

# Radley College Tennis Court

20 April 2020

'Half a Yard' - The Club Newsletter

## The Fourth Week of Shutdown

RCTC shutdown on 22 March, but we are sure you don't want to be reminded of that date. Radley College re-opened immediately after the Easter weekend and has begun a very different sort of Trinity Term on 14 April, with no boys in residence and the whole curriculum being delivered online.

We will continue to give you updates on the tennis club, bring news from the wider world of the game and to provide a bit of tennis-related entertainment. There is no early prospect of the tennis court re-opening, but we will let you know as soon as the College will allow us to welcome you back.

## Tennis on the Internet –

In the meantime, the only play on court is on film. Camden Riviere has continued to produce a series of YouTube videos, 'Cam's Coronavirus Catch-ups', in which he speaks to various Pros. These conversations, and some of his other playing-tip videos, can be viewed on YouTube.



Camden Riviere, with training partner and superb retriever of the ball, Gus.

Do have a look at the following clip for some good advice about defending the grille in doubles:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LGZ2lpH-JJA>

If you have an odd six hours and five minutes to spare, you could do a lot worse than spending it looking at the coverage of the first day's play from most recent Men's World Championship Challenge, held at Queen's Club in 2018. The four sets did not last that long, of course. Chris and Ben Ronaldson are commentating and there is some magnificent tennis:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nwuJaj\\_GQV0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nwuJaj_GQV0)

The re-match was supposed to be starting this week at Prested, but now we will have to wait until October before Camden challenges for the title.

## Tennis in Print –

In the last issue, we re-printed an interview with Rob Fahey that appeared in *The Guardian*. The following day, on 4 April, he was in *The Times*:

## Great unknown is a real sports champ

Jonathan Paige

He is one of the world's most successful sportsmen yet virtually no one has heard of him. Now Rob Fahey is preparing to retire after one more shot at the world championships.

Fahey, 51, has dominated the world of real tennis for more than 25 years, with some fans of the sport considering him to be the greatest of the great. He has played more than 1,000 competitive matches, held the world number one spot for more than 1,000 consecutive weeks and has a win rate of 90 per cent. Real tennis is seen as the father of all racket sports and was first played more than 800 years ago. It is said to have been Henry VIII's favourite sport.

The game combines elements of squash — the wall can be used — and traditional lawn tennis with some extra

rules. Fahey will retire after one more title shot at the world championships, which were due to be held later this month but have now been postponed.

Success in the sport runs in the Fahey family. His wife, Claire, is the women's real tennis world champion, a title she has held since 2011.

Her husband has scored 51 open singles titles and 50 open doubles titles from Australia, Britain, France and the US, as well as 13 world championships, the latest just before his 50th birthday. He may, despite his success, be little known outside the sport, but after retiring he hopes to encourage more young people to take up the game and wants that to be his legacy.

Fahey plans to start an academy programme open to thousands of young athletes, with a scholarship for the most promising beginner. Despite dating

back centuries, real tennis is at risk of disappearing owing to a lack of awareness of the sport, investment and interest among young people.

Fahey said: "My goal is to ensure this great game lives on for at least another 800 years. I want to introduce real tennis to a new, youthful audience and discover the next world champion."

"There are currently just 50 real tennis courts worldwide and 12,000 registered club players. It tends to be a sport for the wealthy but I feel passionately that if more people tried the game, they would love it."

Fahey is now looking for backers to build the first mobile glass court, which he says will tour the United Kingdom in a campaign to make real tennis more accessible and bring the game to those who may otherwise never get the chance to experience it.

**Radley College Tennis Court**

## Chasing the Courts –

CJR and Maggie have continued in their quest to play on all the courts that remain open in the world.

Having corralled a group of Radley and Oxford members into a travelling team, they have now completed their tour of 25 UK clubs and 28 courts over 19 days, starting on 28 March.

They started at the Oxford court and finished at Falkland Palace. During the complete tour, the squad together covered 1.4 million metres.

Admittedly, this total has been achieved using some fairly arbitrary calculations to level up some of the differences between walking, running, cycling and rowing in reality or on a machine.

More science is being applied the Phase Two (the overseas bit) of the Challenge, as greater accuracy is needed, along with far greater numbers of metres each day. No more under-reporting!

