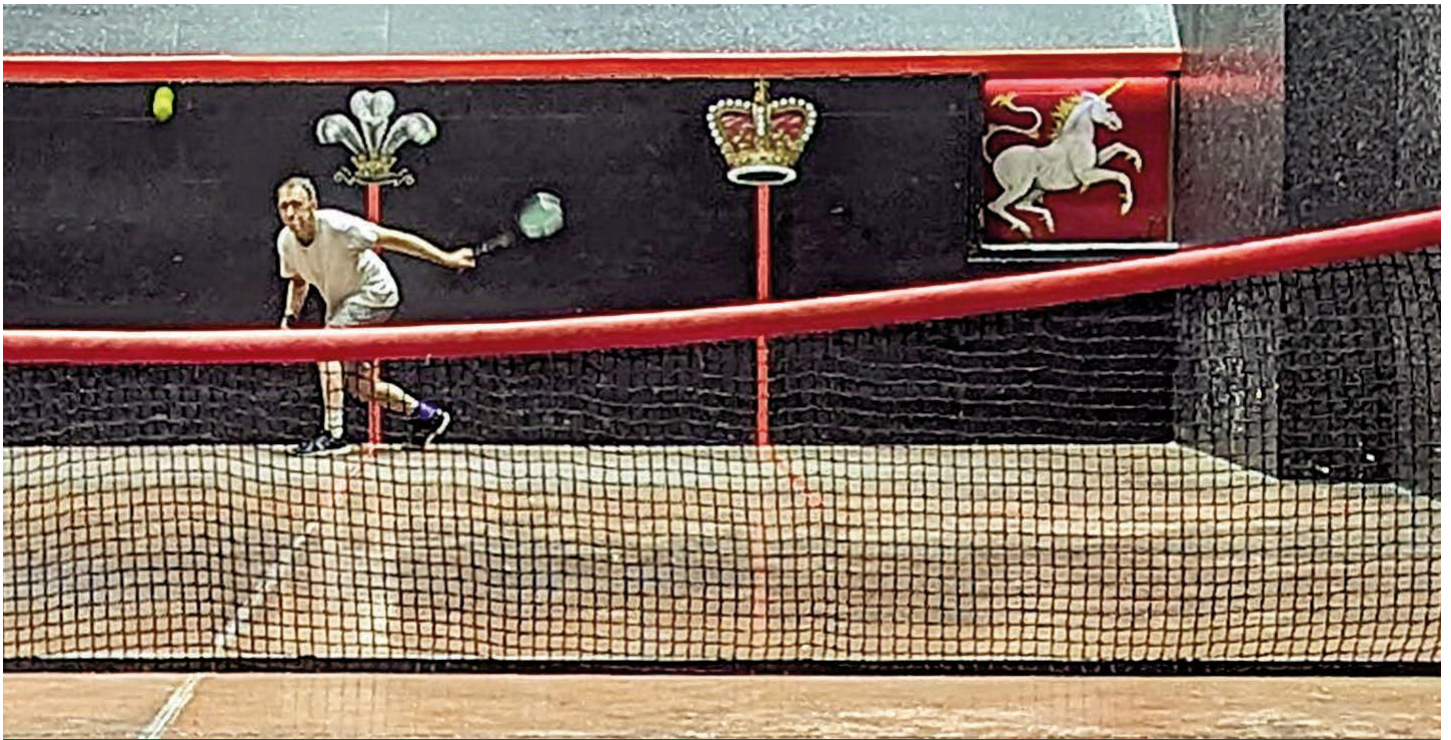
I know it's not that interesting to listen to people moan about their tennis injuries in the club room, but please indulge me for a moment. In 35 years of playing, this has been by far my worst injury year ever. Yet there have been hidden benefits...

It all started with a problem with my shoulder, for which I saw a physio, osteopath, sports rehab expert, personal trainer, acupuncturist and surgeon. Nothing seemed to work. In the end I had a cortisone injection, but that only gave relief for a couple of months.

Perhaps rather stupidly I continued trying to play (basically unable to hit any ball above shoulder height), and in May found myself in the semi-finals of the World Over 50s Masters at Queen's Club.

