

Newsletter

Oxford University Tennis Club



Summer 2025

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The best laid plans don't always work out quite as intended. We had a very enjoyable party in the gardens of Merton College to wish Jim Ludekens a fond farewell on a beautiful evening at the end of



April. With some frenzied activity behind the scenes we managed to secure funding for a third pro for another year, to start at the beginning of May. The timing was critical since Craig was about to take some paternity leave, and we congratulate him and Lauren on the birth of baby daughter Bryce.

We welcomed Nick Jamieson to the club and he was quickly making a good impression when only two weeks into his new post catastrophe struck. He was riding his bicycle in St Aldates and hit a pothole. He fell on his wrist and sustained a fracture of his scaphoid bone. This is on his right side and he is right handed for tennis. It is a very important bone to get to heal and there are no short cuts to treatment which means he cannot play for a month or two. I feel so sorry for Nick and it must be very frustrating for him. I see already that he is going to get back on court playing with his left hand! I am sure you will all join with me in wishing him well.

You will have seen my letter about subscriptions and court fees. Whilst all the other signs for increased income are good, like court usage and a growing number of new members, we still have some work to do on balancing the books. Ashley Deakin our new Treasurer has a firm grip on expenditure and our income streams, and we are looking at a modest surplus by mid 2026. The overhaul of our accounting and billing systems has come to fruition, and as with many other clubs we

shall have a direct debit mechanism in place for payment. All this will make us much more efficient.

I want to give a big vote of thanks to your committee, who are of course all volunteers, working hard to improve every aspect of the club, and I hope you will see some of these changes over the next year.

Neil Mortensen

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

In this Summer '25 edition of the Newsletter (supported by Derek Williams to whom we owe our thanks as always), we've some further reports on the 2025 Varsity matches with Beau Swallow's own account of the last set nail-biting success by the men's team.

For those who did not see the Spring email newsletter report in <https://realtennisnews.com> we've reprinted Ben Geytenbeek's piece on the women's match. For a steady flow of great updates on real tennis this is a great site to subscribe to.

There are the usual Club news items featuring our regular tournaments and leagues – plus a report from Alan Oliver on the annual Golf tournament – and a Facilities Report from Howard on the work he's putting into keeping the place up and running. There's an appeal, too, from Howard for support on a working party weekend in early September. Do lend a hand if you can.

A hidden gem? We owe the preservation of Oxford's only court to Merton and the 'hidden gem' is the title of an account by Catherine Paxton of the links between College and court and the very

successful trial session run for Catherine and her colleagues by the Pros.

Ever heard of 'stické tennis'? Like (and unlike) either our game or the developed lawn tennis. A sort of 'pop-up' real tennis for the country house set in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. There's a copy of Nigel à Brassard's new book in the Clubhouse and there's a review below.

Also on a 'historical' note, we have now finally resolved the question of who actually laid our venerable floor and when. See below for the story and an early 20th century exhibition match featuring the then World Champs and the Oxford pro of the time. Still on the game as was, there's a fascinating piece by Charlotte Harris on the experience of playing on the outdoor court at Falkland Palace.

But this edition is not just the 'past'. The Club's new event for 2025 was the Newcomers' Tournament. Welcome to new members and new players and let's see how their talents thrive under the guidance of our ever-helpful Pros Andrew, Craig and Nick.

Graham Harding

CLUB MATTERS

Facilities report

Both the exterior and interior decoration of the court and clubhouse need attention. While the exterior decoration remains substantially completed various final touches remain to be done. This final finishing-off work may run into next year as our contractor's work schedule has needed to be changed. Inside the clubhouse we may be able to start to refresh the paintwork but substantial

progress remains largely on hold until we see the outcome of the Energy Ombudsman (EO) investigation into our electricity charge costs; we've raised concerns with the EO regarding historic billing costs. Once we have a clearer picture of the electricity costs issue we'll be better able to assess the budget and timing for internal improvements. We will be moving ahead with sorting out tiling and flooring issues in the gent's shower room, hopefully this will be completed this summer. Minor repairs

in the ladies' changing room were carried out in recent months.

The first and main stage of the comprehensive upgrade of the ELS (Emergency Lighting System) has been completed, and part funded by a grant from the T&RA. Sticking with lighting improvements, we expect this autumn/winter to replace most of the failed LED units in the court ceiling lighting, the actual units will be secured through our guarantee but we'll still face installation costs.

Trying to keep up with the court's maintenance is an on-going task – to this end we are having a maintenance weekend on Saturday/Sunday 6th and 7th September when we'll be carrying out some minor repairs and freshening up paintwork etc. Volunteers to help on this work are essential, thanks to those who have already volunteered. If you can spare a few hours that weekend to help out please let the Pros know.