Maggie has produced a daily update for the squad on the previous day's exertions, which has included a lot of stats, a fair number of photos, a good deal of history and more than a sprinkling of tennis lore and legend.

From Wednesday 15 April, the challenge increased significantly in magnitude, and expanded commercially. To get the team overseas, and, as we were lacking a convenient means of travel from Scotland to Holland, we have created our own fit-and-designed-for-purpose ferry company, The Royal Real Court Tennis Ferry Company, trading as 'R2CT Ferries'.

From this point, qualifying distance can now be clocked up each day on an actual metre-travelled basis, but still by whatever means each 'player' prefers; rowing, walking, running or cycling. If you want to get involved, please let Maggie know.

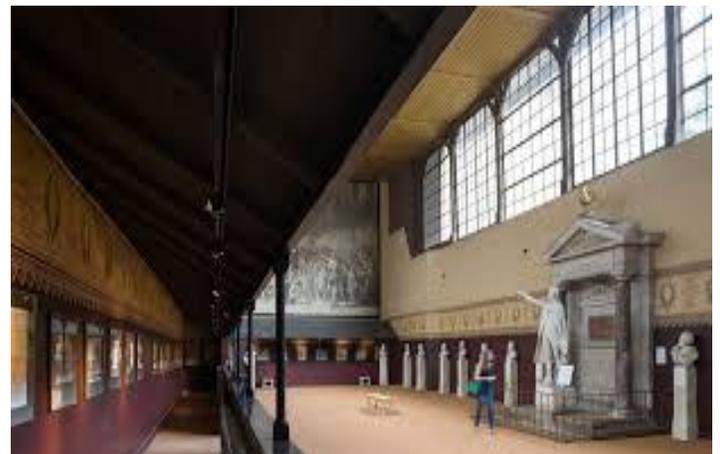
## The Hague -

We will visit our friends from the Dutch Real Tennis Association and admire the wooden-clad court they

hope to build at the Houtrust Lawn Tennis Club in The Hague.



From Holland, we will be pressing on to the French courts in Paris, [Versailles R.I.P.], Fontainebleau, Chinon (under renovation), Bordeaux, Pau and the Trois Tripots trinet courts of La Bastide Clairence, Bayonne and Biarritz.



The tennis court at Versailles, with the painting by David of the swearing of the Tennis Court Oath on the Hazard end wall.

From a convenient finishing point on the SW coast of France, we will strike out across the Atlantic to visit all the courts in the US. Again, as this is an unconventional point for starting a crossing The Pond, we will be calling up one of the vessels from the ocean-going fleet of the R2CT Ferry Company, or will decide to inaugurate an air fleet instead.

Being optimists and wanting to start playing as soon as we reach the US, we are aiming for Charleston. Although the court there has not yet been built, nor

ground yet broken, there are impressive architect's drawings of how it should look from the outside and how laid out on the inside, which were uploaded onto the website in April 2019:

.,<http://charlestoncourttennis.com/>.

We will finish our tour of the US at the court that is farthest west, in Chicago. Then we will have to rely on some astounding athletic performance (or perhaps sleight of hand, magic or air travel) to get from The Windy City to San Francisco, from where we will begin our long, long journey to Australia.

In late September, Chris and Maggie are hoping to visit the site of the proposed new court in Sydney, which will be at a lawn tennis and croquet club in the suburb of Cheltenham. Of course, this plan may be scuppered if the current lockdown and travel restrictions continue.

However, this virtual tour of the courts in Australia will continue regardless, which will mean that they can be guaranteed a visit, and earlier than September, if (and this is a big 'if'), the team can manage the daunting number of metres involved in crossing the Atlantic and, gulp, the Pacific.

Nino and Levi have been far too sensible to get involved in this madness so far, but Levi has now jumped on board for the overseas part of the challenge.

### **Real Tennis Playlist –**

To accompany whatever sort of exercise you are doing while not on court, you might like to listen to a real tennis playlist. Some of the puns are quite dreadful (and some of the tracks are pretty dire too) but if you have any more ideas to contribute, please send your suggestions to Maggie.

