



# Radley College Tennis Court

## April 2020

'Half a Yard' - The Club Newsletter

### The Second Week of Shutdown

The Third Newsletter of 2020 -

Amidst the much more serious news that surrounds us, we hope that this newsletter will provide some lighter relief.

RCTC shutdown on 22 March. It is now two weeks (and counting!) since then. The latest development is that the Pros have now been 'furloughed' and so are not able to do any work at the court, which remains closed until further notice.

We want to keep you in touch with the club, with some of the goings on in the wider world of tennis and to provide a bit of tennis-related entertainment.

We will let our members know as soon as Radley re-opens. In the meantime, the only play on court is on film.

In recognition of the 100<sup>th</sup> Edition of the IRTO USCTA publication, *Chase the First*, Camden Riviere was asked by his national association to record a special edition of his YouTube channel, 'Cam's Corner'.

Camden made his video during his most recent visit to Radley and the link below takes you to his conversation with CJR on court, talking mainly about serving. The soundtrack is not perfect, I'm afraid, but it is possible to make it out.

You will see that it starts with what now seems quite extraordinary, a simple handshake. How times have changed...

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ELaVZQ\\_YTbc&list=PLzAa4D2Mp3qDyJrPnFQq\\_mOZi63AToebT&index=2&t=0s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ELaVZQ_YTbc&list=PLzAa4D2Mp3qDyJrPnFQq_mOZi63AToebT&index=2&t=0s).

### Radley College Tennis Court

CJR started work on 7 April 2008 as Head Pro at Radley. No play on the court is a sad way for to him celebrate his twelfth year at RCTC, but there is a similarity. No play was possible then either but the reason was very different.

When Chris arrived at Radley, the court was still under construction. Completion was two months away, so he spent that period setting systems up, making balls, signing up members and attracting new players. Things were able to kick off quickly when the court opened, and the rest is history!

### Professional and Management Team (and an uninvited guest)

CJR, Maggie and Nino remain at home locally and are keeping in touch with Levi, who is back at his family home in Dorset.

There seems to be considerable concern amongst our body of members about the health and well-being of The Service End Spider. While its diet remains shrouded in mystery, its good health was due to be a matter of photographic record, but the photo shoot had not taken place when the court was closed to all.

One of our members (naturally, as we seems to have in our ranks players with more than average knowledge on every conceivable subject), has explained that even a normal 'house-spider' can go for prodigious lengths of time without eating (more than a year, apparently). While this might explain the Radley spider's survival, it may also mean that it will be insatiably hungry by the time play resumes, so watch out!

The arachnid will be the only one who will appreciate the lack of play, as the vibrations must have shaken his/her web like a hurricane.

### **Club Members - Home and Away**

**Gotcha!** – CJR sent a message to all members on the morning of **1 April**, announcing an increase of two points to every player's handicap, unless mitigating evidence could be produced.

The length of some of the replies he received, and the detailed and compelling accounts of exercise regimes were persuasive - and highly gratifying.

The April Fool was revealed after Noon and so everyone has been deprived!

**Chasing the Courts** - Most real tennis players have a wish to play on all the courts that remain open in the world. Now that they are not able to play any tennis at all, Chris and Maggie, always keen travelers, thought they would realise some dreams and travel, virtually, to all the courts in the world, using no planes, trains or automobiles, of course.

Lucky enough to have a rowing machine and spin bike at home, we thought it would be fun (?!?) to start off by 'rowing' to each of the courts in the UK. Pretty rapidly, CJR and MH-T realised that they had bitten off more than they could comfortably chew and so contacted a few members whom they knew also had rowing machines.

What started as a fitness regime for CJR and MH-T has morphed into something bigger and there are more than a dozen members taking part and putting their backs into the collective effort. Qualifying distance can be clocked up not only by rowing but also by walking, running or cycling.

We started in Merton Street, at the Oxford court, and sculled down the road (yes, we are taking the shortest route by road between each court) to Radley.

In the ten days since the challenge began, we have visited all 16 courts in the South East cluster and now have longer distances to cross to get down to

Hampshire and Dorset and then up to Bristol the Midlands and the North.