Howard Cox



RAILROAD CLUB UPDATE

For The Railroad Club's Spring event this year, we had the pleasure of heading to Hatfield who'd kindly agreed to host us on their superb court.

A dozen or so Railroad Club members turned up for friendly doubles with everyone getting three or four sets with different partners.

Once again there were a couple of members who hadn't played in a number of years and were thrilled to get back on court. Two attendees live not far away from Hatfield and enquired about membership there so a win win all around!



After the tennis the players walked down the hill for a couple of drinks in the sunny beer garden of the Eight Bells Pub! A thoroughly relaxed and enjoyable day.

Many thanks to Eve Shenkman who was such a great help with organisation and to Hatfield pro, Jon Dawes for making us so welcome. We hope our next event will be at Queens again in the Autumn and next Spring we plan to return to Oxford!

Onwards and Upwards for the Railroad Club!



THE
RAILROAD
CLUB

Andrew Davis



A HIDDEN GEM: OXFORD UNIVERSITY REAL TENNIS COURT

Catherine Paxton of Merton writes:

“I first arrived on Merton Street as a fresher at Corpus in 1985 (my Merton era would commence 18 years in the future) and it has taken me forty years to access one of this beautiful street’s hidden gems, the Oxford University Tennis Club.

The Club invited college members to join it for a Merton Evening of Tennis on 11 March 2025 to celebrate Merton’s singularity as the only Oxbridge college to retain a real tennis court. There is a reproachful reference to a young fellow playing tennis in the Merton Register of 1492 but the Merton Street court itself is first mentioned as ‘lately built’ in a lease in 1595. The present structure, on the same site, dates from 1798.

Around 35 people of divergent ages took up the Club’s enticing offer and enjoyed a hugely entertaining introduction to the game and its history; an exhibition match by star players; and a chance to wield a racquet on court. Our host, Professor Chris Lintott, brought the public engagement skills he deploys as the University’s Citizen Science lead (and Sky at Night presenter) to bear as he oriented us on the asymmetric court. This reflects the built environment, in cloisters, courtyards and town squares, in which the handball games from which real tennis would emerge were first played. The walls of the court are lined on three sides with penthouses with sloped rooves. Unlike lawn tennis, the service end is fixed and the

receiver has to contend with a projecting buttress or tambour (the angle of the Merton one is apparently exceptionally obtuse). The receiving or hazard end also features a window or grille which contains the emblem of the club, in this case a unicorn with flowing golden locks on a red ground. If struck, it is a winning shot.

Our understanding of the game deepened as we watched an actual match unfold, cheering on a Merton alumnus, Benedict Yorston, who gratifyingly emerged triumphant over Tim Henman’s nephew. Possessing less than a scintilla of the hand eye coordination of the demonstrators, I excused myself from the opportunity to strike the ball but my husband did not hang back and enjoyed himself immensely. In fact, he has been back since for a couple of lessons. If further recommendation were needed, one need look no further than the wonderful piece on the tennis balls found lodged in the west wall of the chapel in ‘The Treasures of Merton College’ by real tennis player and Merton classicist Nicholas Richardson. He quotes Thomas Cogan who in 1584 cited tennis as the best protection against plague ‘for that it doth exercise all parts of the body alike ... and greatly delighteth the minde, making it lusty and cheerful’. Anyone interested in sampling real tennis for themselves can drop in to the court or email pros@outc.org.uk”.

Catherine Paxton

[This article first appeared in the Merton Magpie, no 27 – our thanks to Catherine and to Merton.]

THE RISE AND FALL OF STICKÉ TENNIS 1874-1939

Currently in the Clubhouse is Nigel à Brassard's book on stické tennis.

Stické – once played both indoors and outdoors – now survives only in a couple of country house courts. It takes its name from sphairisticke, the forerunner of today's lawn tennis that was invented and patented in 1873-4 by Walter Wingfield but is played today on what looks like a simplified and smaller version of a real tennis court, with penthouses but no grille or galleries and no system of chases. The rackets and balls are lighter – seen as a benefit in the 19th century as making it easier for women and younger players to enjoy the game.

A fascinating early chapter of Brassard's book looks at the state and links of the various racket games popular in the second half of the 19th century. Real tennis in this period saw a 'revival' with the laws codified and new courts built. Rackets, which had started in 18th century debtors' prisons, became a game of public schools and the British army. Squash rackets (using a punctured rackets ball) was invented at Harrow School around 1830 but spread rapidly round the world. Badminton, created as an indoor game in British country houses around 1860, was another game popularised by army officers.

Stické was another army creation but it became popular as a country house game – played by the leisured, aristocratic elites of Britain. The Saturday to Monday 'country house weekends' of this wealthy group were dominated by sport. Crudely put, these centred on killing animals in winter and hitting balls in summer, and stické, like croquet, was appreciated for the opportunities it provided for flirting.