Then in the third game of the first set something snapped in my right wrist. The pain was excruciating every time I hit the ball, and the racquet kept falling out of my hand. Rather stupidly (I sense a pattern here) I continued playing, losing the first set but somehow winning the second. At that point I felt I was going to faint from the pain so retired. There followed a trip to A&E, X-rays, MRI scans and being told I would be out of the game for at least three months due to severe ligament damage.

So, what to do? Talking to several tennis players about their own injuries, I was surprised by how many people saw a positive side to the experience. One person said that because his injury limited his capacity to run on court, he found himself watching



Roman attempting to play left-handed. Photo by Morten Kringlebach.

where his opponent was going to hit the ball with far more attention, hugely improving his anticipation. A second noted that she had become a more positive and aggressive player: as her body couldn't handle long rallies, she was learning to finish off the point faster. A third found that his leg injury helped him discover fascinating things about human anatomy and made him focus more on maintaining his overall fitness to prevent further injuries.

Inspired by such possibilities, I asked myself how I could I best benefit from the tragedy of injury and came up with the idea of learning to play left-handed.

I've now had a few weeks of this reincarnation – not just hitting with people but practising alone and in front of the mirror – and it has been a revelation.

I'm far from naturally ambidextrous so it's been a struggle, full of frustrations like being completely unable to hit a backhand volley return of serve.

But the upsides have been enormous. I certainly get more pleasure out of hitting the grille once in a set with my left hand than in hitting it half a dozen times with my right. I'm enjoying the thrill of learning and rapid improvement (though this is likely to taper off soon). It has also helped me focus on the very basics of good technique – short swing, elbow in, full face of the racket hitting the ball, staying low low low – all of which I'm sure will

benefit me when I eventually switch back to my right hand. Moreover, I've got to know lots of club members who I've seen around for years but never actually stepped onto the court with.

On a more existential level, it's making me think about the nature of untapped potential. If I've got all this untapped potential as a left-handed player that I'm finally discovering after all these years, what other areas of my life might be similarly untapped? Maybe I could learn to play the guitar, or do a part-time degree in neuroscience, or become an expert vegan cook.

And then there's death. I have to admit that I haven't found it easy getting older and seeing my abilities on court diminishing year on year. I can't help but hear the ticking clock of my mortality alongside my panting breath as I lunge desperately into the corners. But learning to play left-handed has given me a feeling a radical aliveness, a sense of hope and possibility that it's not all downhill from here. Tennis remains a pleasure and a privilege and a pathway towards discovery and meaning.

Roman Krznaric

*Roman Krznaric is a writer, social philosopher and author of *The First Beautiful Game: Stories of Obsession in Real Tennis*. His new book is *History for Tomorrow: Inspiration from the Past for the Future of Humanity*. www.romankrznaric.com*

THE VARSITY MATCH – IN POETRY

Here Quentin Guérout, the ‘Bard of Oxford Tennis’ reports in the style of Lewis Carroll’s Jabberwocky on how the men’s match went...

*T’was Lord’s, and the slithy forces
Did piqué and tambour in the wabe:
All mimsy were the short chases,
And the penthouse outgrabe.*

*“Beware the Cambridge lot, Alfie!
The balls that cut, the frames that catch.
Beware the faster floor and be
The victors in your match.”*

*Each took their racquet - grays - in hand;
Long time the manxome foe they sought -
So rested they when not in play,
In sauna, awhile in thought.*

*And, as on the grand court they stood,
The Cambridge team, with eyes of flame,
Came whiffing through St John’s wood,
And burbled as they came.*

*Chase two! Chase two! And through and through,
The racquets went crash, bang, and whack!
It was 5 - 1, and as they’d won,
They went galumphing back.*

*“And hast thou won the varsity?
Come to my arms, my beamish boy!
O frabjous day! Callooh! Callay!”
Craig chortled in his joy.*

*A mention for posterity:
Beau, Isaac, Quentin and Alfie,
Give thanks to pros and club greatly,
For help with this vict’ry.*

*T’was Lord’s, and the slithy forces
Did piqué and tambour in the wabe:
All mimsy were the short chases,
And the penthouse outgrabe.*

Quentin Guérout

Varsity Real Tennis – Match Reports

The 153rd Varsity Real Tennis Match, hosted generously by MCC, saw another fierce clash between the Oxford and Cambridge. You’ve seen the poetic version by Quentin Guérout, now for the hard detail of the Men’s match courtesy of captain Alfie Backhouse!

