

# Radley College Tennis Court

5 June 2020

'Half a Yard' - The Club Newsletter

## The Eleventh Week of the Shutdown

Greetings, equally tennis-starved members. The team at RCTC hopes that you and your family are well and managing to make the best of these very strange times.

As you know, all too well, there has been no play on the tennis court at Radley since 22 March. It has been an age since then. However, down in Dorset, the Pros, Jez and Stephen, have been busy...

<https://www.facebook.com/hyderealtennis/videos/263857294808228/>. Any resemblance to living persons is deliberate and completely intentional!

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=229015378552233>

The Government continue to announce further easing of some constraints. We hope you have been able to make the most of the opportunity to meeting up to six people outside, with two metres distance being maintained at all times.

The National Tennis Club in Newport, Rhode Island, re-opened on 1 June and we understand that Prince's Club in Washington may follow in early July. We are not aware of the imminent opening of any UK club.

On 28 May the T&RA sent an email to all its members, with an update on the big picture; summarising recent actions and the conversations it has had with those bodies who will determine when real tennis can be played again. This email stated: 'You should also be aware that Clubs and Schools will open in accordance with their own assessments and they almost certainly will not all open at the same time.'



James Male, Old Radleian, British Open Tennis Champion in 1999 and World Rackets Champion from 1988-99 & 2001-05, demonstrating (some time ago) approved Covid-19 glove technique

On 4 June, another message came from the T&RA, about plans for a return to play. 'Project Restart' (actually sub-committees for Real Tennis and Rackets) is preparing risk assessment and Play Safe guidelines. These are not ready for release yet, but they will shortly be sent to each club, to assist with our own preparations and protocols.

As we said in the most recent Radley Newsletter, real tennis being played again on the Radley court will be entirely dependent upon decisions made by Radley College, determined by a host of factors unrelated to real tennis. We must continue to be patient and understanding of the huge pressures of all kinds on those running schools in these unprecedented times.

In the last Staff Meeting before Radley began its half-term break, the Warden, John Moule, looked ahead and spoke of the hope and expectation that all staff and all boys will be back at the College in September.

He underlined the fact that Radley will follow closely the recommendations and regulations that apply to private and state-maintained English schools.

Radley has re-opened its golf course and playing lawn tennis is now possible between family members.

**In summary, we can give no date for the re-opening of the court yet, but rest assured, we will let you know as soon as the College will allow us to welcome you back, with every necessary precaution to protect the health of members and the Professionals.**

### **Radley College Tennis Court**

Until that happy day when play is again possible, we will continue to bring you news about the tennis club and its members, bits and pieces from the wider world of the game and some tennis-related entertainment.

### **Chasing the Courts – The Challenge**

On 28 March, CJR, Maggie and a determined and energetic group of Radley and Oxford members began their virtual quest to visit all the courts in the world that remain in play (at least they were before Covid-19 struck). By 22 May, we had reached...



In the most recent Newsletter, we told you that the team had completed its (virtual) tour of all the UK, French and Irish courts, and had even visited the site of the proposed court in Holland, at the Houtrust lawn tennis club in The Hague.

To complete our world tour, we moved on across vast oceans to visit all nine courts in the USA and the five in Australia. Along the way across the seas, to relieve the tedium of endless water and the odd seabird, we have been finding out about many of the courts built in the UK since 1800 that are no longer in use; having burned down, fallen down, been taken down, re-purposed in a variety of ways or just left empty.

In total, the team travelled over 50 million metres during the domestic and overseas phases of its journey. The metres have been accumulated by members of the team as they walked, ran, rode and rowed, indoors and outdoors. It has all been about teamwork and not individual performance over the 56 days it took to complete the Challenge – and what a team!

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

All sorts of interesting stories emerged, like the tale of the banjo-playing Hertfordshire court owner 'Lady Val' (see below) of the Belle Epoque, who had been a barmaid and prostitute in Holborn before she married a very rich gentleman, Sir Henry Meux.

Now that overseas holidays seem to be unlikely for a considerable while, a live, real and actual tour of extant and lost courts in the UK might be a possible and most interesting alternative. Inevitably, there may be little or nothing to see in many of the courts that are no more, but there are certainly a lot of site visits to make and we hope that some shreds of evidence may remain that would make the stops worthwhile.