Two men of this era, Lord Desborough, one of the greatest all round British sportsmen of this or any other age, and Lord Dufferin, a noted and well-travelled diplomat, were central to the adoption of stické in England, Canada and India. Desborough was an Oxford rowing blue, national punting champion, fencing silver medallist and, with his wife Ettie, a renowned host at their house in Taplow, where they built a court. Dufferin,

The Rise and Fall of Stické Tennis 1874 – 1939

Nigel à Brassard



Governor General of Canada in the 1870s and Viceroy of India in the 1880s, also built courts wherever his career took him (which explains why stické is also known as 'Indian tennis' or 'Canadian tennis').

The First World War put an end to the leisurely country house weekend and its recreations and today stické courts survive only at Hartham Park near Bath and Knightshayes in Devon. As well as capturing the details of the game, Brassard's book is a captivating account of the social and sporting milieu in which the game was promoted, played and enjoyed.

By 1939, as the title suggests, the game was up for stické but Brassard ends by urging its revival as a 'simple and highly sociable game that can be played by people of very different abilities'.

But has padel taken that place?

Graham Harding

BLUES MATCHES 2025

The University Men won their eighth consecutive Varsity Match by the barest of margins after a deciding doubles match that will be remembered as the best in a generation at Lord's, but the Cambridge University Women balanced the scorecard with a comprehensive victory over the Oxford team.

First, Beau Swallow (captain of the men's team) contributes his own report of the men's match.

Oxford Men win 154th Varsity Match in final game of dramatic deciding doubles

The men's side of the 2025 Varsity Match kicked off with the second seed doubles match, Matthew Dick and skipper Beau Swallow facing off against a strong Cambridge pair featuring Oxford alumnus and half blue Isaac Wighton. It was an uphill battle for the Dark Blues from the start as Cambridge applied pressure with every shot, and, despite valiant resistance from Swallow and Dick, they

were not able to sneak away with even a set as first blood went to the Light Blues.

The next match saw Dick take to the court once again for the fourth seed singles match. Clearly aiming to avenge the doubles defeat, Dick roared to a 3 game lead in the first set, keeping the ball on a length and beating short chase after short chase. Hopes were high for an upset, but eventually his opposite number settled into the match and the handicap difference began to show itself. Dick battled on but struggled to sustain the clean hitting he had displayed at the start of the match, eventually going down in two sets after an incredibly impressive performance. Cambridge were now leading 2-0 in the match.

The third men's match of day 1 saw fresh legs hit the court, as Alfie Backhouse and Quentin Guérault strode out for the first seed doubles, determined to put Oxford on the scoreboard. Backhouse's power and precision from the back



Alfie Backhouse on serve on the Lord's Court



Beau Swallow and Alfie Backhouse en route to the winning set

of the court coupled with Guérault's unerring net play were too much for their opposition, and they cruised comfortably to a three set victory, leaving Cambridge 2-1 up at close of play on day 1.

Some decisive rearguard action was required of the Oxford team on day 2 if the Varsity trophy was to remain on OUTC's (well-stocked) trophy shelves. First up was Swallow in the second seed singles match, going up against Joshua Elliott, an unknown quantity who had achieved a low 30s handicap in a matter of months. Tensions were high and the restes attritional in style as both players retrieved ball after ball. In the end, experience won out as Swallow polished off the match in two sets to level the score at 2 apiece.

The penultimate match was the third seed singles of Guérault against Wighton. In spite of his past allegiances, Wighton showed no mercy as he won the first set without dropping a game. However,

undaunted, Guérault managed to rally himself and clinched the deciding game of the second set after defending four match points, resulting in the first deciding set of the men's match. A back-and-forth tussle ensued, eventually leading to a second deciding game. Was Guérault about to pull off a remarkable comeback? Alas, it was not to be, Wighton prevailing and pulling Cambridge into the lead once again.

It now lay to last year's captain Backhouse to settle the score and take the match to a doubles tiebreaker. Fortunately, the result was never in doubt as Backhouse's class shone through, as he dropped just a game in each set. The stage was set for a thrilling conclusion.

The drama began off-court, as Swallow, due to an unfortunate clash in Varsity Match scheduling, had jetted off to Eton after his match that morning to play in the Eton Fives Varsity Match. The Tabs

successfully shoed over there, a Top Gear-esque race ensued as he sped back to Lord's for 5pm, the scheduled start of the tie-breaking doubles.