Men’s Blues Team

The annual Blues match this year, at Lord’s as usual, was on the weekend of 1-2 March. Generously sponsored by Pol Roger as always. We owe them our thanks.

First on court for Oxford men on Friday morning was Beau Swallow, playing at no 2 for Oxford up against Jin Lee of Cambridge. This definitely set the day up well for Oxford. Beau, the keenest player in Oxford student tennis, produced a crushing performance against Jin. He was never really troubled, and the result was 6/3, 6/2 for Oxford.

Next man on court for Oxford was Quentin Guérout, the bard of Oxford tennis. Against the highly competent Moritz Hirschhausen, a very fine



Alfie Backhouse in action at Lords



*Back row: Craig Greenhalgh (pro), Quentin Gueroult, Alistair Witheford (reserve) and Jim Ludekens (pro)
Front row: Isaac Wighton, Alfie Backhouse (captain) and Beau Swallow.*

lawn tennis player who had spent a few hours warming up. Not much that could be done there alas. Though Quentin made a real fight of it in the second set, he couldn't close it out and the result was 6/2, 6/5 for Cambridge. One all...

Last match of the day for the men was the top doubles. The doubles are best of five sets, but Alfie and Beau needed only three! A highly impressive win saw Oxford lose but three games in all with set 2 coming in at 6/0. Cambridge's Arthur Adams and Oliver Anderson-Shaw were polished off in short order 6/2, 6/0, 6/1. A great result for the men's team to round off a pretty successful Day One with Oxford 2-1 up.

Sauna, recovery supper (and drinks) at the Lord's Tavern and then an early night – ready for the Day Two battle.

So, Oxford went in 2-1 up overall. Confident, yes, but still needing to put in a solid performance to bring it home. Enter Oxford's 'secret weapon', Isaac Wighton. According to Alfie up to that point he had been resting, sauna-ing and pretending to do his History dissertation. But in the third singles he came out like a rocket. 6/3, 6/0 was the result

against Cambridge's Oliver. That made it 3-1 in Oxford's favour. One win needed.

Once again, it was Isaac, this time pairing up with Quentin in the second doubles, on the winning side. This match, though, was the closest of the day. First set went narrowly to Oxford, 6/4, but in set two the Cambridge pair of Jin and Moritz took the first set of the match for the Light Blues. 6/5 and a set all. Could they build on this success? Thankfully for Oxford, they could not! Isaac and Quentin had their measure by now and sailed through the next two sets 6/2, 6/1. Great result – and it secured the match for Oxford. 4-1 up and only the top singles to come.

No. 1 singles featured Alfie Backhouse against Arthur Adams. Immediate thoughts of an easy victory on the lines of the No. 1 doubles vanished when Adams made a good start, but Alfie battled through to take the first set 6/5. After that it was straightforward – if real tennis can ever said to be that. 6/1 to Alfie and a conclusive 5-1 victory for the men. That done it was with off with family and friends, plus coaches Craig and Jim to eat, drink and be merry. Deservedly so!

Alfie Backhouse



pursuit of victory. Mei Whattam battled hard against Phoebe Fox in a tight three-setter, doing incredibly well to claw back the first set after a shaky start. However, Phoebe then settled into the match and began to cause problems with her tricky serve, ultimately coming out on top with a 4-6 6-1 6-1 result. Unfortunately for us, Cambridge used this first win to build momentum throughout the day, winning two further singles matches: Ellie White beat Alex Solovyev 6-4 6-3, and Stacey Sandigurskaia won 6-0 6-3 against Abby Hayton.

The Cambridge players demonstrated exceptional technique and composure, making it very difficult for our team to gain a foothold. After an admittedly frustrating start to our Varsity campaign, we retired to the Lord's Tavern for some much-needed refreshment and team tactics. Indeed, despite facing an uphill battle, our team refused to back down... Alas, the next morning saw another tough defeat for Oxford, despite some good play. Mary Strevens lost to Ulla Petti 6-0 6-1, a 15-point difference in handicap proving very correct! So, into the doubles we went, with pride the only thing left to defend.