As a taster, here is a bit about a Hertfordshire court you might know nothing about, at Theobalds, near Cheshunt.

### **It is dead; it is no more; it has ceased to be...**

The 'dead' court under scrutiny is the one that was built at Theobalds House, near Cheshunt, in Hertfordshire in 1840, predating the court at Hatfield House, about 12 miles away, by two years (which may amount to an example of aristocratic competitiveness, perhaps?).

The original 15C manor of Theobalds was replaced by Lord Burghley. His son, Robert Cecil, realising that the costs of the upkeep might be beyond even his pocket, and that a handsome gift to the monarch might be advantageous, exchanged the estate in 1607 for Hatfield Palace (which immediately became Hatfield House) with James I. As Theobalds Palace, it became James' favourite country estate, having been, in the Elizabethan period, the most significant country house in the land.

James spent a great deal on expansion and extension, and in July 1624 laid plans that a new tennis court, chapel and bedchamber would be built there in the Spring of 1625. Regrettably, and before construction began, he died at Theobalds at the end of March that year. King Charles I cancelled the construction of the court (and was later beheaded by outraged and disappointed tennis-playing courtiers – no, not really).

In the Civil War, the Parliamentarians demolished the Palace, a potent symbol of monarchy (fascinating survey of the Palace's history and significance, but not about tennis, using this link <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/architectural-history/article/theobalds-hertfordshire-the-plan-and-interiors-of-an-elizabethan-country-house/98DADCAED1922F1A0C71BD2CD75E2FD/C/core-reader>), which was rebuilt, much more modestly, after the Restoration, and eventually came into the ownership of the Meux (brewing) family in 1839.

Henry Meux, who was married to the aunt of Lord Brougham (builder of the court at Eamont Bridge, near Penrith, so there is a nice tennis connection), handed the property on to his son, also Sir Henry, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Baronet, who built the court shortly afterwards at Theobald's. It was said to be in a

wooded area of the estate and lit only by windows in the roof, but further details have proved elusive. He and his son, also Henry, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Baronet, played tennis. The latter Sir Henry scandalised everyone who could be scandalised by marrying a banjo-playing barmaid and prostitute, Susan Langton, known as 'Val Reece' and later as 'Lady Val'.

She was renowned for driving herself around London in a phaeton carriage pulled by a pair of zebras; nothing to do with tennis, obviously, but I had to tell you about the zebras, which pulled her around years and years before Lord Lionel Rothschild, banker, politician and zoologist, drove a coach and his own four trained and matched zebras past Buckingham Palace.



The 3<sup>rd</sup> Baronet, Henry Meux, played on the court and, after he husband had been certified as insane, his wife renovated it, adding side windows to improve the lighting, a swimming pool and an indoor skating rink. but whether she ever played there or not is unknown.

There is a stunning full length portrait of Lady Val by J. M. Whistler, painted in 1881, in the Frick Collection in NY and this is one of a trio of portraits of her that was his first commission after he had been bankrupted by the notorious 'Ruskin trial'. She was quite a woman, it seems, with big ideas and the money to indulge herself. In 1878, she bought one of the old gates into the City of London, Temple Bar, designed by Christopher Wren, and had the 400-ton monumental arch transported at a cost of £10,000 to Theobald's to replace one of the gates to her Park.

I remember wading through brambles to admire it through barbed wire in the mid-1990s when I heard this Scheduled Ancient Monument was still there, although in a perilous state of decay, on the edge of the park. It was returned to the City in 2004 and re-erected next to St Paul's Cathedral.



A tenuous link with tennis is that she 'loaned' one of her horses, the 1901 Derby winner, which she raced under the pseudonym of 'Mr Theobalds', to W. C. Whitney; the very same Whitney who built the court in Aiken the following year.

This peculiar tale gets even more peculiar. Lady Meux donated 6 twelve-pounder guns to the British Army during the Boer War, after her offer of a gunship was refused by the Royal Navy. Afterwards hostilities had ceased, Sir Hedworth Lambton, son of the Earl of Durham and Commander of the Naval Brigade that had lifted the Siege of Ladysmith, decided to go to Theobalds to thank Her Ladyship in person and tell her of his adventures.