The tension was palpable as the four players stepped on court, Backhouse and Swallow for Oxford, Wighton and Elliott for Cambridge. Swallow and Elliott played the volleying role as Backhouse and Wighton sent cannonballs from the back of the court. The Cambridge pair were exceptionally tidy with their play, keeping sustained pressure on the Oxford pair as the two sides exchanged games until reaching a deciding game in the first set. By this point, the dedans and side galleries were packed, with supporters for both sides becoming increasingly vocal and cheering every point. Andrew and Craig were peering nervously through last gallery. After multiple deuces at 5 all, Cambridge managed to edge their way into the lead as they took the first set. As they had been through the match, Oxford were playing catch up.

A quick regroup led to a change in tactics as Oxford played more conservatively, backing themselves in longer rallies and cutting down the unforced errors. This quickly paid dividends, as the pair took more control of the play, enduring the relentless pressure from their opposition and taking their chances as they came their way. From 3-3 Oxford pushed on to 5-3, eventually taking the second set 6-4.

So, the 2025 Real Tennis Varsity Match was to come down to a deciding set in the deciding doubles. Neither pair was relenting, leading to the highest quality tennis of the match. The pairs traded games once more to reach 3-3, before Oxford managed to win the crucial seventh game to make it 4-3. They quickly brought themselves within a game of victory, when Cambridge for their part rallied and fought back to 5 all – it was winner takes all in the final, deciding game. It was nervy, as both sides made unforced errors while trying to bring about a conclusion to the match. In the end, a strong return of serve from Backhouse forced a loose volley from Wighton onto the high back wall, and a straight force from Swallow forced the error as the Dark Blue supporters erupted in celebration.

Results (Oxford names first)

Swallow/Dick vs Wighton/Craig 4/6 0/6 3/6

Dick vs Craig 4/6 0/6

Backhouse/Guéroult vs Seok Lee/Elliott 6/3 6/2 6/1

Swallow vs Elliott 6/3 6/2

Géroult vs Wighton 0/6 6/5 5/6

Backhouse vs Seok Lee 6/1 6/1

Swallow/Backhouse vs Wighton/Elliott 5/6 6/4 6/5

Oxford won 4-3 overall

Beau Swallow

And now Ben Geytenbeek on the women's match

The Oxford vs Cambridge Varsity match is the oldest extant annual tournament in real tennis, having been played continuously since 1859, and is the fourth oldest of the Varsity matches — after rowing's Boat Race, cricket's University Match and rackets' Varsity Match. The real tennis Women's Varsity Match started in 2007.

Play started in the Women's match on Friday, with Cambridge getting off to a rapid start in the third string singles, as Phoebe Fox (Sidney Sussex, Cambridge) found success targeting Cordelia Lamming's (Exeter, Oxford) backhand and taking the first set 6/1. But then Lamming found a good run of target hitting, winning back the second set as she found more time at the service end. The final set was hotly contested, with Fox winning an early lead before being pulled back to 4-all by Lamming. Fox held firm on her return of serve, laying some good short chases to take the win.

In the Women's 2nd Singles, three time Light Blue Venetia D'Arcy took on debutant Dark Blue Grace Beglan (Merton). It was D'Arcy's first match back in Cambridge colours since her initial stint between 2014 and 2016. Beglan has seen rapid improvement in her game, dropping over 20 handicap points in the last 12 months alone. The match was an intriguing battle between the stable and steady D'Arcy with her double handed technique, and the erratic but courageous Beglan. In the first set, D'Arcy had set points in both the 5-3 and 5-4 game, but Beglan saved both.



Grace Beglan attacking the grille

The Oxfordian then went on to win the deciding game to love. The second set was equally as tight, this time with D'Arcy saving two match points before falling at the third on a short chase. Beglan celebrated with her arms outstretched and shouting "come on!" at the Oxford half of the dedans.

The day ended with the first string doubles matches, starting with the women's. Cambridge were too strong for Oxford's Mary Strevens and Cordelia Lamming. Ellie White dominated the back of the court, easily chasing down anything Oxford had to offer, while Phoebe Fox lurked at the net beyond the first gallery line, ready to poach anything coming in her direction. Cambridge took a 2-1 lead in rubbers going into the second day.

Cambridge entered the second day's play with a 2-1 lead in both matches and quickly extended that lead in the women's match, with Martha Rushbrook easily overcoming Oxford's Hannah Wilson Kemsley (Exeter, Oxford).

Then Cambridge captain, Ellie White defeated Mary Strevens to set up an unassailable lead. White looked in control for most of the match, until Strevens threatened to cause an upset in the second by fighting hard to 3-all. It would not come to pass, with White hitting several grilles on her path to victory.

The final episode of the women's match with the dead rubber women's second doubles, won by Cambridge who dominated the net to put constant pressure on Oxford. Despite a late surge from the Dark Blues, this match ended with Cambridge's fifth victory.

Ben Geytenbeek

Real Tennis News Digest – February 2025
Ben's Substack (www.realtennisnews.com) has great RT coverage – you're very welcome to subscribe.