Women's 1st team

The first day kicked off with a series of intense singles matches, each player giving their all in

With unwavering determination, Mei and Abby fought hard against the Cambridge pair, hitting some beautiful shots into the grille and dedans,



Mary Strevens



*Back row: Craig Greenhalgh (pro), Alexandra Solovyev and Jim Ludekens (pro)
Front row: Abby Hayton, Mary Strevens (captain) and Mei Whattam.*

but once again the light blue team prevailed, 6-1, 6-1. At this point the support from the side lines was palpable, with our fans cheering the team on with great gusto. And then, as the final doubles match commenced, something extraordinary happened. Mary and Alex played the best doubles match of their lives, displaying impressive teamwork and coordination and delivering thrilling rallies that had the crowd on their feet. Oxford finally had a win... 6-1 6-4!

As the players shook hands and exchanged congratulations at the conclusion of the fixture,

it was evident that while the scoreboard may have favoured Cambridge on this occasion, the spirit of competition and camaraderie prevailed above all else (we would of course say that!). Despite the defeat, our team left Lord's with their heads held high (and a bottle of Pol), ready to regroup and come back stronger in future encounters. Many thanks to MCC, Brian Sharp, the markers, Pol Roger for sponsoring the event, and everyone at Oxford and the Railroad Club for supporting student tennis.

Mary Strevens

Seconds varsity teams

Seconds varsity provided a very competitive women's match-up and a slightly less competitive men's match-up, with Cambridge fielding an incredibly strong side. Somehow both teams ended up losing 4-2, particularly disappointing for the women who had held the trophy since 2016. I suppose we needed to give the other side a chance!

The major highlights from the men's side were the incredible performances of arch-bandit, Ali Witheford, who beat an opponent with a significantly better handicap in 2 sets and then proceeded to dominate what was probably the most entertaining doubles match I have ever seen.



Grace Beglan – next year's women's captain



Kofi and Matthew with doubles opponents Moritz and Ben

Ali and Charlie Mackintosh versus Ollie Hilton and Leo Sannit should have been no match for Cambridge's two forty-something handicappers but with incredible tenacity, good humour and some phenomenal volleying, Ali and Charlie (though, mostly Ali, as Charlie would attest) clawed back, first from 4-1 down to 4-all and then from 7-4 down to 7-all and an 8-7 victory. Truly remarkable backs-to-the wall stuff, an inspiration to all present.

Serious credit must also go to Kofi Gunu (pictured with Matthew Dick and their doubles opponents Moritz Hirschenhausen and Ben Craig) who took three games off an opponent despite a thirty-point difference in their handicaps, not in Kofi's favour!

On the women's side, Hannah Barber, played some absolutely beautiful tennis, in both the singles and the doubles, contributing two victories. Grace

Beglan gave us one of the most entertaining matches of the weekend, a three-setter versus Martha Rushbrooke, which Kees Ludekens of Cambridge memorably described as 'squash versus tennis'. Alas, tennis won out this time.

So, an inspirational defeat for the men and a difficult one for the women and, thankfully, a thoroughly enjoyable weekend for all. Hoping to go two better next year in Cambridge!

Abby Hayton

MATCH REPORTS

National League Division 3 – OUTC vs Radley

Real Tennis' equivalent of Oxford v Swindon... on the Oxford court.

A dreadful wet night kept the numbers down – but these who were there had some great tennis to watch.

For Oxford, Henry Henman at No. 1 and Craig Greenhalgh (now returned to competitive play) at No 2. and, on the Radley squad, Benedict Yorston (veteran of a number of successful Blues' matches) and Alex Machin.

The first-string singles set Henry's power (one shot that hit the dedans surround finished up a hazard chase!) and control against Benedict Yorston's irrepressible confidence and apparent ability retrieve certain winners – time and time again. The first set was even all way the way to the very end – neither man ever more than one set up but Henry always with his nose just in front. Henry went to 5-4 up but – as in so many of these first set games – Benedict's combination of killer serves and focused angles into the tambour saved the set. The 11th game – and the set – was well and seemingly easily taken by Henry. One set up.

Set two was a different story. Now Benedict was not just retrieving the apparently impossible but turning his returns into winners. One such that will stick in the memory was a behind his back return of a low drive from Henry into the hazard court that took the dedans first bounce. In game four, Henry banged his knee badly and after that began to slip just a little. Benedict took advantage – from 2-1 up to 5-1 up. It looked like set over. But no. Henry came back, winning three games on the run to make it 4-5. But game 10 – and the set – went to Benedict. One all.