They clearly hit it off in a major way and, having been snubbed by the snobbish relations of her husband, she made him chief beneficiary of her estate, including the brewery, providing he changed

his name to Meux. The Deed Poll change was made without delay.

When Sir Hedworth Meux moved into Theobald's in 1910, the tennis court was barely used, although Henry Case, who had been the Marker at Hampton Court, was still there, as he had been from 1885, and he continued as the Professional into the 1920s, with his wife making the tennis balls.



When Sir Hedworth died in 1929, his widow sold the estate, which was used, successively, by the Royal Artillery during WWII, as a riding school by the Metropolitan Police, then was turned into a school, an adult education centre and, finally, became a hotel and conference centre in 1995.

The house is Grade II\* and is now The De Vere Theobalds Hotel. The precise fate of the court through this succession of ownership is uncertain but it is thought to have been demolished about 1975. I have not been able to track down a photo of the court but have added it to the list of places worthy of a field trip to see what remnants can be found.

I owe a debt to John Shneerson's *Tennis Today and Yesterday*, 2015, as well as to a number of websites, including the following one: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Valerie,\\_Lady\\_Meux](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Valerie,_Lady_Meux). Sadly, it contains neither a photo of the court at Theobalds House, nor of her zebras.

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

CJR continues his series of player profiles:

*'My fourth contender for the title of greatest player of all time is Pierre Etchebaster.*

*Born in St. Jean de Luz near the Spanish border in 1893, the young Pierre took to all three traditional Basque ball sports becoming, uniquely, the champion of each. After fighting for France in World War 1 he was, in 1922, tempted to Paris to take up real tennis at the advanced age of 28. Remarkably, he was challenging for the World Championship in just five years and, although he lost that match, he returned to England the following year and claimed the title.*

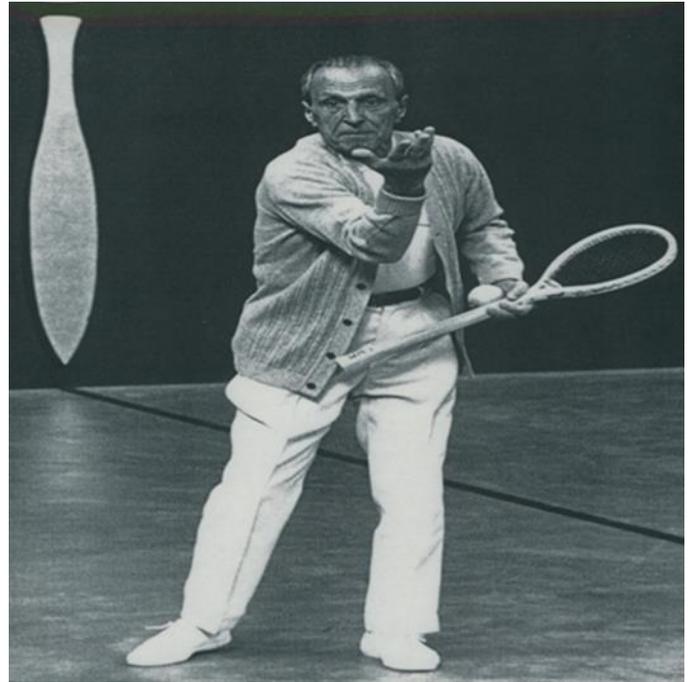
*The newly crowned World Champion did not return home, for, without telling his pregnant wife or his young daughter, he took a ship to New York to become the professional there. His wife only learned of his whereabouts when a photograph of him making the Transatlantic crossing appeared in a French newspaper. It was 18 years before he returned to his family in Paris.*

*After a successful defence of the World Championship in 1930, Pierre mysteriously disappeared for seven years. These were the years of the Great Depression, during which the World Championship was not contested, and he never revealed his whereabouts. All we know is that he reappeared at the Racquet and Tennis Club in New York in 1937, retaining his World Championship in a match against Ogden Phipps, in which Pierre was 3 sets to 1 up when Phipps was injured and had to retire. It was only in 1946 that he went back to Paris and reunited with his wife and met his 18-year-old son for the first time. But we are not here to assess his personal life but it was common knowledge that he had a terrible gambling problem.*