AN AMERICAN NEWCOMER REFLECTS ON REAL TENNIS AT MERTON

After Harvard, Carli Cooperstein spent a year at Oxford doing an MSc in Digital Scholarship in 2024-25 ... and discovered Real Tennis. “I started playing real tennis on the Merton Street court in October. I particularly loved the Oxford team name—the ‘Unicorns’. Coming from startups and the tech world, joining a team called the Unicorns was just too perfect to pass up.



I’d played lawn tennis before – I’d never even heard of real tennis – but I’d also done a lot of dancing. That really helped when I got on court. I began taking lessons from the three pros based at Oxford and started competing in friendly games against other players around my level.

Throughout Michaelmas term there was a recurring Sunday night beginners tennis session hosted by the Unicorns captain. It being winter the court often sweated and when this occurred, I received a series of emails riddled with Britishisms and uniquely real tennis language (e.g. “real players win every chase, even if the conditions prevent them from getting on court!”) to announce the cancellation of Sunday Club practice.



Grays racket factory workshop

I was also fortunate enough to visit the Grays Racket Factory in Cambridge this past November, where I saw the racket construction process. The factory is operated by two individuals who make all the rackets by hand using methods and tools that date back 100+ years.

My most sincere hope is to one day open a Real Tennis court in California, the first in west coast USA. I’ll let you know how I get on but if anyone has any west coast contacts that could help out or work alongside me, do please reach out!”

Carli Cooperstein (from her Substack)

Carli’s full Substack post can be found at <https://substack.com/home/post/p-161710091>; her contact details are Carli1100@gmail.com



Carli Cooperstein on the Merton Court, April 2025

JIM'S FAREWELL PARTY

On a glorious spring evening, 80 or so members of the Club gathered to say goodbye to Jim. He joined us as an Assistant Pro when Andrew was ill and, as Neil said in his brief address, he very quickly made his mark.

In reply, Jim first thanked Grace Beglan who made it possible for us to meet in the perfect surroundings of the Merton Fellow's Garden, and Andrew who got it all organised for us with punch, wine and nibbles. We should also thank Neil for his very generous contributions to the event.

An evident highlight of Jim's time with us was coaching the Varsity teams – early morning sessions that have paid off handsomely with back-to-back wins over Cambridge in the last two years. Since his Dad, Kees, was responsible for the Cambridge squad that made victory even sweeter – an achievement that more than justified tucking into the after-match Pol Roger.

Jim's plan now is to focus more on his own game, and he thanked Craig, Roman (Krzmaric), Alfie (Backhouse) and Geoff (Baker) for being his hitting partners and handicap improvers over the last year or so. Let's hope you'll find as good in your next role, Jim!



Jim gets the court!

Neil had presented him with an old print of our historic Court – a gentle hint not to forget us? We certainly hope he won't!

As he said, he's made friends, laid down great memories and – with luck – he'll be back with us some time in the future. And so say all of us! The reception from the assembled members made it very clear that he'd be welcome at any time.

The Editor



Gathering for Jim's leaving party in the Merton Fellow's Garden

INTRODUCING OUR NEW PRO – NICK JAMIESON

“I first found real tennis rather randomly – I stumbled across the image of a real tennis ball on google images, and dived straight down the rabbit hole to find a sport I didn’t know existed. I brought my family an hour and a half from central Somerset up to the Bristol court to learn about the game with Kevin King. I played occasionally for 3 or 4 months there before stopping when I went to University at Bath to study Chemical Engineering.

Having got my masters, I realised I could indulge my taste for tennis again, and started playing as a member at Leamington near the start of 2022, where I quickly became obsessed with the sport, and found out about the Investing in Professionals scheme to get started on becoming a pro. It was another year later that I finally got accepted onto the scheme in October 2023 at Leamington, doing my first year there learning under Lewis Williams and Chris Aley, before moving down to Radley, where I filled in the third pro space left by Chris Ronaldson going off to open up the Sydney court.

Now I’ve found myself at Oxford, which coincided perfectly with when I needed to finish at Radley. Oxford’s been a fantastic club to work in, and Andrew and Craig are taking good care of me,

WHO LAID THE OXFORD COURT FLOOR?

Earlier this year, a chance sighting in the 1912 edition of the Oxford Journal led to an answer to a longstanding question. Just who laid the current floor of our Court?