In the deciding set, Benedict always looked fresh and though Henry went for – and found – the grille almost relentlessly, last year's Oxford captain was

always in front, pulling away from 3-2 up to close the set at 6-2. First blood to Radley.

In the second singles, Craig always had the measure of Alex: 6-0 in the first set and 6-2 in the second. Craig's railroad serve, the calm control of his shots at the grille and his consistent retrieving forced errors from Alex. One each...

The deciding doubles was – from an Oxford point of view – sadly one-sided from a score line point of view. Radley took the first 4 games and finished the set at 8-2. In this match, Alex was not only making fewer errors but making some almost miraculous volleyed grille shots from seemingly impossible positions, whilst Benedict was able to switch from retrieving mode to killing mode with some impeccable finishing. Roman broke off from his marking duties at one point to shout 'Come on Oxford' as we trailed 7-1. The mini-Oxford revival that ensued didn't last long though and Radley closed it out for an against the odds win by two games to one.

On the sponsorship front, we owe thanks as ever to Mark Savage MW for wine and to individual members of the Club for their support.

National League Division 3: Oxford versus Queen's

18th April 2024 – a chilly night but red-hot action on the Oxford court when we hosted Queen's for the National League Division 3 match.

Queen's were represented by Richard Elmitt and Josh King. Oxford Blue, Charlie Defries, was due to play but had been concussed – on court – the previous day. The usual Oxford team of Henry Henman and Roman Krznaric were both unavailable: Henry playing in the 0-9s at Manchester and Roman forced out by a shoulder injury. Taking their places – very ably, too – were Alfie Backhouse, the current Varsity captain, and Alex Hume from Lords.

The first-string singles featured the evenly matched pairing of Alex versus Richard. Richard's power and control allied to accurate groundstrokes kept him in front for the first five games but then Alex's highly effective railroad gave him the advantage. From 3-2 down, Alex won four games in a row to take the first set 6-3.

And, not content with that streak, Alex took another four games to go 4-0 up in the second set. Precise serving gave Richard few chances and Alex's cut returns into the corners forced mistakes from his opponent. Richard recovered to take a couple of games, but Alex clinched the first match point to close it out at 6-3, 6-2. First blood to Oxford.

The second-string match set Alfie Backhouse against Josh. The first game went to Alfie but after that Josh was dominant right through to a 5-2 lead. Josh' serve – at that stage – was tighter and despite Alfie's great backhand pickups he wasn't making the most of his winning openings. But then he found his rhythm and his service length. The pace of his railroad dropped a touch but accuracy improved and now he was able to make his volleys into the tambour really count.

From 2-5 down, Alfie took four games in a row to clinch the set at 6-5. The second set followed a similar pattern. To begin with Josh was getting back those shots into the tambour to eke out a 3-1 lead. But again, Alfie turned up the pressure with some wonderful pick-ups and cut chases into the corners. The pressure began to tell on Josh and from 2-3 down, Alfie launched into another four-game streak. His railroad forced looser returns before lethal forces finished off the points. 6-3 and the match to Alfie.

Time was now running down, and we went straight into the doubles. Oxford started well – getting the better of some impressive long rests to go 2-0 up –



From the left: Vaughan Roberts, James Mallinson, Mark Crowley – the victorious Oxford team against Middlesex – with Craig. With apologies for the poor picture quality!

but then the Queens' pair upped the tempo and the pressure to get back into the set. Back and forth it went but Oxford were still hanging on to the lead at 5-4. Another four game streak – but this time it was to Queens' advantage, and they took the set 8-5.

A good night's tennis for sure – even if we didn't get the 3-0 result that we might have liked. Thanks to Jim for marking and our thanks – as always – to Mark Savage for wine and to other individual sponsors for their support.

FLM National League Div 9 final – Oxford win!

Oxford hosted Middlesex in the FLM national League division 9 final. Middlesex drew first blood with James Mallinson losing out to MVP winner Danny Leboff 6/3 6/4 but Oxford pulled the match level with an impressive performance from Mark Crowley who beat Faustas Vilmas 6/1 6/4. So we went into the final rubber with the match tied. All to play for but Vaughan Roberts did the business for Oxford. He never looked like losing against Mark Hefferman and took the match 6/4 6/1. Well done team!