*Aged 54 to 58, he accepted a series of challenges for his title, defeating Phipps again, Jim Dear and Alistair Martin with some ease. Then, within sight of his sixtieth birthday and with no new challenger on the horizon, he retired from competitive play.*

*I met him just twice. The first time at the opening of the new courts in Melbourne. Although he was then 81, the*

*committee seeded him and Norty Knox first in the doubles (he scratched, as his ankles were swollen from the flight). The second time was at the official opening of the new Bordeaux court in 1979, when he was the Guest of Honour. He died a year later.*



*There is no doubt that Pierre was the best player in the world for a quarter of a century. Those who played against him or were taught by him were in awe of him, including; Northrup Knox, Pete Bostwick Jnr and Jimmy Bostwick, who were all juniors coached by him and were the three successive American World Champions who held the title from 1959-1976.*

*But was he the best ever? Some say, yes, especially those that saw him play, who speak in hushed tones about his ability to place the ball 'on a dime'.*

*However, that quarter of a century included the years of the Great Depression when there was little tennis activity anywhere, the disruption of World War II and the reconstruction of the post-war period. Could he have coped with the speed and power of modern players? We shall never know.'*

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

## Tennis on the Internet –

In the last edition, we drew your attention to the crossword, 'Crossvid-19', devised by member Tim Harper, which had been put on the T&RA website. The entries have been assessed and prizes have been awarded. The first prize (of two games with Tim) has been won by Nigel Shaw; second prize (of one game with Tim) has gone to Simon Horobin; and third prize (something drinkable) has been shared by MHT and Alan Giddens, so Radley members have done really rather well out of this competition. Thank you, Tim!

There is an Amazon Prime promotional video for real tennis, nicely filmed and featuring Neil Mackenzie on court at Queen's. We applaud the idea but are astonished that the lines along the court floor have been mis-labelled as 'Chasers'. Surely someone could have sorted out this error before it was released to the world.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1NdujcsyjLs&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR1KmUkrOnr8kQ2fZj10S\\_mMTY10ulARzEKq0ovKavf3ol\\_kYq6ID2sAUw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1NdujcsyjLs&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR1KmUkrOnr8kQ2fZj10S_mMTY10ulARzEKq0ovKavf3ol_kYq6ID2sAUw)

## Camden Riviere

Camden Riviere continues with his 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. This five-minute clip is about The Volley.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-j7c-IKCQqE&list=PLzAa4D2Mp3qDyJrPnFQq\\_mOZi63ATOebT&index=17](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-j7c-IKCQqE&list=PLzAa4D2Mp3qDyJrPnFQq_mOZi63ATOebT&index=17)

## Future tournaments –

The British Ladies Masters was not held in 2017 and 2018 but was revived this year and just managed to take place in Manchester before the Shutdown began.

We are delighted that the 2021 tournament, on 19/20/21 March, will be held for the first time at Radley.

To be eligible, female players must be over 40 years old (that is the 'Masters' bit). The competition is played level, there is a Plate for first round losers and a Doubles tournament takes place in addition to the main event.

The current holder of the title is Penny Lumley, who has won the event for the five years between 2013-2017 and in early March 2020. Penny was the dominant force in women's real tennis in the 1990s and was a prolific winner of national titles in singles and doubles as well as holder of the World Championship title from 1989-1993, 1995-2001 and 2003-2005.

## Junior World Championship -

The 2020 Real Tennis Junior World Championship has been postponed. This event started in 2018 and runs in the same years as the men's World Championship. This year's tournament was due to be held in August at Tuxedo Park, but that plan has been abandoned. New timing and a different venue are being worked out currently and it has just been confirmed that the event will be held in England.

The field of sixteen players is made up of an invited group of the top juniors in the world, of whom eleven are currently based in the UK, underlining the strength of the game here at that level.

Radley has put in a bid to host this event, which would be a thrilling addition to the club's fixture list, and it would be terrific to see some of Radley most talented young members playing for the title on their home court.

## News of other courts:

### The Oratory Real Tennis Court

All sports facilities at the Oratory School, by contrast, remain closed, including the golf course and there is no official word on when any of the facilities available for public use will re-open.