The original floor was undoubtedly stone flags probably about 50 cm square. Presumably any gaps would have been filled with mortar / concrete to give as smooth a surface as possible. But, of course, our Court has been renewed several times over the centuries – and we did not know when and by whom the current floor was installed. The photo opposite gives the answer. Dated 30th October 1912, it shows the court itself (perhaps before the new floor) and then, on the left, it says this ‘new-patented floor’ was laid down by ‘Mr Bickley’. Two world champions took on the Club Pro, Duncan Wilson and his partner, B. C. Dickinson from the Prince’s Club in Manchester. Not surprisingly, the world champs, ‘Punch’ Fairs and Peter Latham, won in straight sets



Nick on court in an earlier role

especially with the broken wrist. Recovery is going well – it’s not been painful other than the first few days, and I’ve been able to move it around without issue, I’m just waiting to get the cast off and see what the doctors have to say. I’ll be following whatever advice they give me!”

Nick Jamieson

July update. Cast is now off and gentle hitting with the right hand starts soon ... but Nick is already proving a tough opponent playing left-handed. Well done, Nick!

and the photo shows them with the proprietor of the Oxford court and Joseph Bickley who had installed the floor.

Bickley, a specialist in plaster and floors for racket courts of all types, is known for applying his patent ‘Bickley Formula’ floor to a number of Britain’s best courts – including Newmarket, Moreton Morrell and Hardwick House. But not, until now, to Oxford. This appears to have been his final UK floor, though there were later ones in the USA.

The patent gives exhaustive detail on how to lay one of his floors – including the continuous 30 or so hours of polishing that went on through night and day to get a floor that had just the right amount of grip both for players and for the cut ball.

Bruce Paxton of Moreton Morrell has recently led a project to replace the Bickley floor there and gave the Newsletter an inside account of the process of analysing their existing floor, identifying specialists

ROYAL TENNIS COURT IN MERTON STREET.



For the opening match on the new-patented floor laid down at this court by Mr. Bickley, of London, a splendid double game was arranged, consisting of "Punch" Fairs (from the Duke of Manchester's Court), Peter Latham (from Sir C. G. Rose's court, Newmarket)—both ex-world champions—R. C. Dickinson (from Prince's), and D. Wilson, the Oxford professional. Latham and Dickinson opposed "Punch" Fairs and Wilson, the result being a win for the former pair by three sets to two (31 games—28 games). The new floor was much appreciated by the players, who expressed the opinion that it was a vast improvement on the old one. The above photos show (on the right): The court upon which the game was played, with its new floor; and on the left the players, who are left to right: Wilson (Oxford), Dickinson (Prince's), Mr. J. H. Dickinson (proprietor of the courts), J. Bickley (London), R. Latham (Sir C. Rose's), and P. Fairs (Duke of Manchester's).—(O.J.I. photos).



From the Oxford Journal, 1912: the new floor is christened

who could lay the concrete and then add and polish the final few millimetres that form the hard, coloured surface of the court. So, next time you play at MMTC do be generous ... it's not a cheap

process. Certainly well over £100,000 and we can but hope that our floor continues to give satisfaction.

Graham Harding

AT THE FALKLAND PALACE COURT

In February this year I happened to be holidaying at the Landmark Trust's brilliantly bonkers Pineapple building. I realised that in Scottish terms this was not far at all from Falkland Palace Royal Tennis Club and so decided to answer their recent call to go and play bearing a gift from OUTC as part of their 50th anniversary celebrations.

Tennis has been played on the court since 1539 by the Kings and as it turns out Queens of Scotland (apparently Mary of Guise liked to play in her breeches).

I found this all out the day before on a tour of Stirling Castle, so it was quite surreal to actually be on court the next day. Unique in that it has no roof, in between the snowy showers I found myself playing the most enjoyable game against James Lindsay (whose son Archie is currently at Brookes and playing with us too). I failed to get the ball through one of the lune opening (which wins you the game) but was delighted to hit the ais 3x which wins you the point! I left them with a framed print of our court to be displayed in their new visitor area which is being created by Historic Scotland.



Charlotte with James Lindsay on the Falkland Palace Court

I would like to say a huge thank you to James and the club for going out of their way to let me play and being so hospitable with it.

Charlotte Harris

For more on the Falkland Court see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Falkland_Palace_Royal_Tennis_Court.

NATIONAL EVENTS

National Parent and Child Handicap Doubles 2025

The National Parent and Child Handicap Doubles was won this year by Marty and Edward Burns – honour to both OUTC and Radley!



*Edward (left) and Marty with their trophy
(and an OUTC shirt!)*

2025 CLUB EVENTS

Xmas doubles



*Winners Roger Nathan (left) and William Rowsell in the
Clubroom with their trophy – note the faithful OUTC
Christmas tree in the background*

The ever-popular Christmas doubles had a slight change of format this year, with a winning pair as opposed to a single winner.

The top 4 players from the group of 12 qualified for a doubles final to 6. Roger Nathan and William Rowsell were overall winners, beating Ian Barry and Danny Dawson 6/2.