Graham Harding

CAMBRIDGE MIXED DOUBLES

Three Oxford pairs went up to the annual Cambridge mixed doubles tournament in May – a very good showing, particularly as a potential 9 am start meant that all bar one of us went up the night before.

The pairs were Mary Strevens, current women's blues captain, and Peter Bristow, Abby Hayton and Kofi Gonu, and Chris Peri and Louise Fitzpatrick, one of last year's blues.



Kofi Gunu, Abby Hayton, Chris Peri and Louise Fitzpatrick – victorious at Cambridge!

The tournament format was two divisions, playing out of boxes, followed by knockout semis and a final.

Mary and Peter battled valiantly but didn't quite make it out of their box. Both Abby and Kofi and Louise and Chris finalised in Divisions 2 and 1 respectively – and won!

There was a certain innocent (shall we say...) pleasure amongst the Oxford contingent – ably supported by Paul Brown – at sweeping the board at Cambridge's home tournament, something that Kees Ludekens, Cambridge Head Pro, referred to, somewhat ruefully, at the prize presentation.

Chris Peri



Exhibition doubles: Rob Walker, Spike Willcocks, Craig Greenhalgh and Geoff Baker



The Railroad Club set up for past Oxford players to support Oxford student tennis has been active.

Railroad monies have supported not just the masterclasses run by Rob and Claire Fahey for the Varsity squads but also the subsidised racket scheme for students. This year eight rackets have gone to students; including Alfie Backhouse (men's captain), Mary Strevens and Matthew Dick. 'Fantastic!' was Alfie's response. Help me 'shoe the Tabs!' was Mary's.



Mary Strevens

The Railroad Club took advantage of Spike Willcocks (who's now based in the States) making a UK trip to set up a weekend of tennis followed by supper at Vincent's Club.

A mixture of OUTC alumni, former attendees of OU who play Real Tennis here at Oxford, current students, OUTC committee members (including our club president, Professor Sir Neil Mortensen), Club trustees, our ex-professional Alan Oliver and the odd regular club member, played Real Tennis during the day and went to dinner at Vincent's in the evening.

Around 16 attendees signed up for tennis. Though some of the alumni had not played for 10-20 years,



Matthew Dick

everyone seemed to love getting back on court here at Oxford and some really entertaining doubles was played. The 'show' match was late afternoon and featured three ex OUTC captains and our professional, Craig Greenhalgh. A full dedans was eager to see our Railroad patron, Spike Willcocks, play again and he did not disappoint! Partnering his old team-mate, Rob Walker, he took on Geoff Baker and Craig. Despite being out of practice and having been in a serious car accident a couple of years ago, Spike was 'on fire' right from the off! His court coverage was exceptional and volleys so precise it was a joy to watch – it was like turning the clock back to the late 1990s! Ably supported by Rob Walker they took an early lead. Craig however, supported by his inspired partner, Geoff Baker worked his way into the game. This combined with Spike's level possibly dropping a tad meant they ran out winners in an entertaining and close 8 game set.

Dinner at Vincent's was lovely with about 35 in attendance. Older and younger alumni enjoyed each other's company and the feelgood factor was obvious to all there. Neil made an introductory speech which was followed by Spike who spoke for 20 minutes or so (brief by his standards!). A toast was proposed by Spike's contemporary at Oxford and former second team player, Ollie Hawkins. A big thank you goes to Mark Savage who kindly supplied delicious wine for the occasion. A good number of diners then moved next door to Sandy's wine bar until the early hours!



Spike in full flow

The feedback has been incredibly positive and there is a definite will to repeat the event at some point. We have never held an event quite like this one before and I would say the atmosphere throughout the day and into the evening felt 'uniquely positive'. 'So brilliant being back in Oxford', said one participant, 'a wonderful day and evening'.

Up next for the Railroad Club ...

A re-run of the successful events held at Queen's Club is planned for October – thanks to Georgie Willis and the help of the Queen's pros and management.

Andrew Davis



Dinner at Vincents'

CLUB COMPETITIONS

Broadbent Cup

Peter Norris won this year's Broadbent, beating Matthew Dick 6/3 in the final.



Sponsor Derek Williams applauding Peter on his win

Aberdare Cup

This year's Aberdare Cup was won by Mary Joyner who beat Charlie Lane Fox 9-8 in the final.