One thing may well lead to another and, once all the UK courts have been visited, our ambitions could expand to include Europe, Australia and the US. The prospect of trying to row across the Atlantic and, gulp, the Pacific, is daunting, even with a dozen in the same boat. If you would like to join the international endeavour, please let Maggie know (maggie.ht@btinternet.com), and she can pull you on board at the appropriate time.

Even if we manage to achieve this considerable target, it need not be an end to the challenges. What about visiting all those courts that still stand, but are no longer 'in play' throughout Europe, and, beyond that, what about all those places that we know were courts but are now used for other purposes; the theatres, lecture halls, gyms and museums? It could go on for years... The Challenge, that is, and not, we fervently hope, this coronavirus crisis.

### **World Champion in print -**

In case you missed it, here is an article that appeared on Fri 3 Apr 2020 in *The Guardian* about Rob Fahey:

#### **Experience: I'm a 13-time world champion at real tennis**

'I'm 51, my ankles are wrecked and I'm in pain for weeks after a tournament.'



Rob Fahey: 'Courts and rackets are asymmetrical, and serving is done on to a sloping roof.'  
Photograph: Amit Lennon/The Guardian

At 17, I was thinking of going to university to study economics when I saw an advert in my local paper looking for someone to help run the real tennis club in Hobart, Tasmania. I didn't know much about real tennis, which has been played since the 16th century but is very different from tennis. The advert specified someone with good racket skills, and as I'd been playing modern lawn tennis since I was nine, and was the No 1 tennis junior in the state, I couldn't resist.

Real tennis is the game from which racket sports evolved but requires different skills from lawn tennis. Courts and rackets are asymmetrical and the balls are cork, so are heavier and less bouncy. Serving is done on to a sloping roof and the scoring system can seem complicated to newcomers. There was a lot to learn, but absorbing the rules and physics was part of the appeal. My job involved tasks such as stocking the fridge, but the club also wanted someone who could learn the role of a professional, play against members and eventually coach. The more mundane aspects faded into the background as my game improved.

By my early 20s, I was playing real tennis internationally, although there are fewer than 50 courts in the world, with most in the UK. It can be tough maintaining a career in a game that isn't widely known: the prize money is respectable, but even the top players have other jobs. I've needed to carry on winning in order to keep things rolling financially.

Early on, my greatest rival was New Yorker, Wayne Davies. We met in the World Championship final in 1994. We played two 13-set matches, the first in Tasmania, which I won quite comfortably. The second, on Wayne's home turf, was a different matter. The crowds are not huge, but they're at close quarters. Having 250 New Yorkers screaming me down was the most intense situation I'd experienced during my career, but I scraped through and became world champion for the first time.

I was euphoric at reaching the top, of course, but also well-aware I couldn't rest easy if I wanted to stay there. I was 25 and could rely, to some extent, on my athleticism. I continued to win successive

world championships but had to focus on strategy as I entered my 30s and 40s.

Given the relative obscurity of the game, you can't depend on a full house for every match. During one US Open, I played a Wednesday afternoon fixture in front of an audience of one – the other player's girlfriend. Inevitably, she was pretty biased, but I managed to win the match.

I met my wife Claire at a real tennis event – she was a highly regarded up-and-coming player and has been the women's world champion for nine years. It's good to have someone in the family who shares my passion for the game – other relatives turn up to matches, but I don't think they'll ever fully grasp the rules. If someone asks me what I do I often say I'm a photographer rather than spend the next four hours trying to explain it.

One of my favourite matches was at Hampton Court against Tim Chisholm in 2002. It was thrilling to face him at Henry VIII's court – Henry was a real tennis enthusiast. That game went down to the wire, we were playing the best of 13 sets and ended up at six-all on day three. By that stage, we were physically and mentally battered; I won, but I don't remember a single shot.

The real tennis world championship takes place every other year and I'll compete for the last time next month. I've been world champion 13 times; it would be great to make it to 14 before bowing out, but either way, this is the right time. I'm 51, and though I'm better at the game than I was in 1994, I've obviously lost most of the athleticism that goes with being 25. My knees aren't too bad, but my ankles are wrecked – I'm in pain for weeks after a tournament.