Over-60s tournament

The over 60's semi-finals and final took place at the end of January, two months after the tournament had started! After a postponement due to a sweating court in November, the semi-finalists finally managed to find a date which all could do.

Willy Alden and Howard Cox beat Marty Burn and Peter Anderson 6/4 in the final.



*Over 60's Doubles winners Willie Alden (left)
and Howard Cox*

Grant Bates Trophy

This year's Grant Bates Trophy (the club handicap doubles) was held on 11th/12th Jan 2025.

The results was a triumph for the strong student pairing of Mary Strevens and Alex Soloyev who

overcame last year's winners, Anisha Charania and Tim Ault in the final, beating them 6/2.

A big thanks goes to Scott McGlashan for providing prizes this year. Scott was a close friend of Grant's. Thanks also to Alden's for a fabulous lunch.



Grant Bates Trophy winners Alex Solovyev (left) and Mary Strevens. In the background are Scott McGlashan and Neil Mortensen

Strutt & Parker Final – 12th March 2025

Congratulations go this year to Matthew Dick who captained his student team ('Dicks Nicks!') to victory over Danny Dawson's team, 'No Need to Boast'.



Dick's Nicks team on finals night. Left to right: Tom Hilditch, Archie Sprott, Alfie Backhouse and Matthew Dick

It was a great final and though the score finished 5/1 to Dicks Nicks, four of the matches were won by just one game so it really could have gone either way.



Sponsor Nick Hextall presenting Mathew of 'Dick's Nicks' with the Strutt & Parker Trophy

Many thanks go to Nick Hextall who supported and presented prizes on the night. He arranged the sponsorship with Strutt & Parker and we are so grateful to them for their continuing support of this very popular event.

Wroth / Craig Cup

A slightly different format for the Wroth Cup this year saw the tournament split into two separate events. The main draw was the Wroth Cup played for by the two top seeds while the other teams played off for the Craig Cup. This was won by Sam Lowden and Katie Leppard who beat Marty Burn and Alex Thomson 6/4 6/5.



Craig Cup winners – Katie Leppard and Sam Lowden



Wroth Cup winners Benedict Yorston (left) and Chris Lintott

The Wroth Cup itself was won by top seeds Benedict Yorston and Chris Lintott who took on the competitive partnership of Alfie Backhouse and Mark Crowley and won a tightly contested match 6/0 6/4.

Cuppers

Cuppers was a great event which saw students battling it out in pairs for the title. The first semi-



Cuppers Finalists left to right: Alex Williams, Tom Hilditch, Eleanor Bogie and Francesca Dakin

final saw last year's Women's varsity captain Grace Beglan and partner Chris Sneddon representing Merton, take on newcomers Eleanor Bogie and Francesca Dakin, also from Merton, and Somerville respectively.

Bogie and Dakin found their stride, and used the handicap difference to its fullest, taking the game 8/4 after a close start to the match.

The second semi-final saw Tom Hilditch and Alex Williams (Christchurch) take on Rob Brettle and Harry Edmondson (New College). Tom and Alex's training in the weeks leading up paid off and they also won a strong 8/4, securing their final.

Limited once more with a banned tambour and only one serve, Tom and Alex were consistent and punished what they could, but a few shots into the dedans or good serves at the right time from Eleanor and Francesca was enough to secure their Cuppers title 8/5, meaning Merton and Somerville jointly won Cuppers, with use of two new additions to the real tennis roster.



Cuppers Winners with the cup. Francesca Dakin (left) and Eleanor Bogie

Beard Cup

The Beard cup final was a match between Mark Crowley, and Will Rowsell. Mark found his rhythm after a strong start from Will and clawed it back to 6/7, before Will was able to grab the next two

games to finish the match 6/9. A fantastic performance by both players, especially Will who just seemed to play better and better throughout.



Runner up Mark Crowley (left) and winner William Rowsell (centre) being congratulated by sponsor Mark Beard

Pamela Wallis Trophy

The Pamela Wallis cup final was Sam Lowden, our strongest newcomer, who has improved rapidly vs Jeremy Perkins, a similarly quickly improving new member. Jeremy kept pressure on Sam with the large handicap in his favour, never giving Sam an easy put away, forcing him to work for every point. A strong performance from Jeremy to win 9/2.