Mary Joyner holding the Aberdare Cup. As Oxford's winner, Mary went on to represent the Club in the Chetwood Trophy, which is the national handicap singles tournament, and got all the way through before losing narrowly in the semi-final.

Strutt & Parker

Nick Hextall of Strutt & Parker had the pleasure of presenting this year's S&P trophy to Up the Unicorn, who beat the Four Paumeketeers 6/0 in the final. Congratulations!



Up the Unicorn: (left to right) Chris Lintott, Mary Strevens Beau Swallow and Chris Morton, being presented with their prizes by Nick Hextall (behind the bar!) of Strutt & Parker

Town vs Gown – 25 May 2024

The annual Town vs Gown match was held on 25 May 2024 – and resulted in a comprehensive victory for the Gowns. Final score was 5-0 – here's Grace Beglan accepting the Trophy on behalf of the University squad.



Grace Beglan accepting the Town v Gown trophy from Chris Peri. On the left Roger Nathan, match manager

Beard Cup

Victory this year for Mark Crowley who beat Henry Taylor 9/7.



Winner Mark Crowley (left) and Henry Taylor

Pamela Wallis

Alex Thomson beat Peter Norris in the Pamela Wallis final in a hard-fought 9/6 win.



Alex Thomson (left) and Peter Norris

Grant Bates

And here's Neil presenting Anisha Charania and Tim Ault with the Grant Bates shield. Anisha and Tim beat Daniel Talbot-Ponsonby and Adrian Fort 6/2 in the final.



Neil presenting Anisha Charania and Tim Ault with the Grant Bates shield with Jim Ludekens (left) who marked the final. With apologies for the poor picture.

Wroth Cup

Won this year by Alfie Backhouse and Geoff Baker who beat Chris Lintott and Ahsley Deakin 6/0 6/2. Here's Charles Wroth presenting the trophy to Alfie and Geoff.



Alfie Backhouse and Geoff Baker receiving their trophy from Charles Wroth

Howden Summer League

The Howden Summer League is now well underway – building up to the knockout stages later in the year with champagne prizes thanks to the firm. Worth fighting for...

HOWDEN

JIM LUDEKENS

As you'll know, Jim came to us to provide pro support to Craig in Andrew's absence. He's been a great success and we're very pleased to say that he'll be staying on. But what was it like making the transition from Cambridge, where his father Kees has been running the Cambridge University Club for some while? Here's Jim's own reflections on changing cities and courts.

The Oxford and Cambridge courts

Growing up in Cambridge living in 'Tennis Court House', my bedroom was above the dedans of the green court. You could hear the thud of the ball when someone missed a force for the dedans on a Sunday morning ... I wasn't too happy about it. My sister had to put up with the singing from the men's changing room below her room!

But back to the courts themselves: Cambridge has two courts, and they play very differently. The green court is one of my favourites, built in 1866 it's a classic court. Most away players should feel pretty comfortable. It's fast on the floor, cuts well and has large nicks. It's a dark court with green and yellow lines.



The newer blue court was built in 1890 but converted into squash courts in the 1930s. With a lot of hard work from the membership, it was reinstated as a real tennis court in 1999. Its correct use ... as I'm sure you will agree! It has a modern look with a bright red floor, and, like most newer courts, it is on the bouncy side. The ball tends to kick off the main wall into the centre of the court.

It has an amazing viewing gallery above the dedans looking down on the court; I have been privileged to play on the court in front of a crowd and this feature really adds to the feel. The clubroom has also hosted many a good party over recent years.

There has been a real tennis court in Merton Street since at least 1595. Our present building, on the site of the earlier court, was constructed in 1798, making it the second oldest court in England after Hampton Court Palace.

The beauty of the Oxford court is second to none. The unicorn painted on the grill makes it hard to

resist, with a red and black design giving a traditional feel to the court. There are many features to this court that I love: the court rewards a good shot when it's cut or hit flat, it's fast on the floor, the low penthouse makes fast and straight Railroad

serves particularly effective, whilst the nicks and cracks on the court keep you guessing. The biggest shock to an away player has to be the size of the court and shallow angle of the tambour.