The Lockdown Playlist currently comprises:

Senior Service (Elvis Costello)  
Secret Service (Kansas)  
Service With A Smile (Backman-Turner Overdrive)  
Hazard (Marx);  
Hit Me With Your Best Shot (Benetar);  
Hey Man, Nice Shot (Filter);  
Diminishing Returns (Harvey Danger);

Return to Sender (Presley);  
Strung Out for your Love (Four Tops);  
Love Hurts (Nazareth);  
It Must be Love (Madness);  
Deuce (Kiss);  
Wrecking Ball (Springsteen);  
A Cut Above The Rest (Watts);  
Cut To The Chase (Rush);  
Spin My Head Right Round (Flo Rida);  
The Chase (Family);  
Full Force Gale (Van Morrison, and probably written for LEVI!);  
Walk The Line (Cash);  
Don't Get Caught In The Net (The Wonder Kids);  
Penthouse Red (Lanez);  
Dead on Arrival (Fallout Boy);  
Dead and Gone (Timberlake);  
Mr Tambourine Man (Dylan);  
When I first Saw Your Gallery (Mitchell);  
Let's Go Down to The Sunset Grill (Henley);  
Working on The Railroad (Notting Hillbillies);  
Twist and Shout (The Beatles)  
Let's Twist Again (Chubby Checker)  
My Boomerang Won't Come Back (Drake);  
The Caterpillar (The Cure);  
The Running Dog (Irish Folk Song);  
(What a Drag It Is Getting Old) Mother's Little Helper (Rolling Stones);

and the last, at last,

The Final Cut (Pink Floyd).

This list was created with considerable help from Jamie Henderson-Gibb and CJR.

### **Another Great Past Champion of the Game -**

During these special 'Shutdown' editions of the club newsletter, CJR will write various pieces about the game. This week, he has written about Peter Latham, one of the greatest male champions of the past.

*'When discussions take place about the best player of all time, the name of Peter Latham (1865-1953) always comes up. He was undoubtedly the leading exponent during the period which is widely held to be the 'golden age' of tennis; from the closing years of the nineteenth century through the first decade of the twentieth.*

*E.B. Noel and J. O. M. Clark, those exemplary historians of the game, wrote of Latham in the most extravagant terms in A History of Tennis (OUP; 1924, Volume 1, p104-116, from which quotations are taken in this article)*

*“[Charles] Saunders...five years later had to bow the knee to perhaps the greatest tennis player, and certainly the most astonishing ball game player the world has produced or is likely to produce. Needless to say that this was Peter W. Latham.”*

*The reference above is to the Championship match played in 1895 at the Prince’s Club in Brighton. or the preceding seven years, Latham had learned the game from scratch when he moved to the Queen’s Club. Latham’s working life began at the Manchester Racquets Club from the age of eleven, yes, eleven. His father died prematurely and young Peter needed to earn a living. At that time, the Manchester club had not yet built its tennis court and so his exposure was at first to rackets only.*

*By 1887, when he had reached the age of twenty-two, Latham was World Champion at Rackets, a title he held for the next fifteen years, until he retired from that game.*

*Moving down to London, to the newly-opened Queen’s Club in 1888, and continuing to dominate rackets, he set about improving his tennis game, acquiring the correct skills, augmenting his heavy cut strokes with the powerful boasts from his rackets game. Noel and Clark wrote of his: ‘instinctive knowledge, as well as the marvellous physical endowments for ball games,..he superimposed all the value of his unrivalled quickness and skill at rackets, and the result was perhaps a return that has never yet been equalled, coupled with a powerful attack and resource in defence, whose strength had to be seen to be believed.’*

*Just seven years later, he defeated Charles Saunders by 7 sets to 2, in the very first all-British Challenge, thus becoming the first man to hold the World Championship in both rackets and tennis simultaneously.*



*As all incumbents of the World Championship were professionals, they would only agree to a defence if all the terms, not just the financial ones, were suitable. Until 1959, the title of World Champion was owned by the holder and in Latham’s day there were no established rules for a challenge match.*

*There was often some wrangling over the venue or whether to use French, English or American balls, but, above all, there had to be enough money on offer.*

*In practice, this meant that a challenger had to find a backer; someone who was prepared to put up a ‘purse’. Sometimes the match was effectively a wager between two wealthy amateurs, a “my man can beat your man” affair, with amounts as large as £2000 changing hands. This is about a quarter of a million pounds in present value.*