Pamela Wallis Trophy winner John Perkins (left) with runner up Sam Lowden

Town v Gown

Gown on left, Town on right

Valerie Shen v Tim Beechey-Newman: 6/1 6/2

Carli Cooperstein v Harriet Branford-White: 2/6 5/6



Town vs Gown. Winning Gown team left to right: Alex Williams, Tom Hilditch, Grace Beglan, Leon Kashdan-Brown and Charlie Burrows. Not pictured: Carli Cooperstein and Valerie Shen

Alex Williams v Anisha Charania: 6/4 1/6 6/5

Charlie Burrows v Mary Joyner: 6/2 6/5

Leon Kashdan-Brown v Will Rowsell: 6/5 6/4

Tom Hilditch and Grace Beglan v Chris Peri &

Derek Williams: 6/4 6/1

Town v Gown was a fantastic day, with a full dedans for the majority of the day, with 6 matches on the docket. The first two matches went one apiece, with the Gown securing the first match with a strong scoreline, though a close match with lots of rallies, and the Town winning the second, with both players improving more and more as the game went on.

Unfortunately for the town, the students geared up, and went on to take the next 4 matches, despite fierce opposition, putting up strong fights in each match. Overall score ended up 5/1 to the Gown, and hopefully the students will continue to play and improve more and more.

Aberdare Cup Final

The final of the season-long Aberdare Cup was played on 12 June with a match between Ewan Smith and Rafael Perera.

Despite the handicap difference of 30 – owe 40 in Ewan's favour, Rafael put in a stunning performance of consistency, barely making any racket errors over the entire match, despite the pressure coming from the other side of the net.



*Rafa Perera receiving the Aberdare cup from Nick Jamieson
(with apologies for the poor picture quality)*

Rafael took the match 9/6 in the end, with a great performance from both sides. A very good example of how to play the big handicap difference games, and it certainly wasn't made easy for him by Ewan. It was fantastic match to watch (and mark). Well played to both!

Broadbent Cup

The Broadbent Cup saw 20 members fighting it out over the weekend of 3-4 May, neatly coinciding with the start of our new pro, Nick.

With some close groups and strong matches to start the Sunday, the players were whittled down to the final four, newcomer Phillip Awadalla taking on Derek Williams, and student Alex Williams taking on another strong newcomer Sam Lowden.

Phillip had had a very good run through his group stage, only dropping 7 games over 3 matches, and looked to be on good form having taken on Chris Lintott the round before – the highest handicap difference in the tournament. He continued his streak with a 6/3 win against Derek, staying in rallies long enough and dealing with the faster balls being sent over the net by Derek.

Sam and Alex's match was fought to the bitter end, Alex just taking the match 6/5, after having to come back from a deficit against his opponent. Both players ripped in railroads and looked dangerous from the server's end, with Alex coming out on top after a tough match.

Now to the final, Phillip showed again his consistency, and ability to retrieve tough balls, making it hard for Alex to find enough ways to put the ball away. With Phillips's lead increasing, Alex moved away from the trusty railroad which had served(!) him so well throughout the tournament, and found a good demi-pique serve that was starting to give Phillip some trouble. Coming back from 5/3 down and bringing it back to 5/5, the last game proved to be the hardest to win, and Phillip crossed the line with some long restes ending up in his favour. Final result 6/5 to Phillip.

Congratulations to all involved, it was a fantastic weekend and a great introduction to the club for new pro Nick, and a great turnout for the final few matches.



Broadbent Cup winner Phillip Awadalla (centre) flanked by runner up Alex Williams and Neil Mortensen



Newcomers (from left to right): Ian Groom, Elenor Bogie, Mike Carter (winner), Phil Awadalla, Phill Biggins. Not pictured - Christopher Metcalf

Newcomers' tournament

On 21 June, all the new members we have collected over the last 12 months took to the court for a 'newcomers' tournament. In a doubles league format, six players played a mixture of matches against one another. Results were tight and three players tied for first place. The final result was decided on games difference – and Mike Carter came out the winner. Well done, Mike!

And enjoy the bottle of Mark Savage's wine. Thanks Mark. Great fun was had by all – and welcome to the Club!

Howden summer league finals

The Howden summer league finals consisted of only one final on the night. With Julian Knight beating Ewan Smith 8/6 earlier in the year, Alexandra Solovyev played Chris Morton in the other final and Alex didn't look like ever losing. Winning the match convincingly 8/1. Many thanks once again go to Howden for their support of the tournament.

OUTC Golf tournament

Fine weather and a well-maintained North Oxford course meant for a pleasant afternoon's golf for ten participants for the Club's golf tournament on 31st March. We welcomed new member Ian Groom playing off 14 handicap. After taking a while to get used to the course he scored an excellent 20 points on the back nine and was only 1 point away from winning at the 1st attempt. Nearest the pin on the 11th was Craig.

The other prize winners were:

- 4th John Stevens [20] – 32 pts
- 3rd Richard Oliver [11] – 35 pts
- 2nd Ian Groom [14] – 36 pts
- 1st Alan Oliver [21] – 37 pts.

We're hoping to have an autumn challenge in September so if you're interested do let the Pros know.



Howdens Summer League winners Alex Solovyev (centre) and Julian Knight (right) with committee member Ian Barry (left)



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