Jim Ludekens

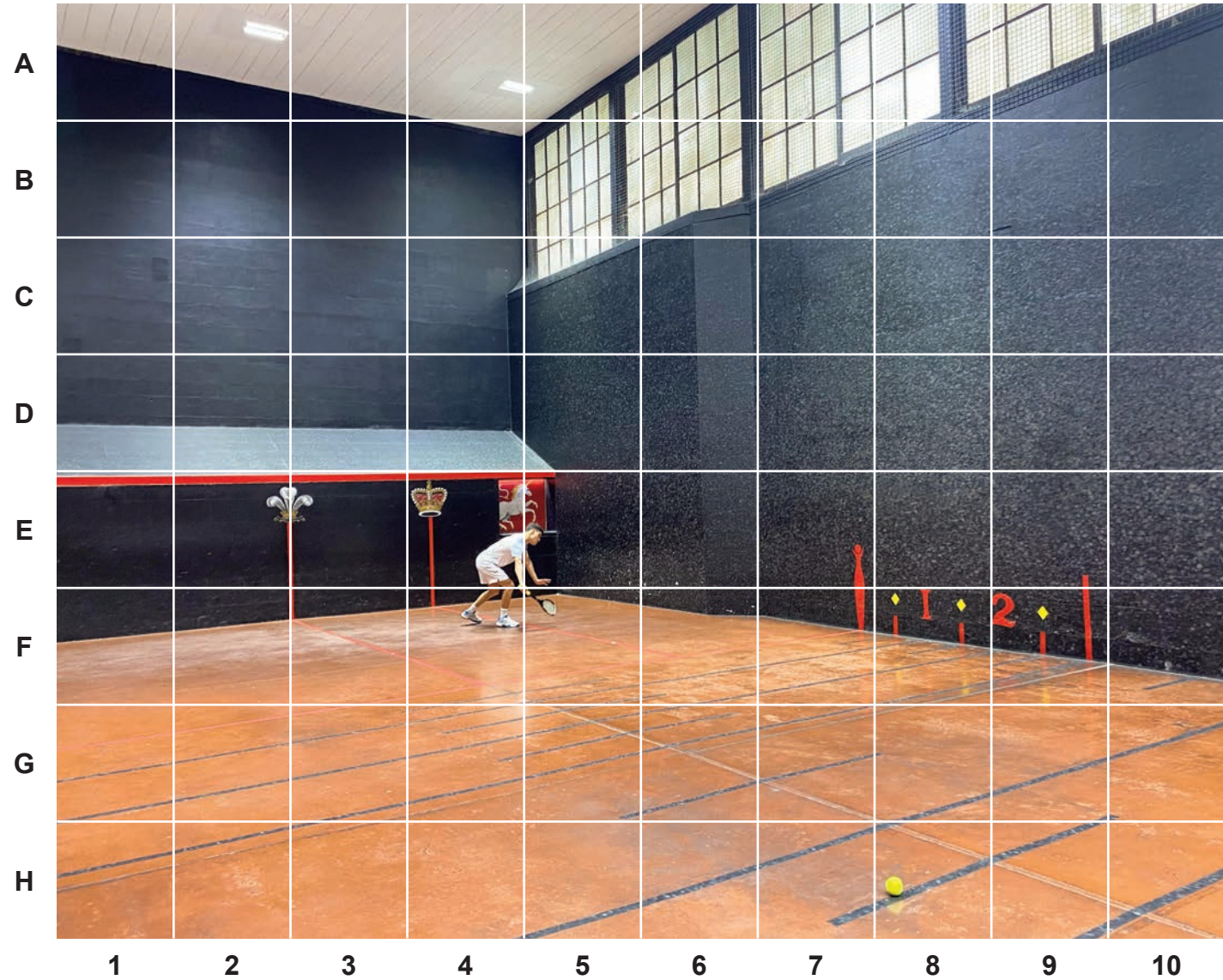
SPOT THE BALL

The winner of the competition in the last Newsletter was Howard Cox. Congratulations!

Just 30 seconds of your time on this new challenge and you could win a bottle of something decent.

And here’s another pic – this time it’s Jim Ludekens at the hazard end. Just email the Club with your best idea on where the ball is, and you could win a bottle of champagne. And no, it’s not the ball on the floor!

Graham Harding



‘SUNDAY CLUB’ UPDATE

This is now a regular event at OUTC. Please sign up with Jim to join a sociable morning of drills and doubles with Jim and fellow members – just doubles when Jim is not available.

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!



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