I'd rather spend more of my time coaching new players and promoting the game (I'd love to see it offered by more schools) and to create a glass show court that could tour the world. Claire and I have a young family and run the Prested Hall Real Tennis Club in Essex. I'll always be involved in the sport, but I don't want to be one of those guys who pops his clogs on court in his 90s.'

Interview with Rob Fahey

During these special editions of the club newsletter, CJR will write various pieces about the game. What follows is his portrait of one of the great male champions of the past, Edmond Barre of France.

*'In my opinion, the best real tennis player of all time is Rob Fahey; and it is quite likely that the next two in quality would be the current performers, Tim Chisholm and Camden Riviere. Certainly, no contestant from the last fifty years could have defeated Rob at his best.*

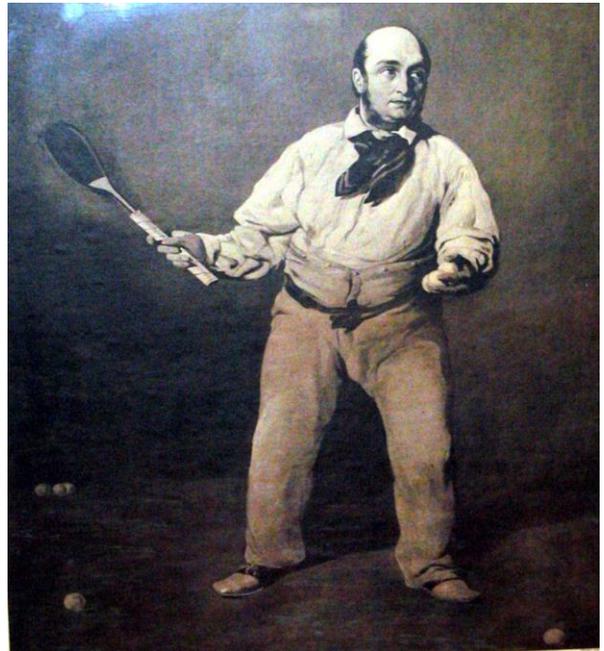
*From the period before 1970 it is more difficult to make comparisons, because of the changing generations and the way the equipment has developed. In particular, the modern racquet frames and synthetic strings allow players to hit the balls at much higher speeds than formerly, to the detriment of the classic cut floor shots and the enhancement of forcing.*

*Candidates from other eras who might have challenged Rob Fahey include Edmond Barre (World Champion 1829-62), Peter Latham (1895-1905 and 1907-08) who was also rackets champion, Jay Gould, the great US amateur (1914-16) and Pierre Etchebaster (1928-54).*

*The longest reign of all, at 33 years, was that of Barre. Accounts of his style of play emphasise precision and control, with little forcing, although one should point out that in his era racquets were strung by looping the cross strings around the mains. Interweaving the strings, which began in the 1860s, greatly increased the tension.*

*However, Barre was famous for his stamina. On one occasion he walked from Paris to Fontainebleau, a distance of nearly 40 miles, rested for an hour, defeated his aristocratic opponent and walked home the next day. More colourfully, it was said that when negotiating fees for a tour of exhibitions in England, he asked for; 'eight pounds per week and two wenches per day'.*

[It is not recorded whether his terms were met, but one hopes not. Ed.]



*His most famous match was the one in which he lost his World Championship in 1862 to Edmund Tompkins, some twenty-three years his junior. Here, aged sixty, his stamina finally failed him after four hard days of play.*

*In those times, if the score stood frequently at 'games-all' (presumably 3-all, 4-all and 5-all but this is not recorded) then the set was deemed a draw and, after two weeks with the score standing at six sets to four in favour of Tompkins, with four sets drawn, Edmond Barre conceded and his era came to a close.'*

The most authoritative work on past champions is 'The First & the Foremost' by Kathryn McNicoll (Ronaldson Publications 2010).

...and, finally

Thank you to all those members who have written with messages of support and offers of help for the Pro team. These are much appreciated.

Stay well! Stay fit! Stay apart! Stay cheerful!

*This Newsletter, the third one of 2020, was compiled by Maggie Henderson-Tew*