*In 1905, Latham, now aged forty, and having left Queen’s to work for Sir Charles Rose, first at Hardwick and then at Newmarket, where he had not had strong practice partners, lost his World Championship Challenge to Cecil ‘Punch’ Fairs. This defeat “was the only one in his twenty years of championship play at rackets and tennis and was a blow to his admirers who had regarded this marvellous player as almost invincible”, wrote Noel and Clark about this match.*

*Impressively, two years later Latham became the first man to win back the title, when he successfully challenged 'Punch' for the title, again in Brighton, when the younger man was regarded as being at his peak. The match, it was said: "produced possibly the finest play seen in a match of modern days" and "few more brilliant rests than some played, have ever been seen." Intriguingly, the match was refereed by the American amateur, Jay Gould, who would become the first amateur to compete in the Championship, which he won at his first attempt in 1914, seven years later.*

*In 1908, a year after regaining his crown, Latham resigned as Champion, "with his honours still thick about him and an unequalled record", although he continued to play well into his fifties. His reason(s) for abdicating are unclear but presumably related in no small part to his age and that, having won back the title, he had nothing left to prove.*

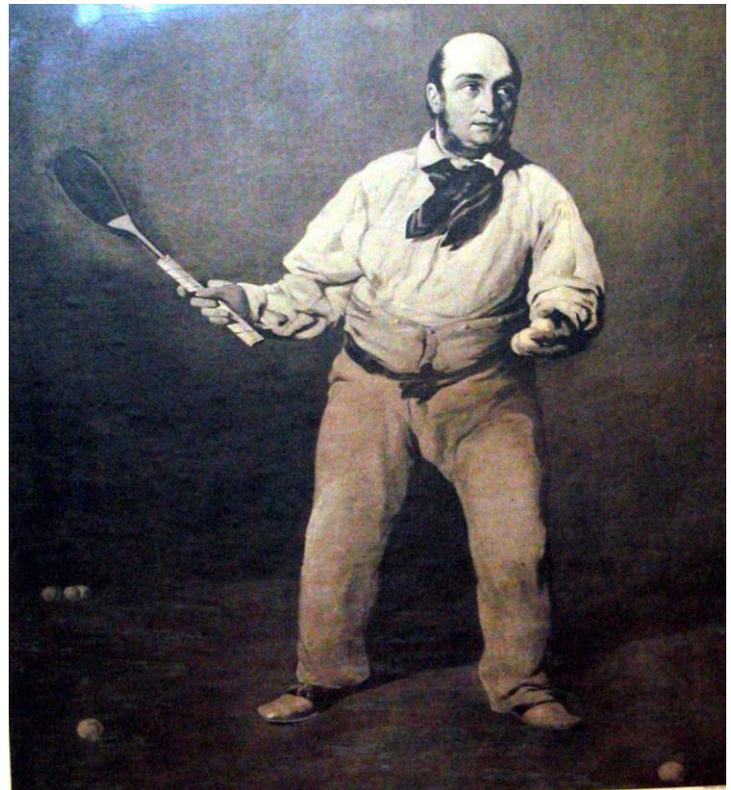
*Although he was always known as a courteous and popular player, his reputation was probably enhanced by the sense of longing for 'the good old days' that many in Britain felt after the Great War.*

*Once again, I am indebted to Kathryn McNicoll for her authoritative work on the World Champions: The First and the Foremost (Ronaldson, 2010).'*

In the previous newsletter, CJR wrote about Edmond Barre, from the generator of players before Latham, whose portrait was reproduced then and is, again, below. His appearance is, it is fair to say, not exactly that of an outstanding athlete, at least not in this rendering of him in later life. It seems fair to balance this impression with some well-informed assessment, from no lesser authority than the great Julian Marshall, who wrote in his seminal work, *The Annals of Tennis* (1878, p205):

*'Those who remember Barre in his later days will call to mind the picture of a large unwieldy man, who could not run, but could still play on even terms with the best and most active players of the time.*

*His judgement, experience, and knowledge of the combinations of the game, were more valuable than mere activity or strength, though he had an uncommon share of muscular power.'*



Edmond Barre, of France, World Champion from 1829-1862

Never under-estimate the older player and be very cautious of judging by appearances. Good advice then and now!

### STOP PRESS!

Radley College has just informed RCTC that the taking of direct debits for the second quarter's membership fees will be deferred.

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

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