It has now been formally announced that Claire Fahey will start her new job as Head of Racquet Sports at the Oratory in September and Rob Fahey will become Head Pro of its real tennis club.

Rob's first major act of the new season will be to defend his World Championship at Prested Hall on 20/22/24 October, delayed from April.

### Jeu de Paume de Bordeaux

In the past few days, we have heard from the President of the club in Bordeaux that the new court will probably be able to open in mid-June, as the country relaxes many of its Covid-19 restrictions. The Girondins Sports Park, where the court is located, announced on 4 June that it is re-opening on 15 June, although the arrangements relating to each sport are yet to be announced.



Subject to such essential details as whether or not there will be quarantine imposed on anyone travelling between the UK to France, CJR, Maggie and a small international team will be going, on a *pro bono* basis, to open the court and generate some momentum during what is left of this season. Watch this space! CJR has donated a set of new balls he has made during the Shutdown to Bordeaux and they will be on their way their shortly.

### Sports Trivia Quiz:

The following questions are all about the 1908 London Olympics, which was the first and last in which Jeu de Paume and Rackets were played, as two of the 22 sports included, an increase from the 16 in the preceding Games.

True or false?

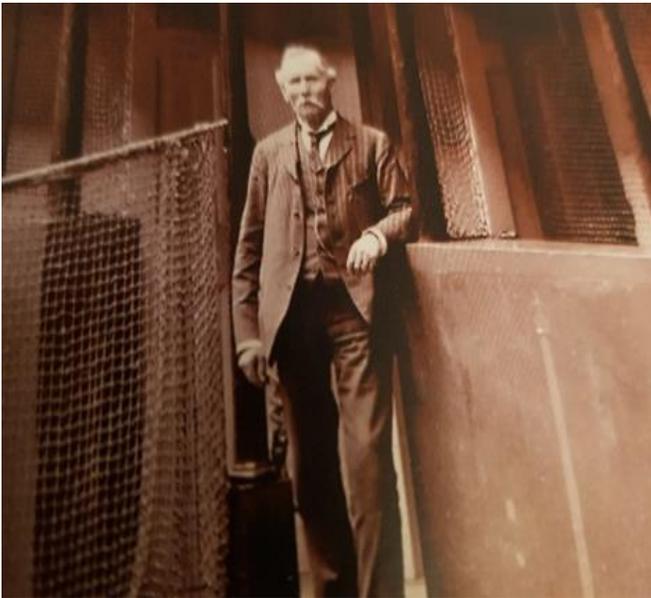
1. The Gold Medal for Jeu de Paume was won by Jay Gould of the USA, the Silver Medal by Eustace Miles of England and no Bronze was awarded.
2. The 1908 Olympic Games were originally awarded to Rome and were only reassigned to London when it became apparent that the Italians would not be ready in time.
3. For the first time, a stadium was specially prepared for the Games.
4. The Russian Olympic team arrived twelve days late because Russia had not yet started to use the Gregorian Calendar.
5. The Organising Committee fixed the distance of the marathon at 42km and 195m, the last 195 metres being added on to ensure the race finished below the royal box in the London stadium.
6. This 'London marathon' distance became the official length of the marathon from the 1924 Games onwards.
7. Dorando Pietri of Italy entered the stadium first at the end of the marathon. Suffering from extreme exhaustion and dehydration, he ran in the wrong direction on the track and collapsed. Officials helped him to reach the finish line. He was not disqualified for receiving outside aid, as his efforts were considered 'heroic' and he still received the Gold Medal.
8. It was the first time that swimming events did not take place in open water.

## Picture quiz:

Without the gentleman in the phot below, real tennis in Great Britain would have been considerably poorer.

Is he:

- Sir Charles Rose (builder of two courts at Hardwick, one at Newmarket and the model of 'Toad' in *The Wind in the Willows*).
- Julian Marshall (codifier of the rules of tennis in 1872, co-codifier of the rules of lawn tennis in time for the first All-England Championship at Wimbledon in 1877 and author of the seminal work, *The Annals of Tennis*, 1878).
- Joseph Bickley (constructor of courts and inventor of an unique recipe for plastering the walls that he took to his grave)?

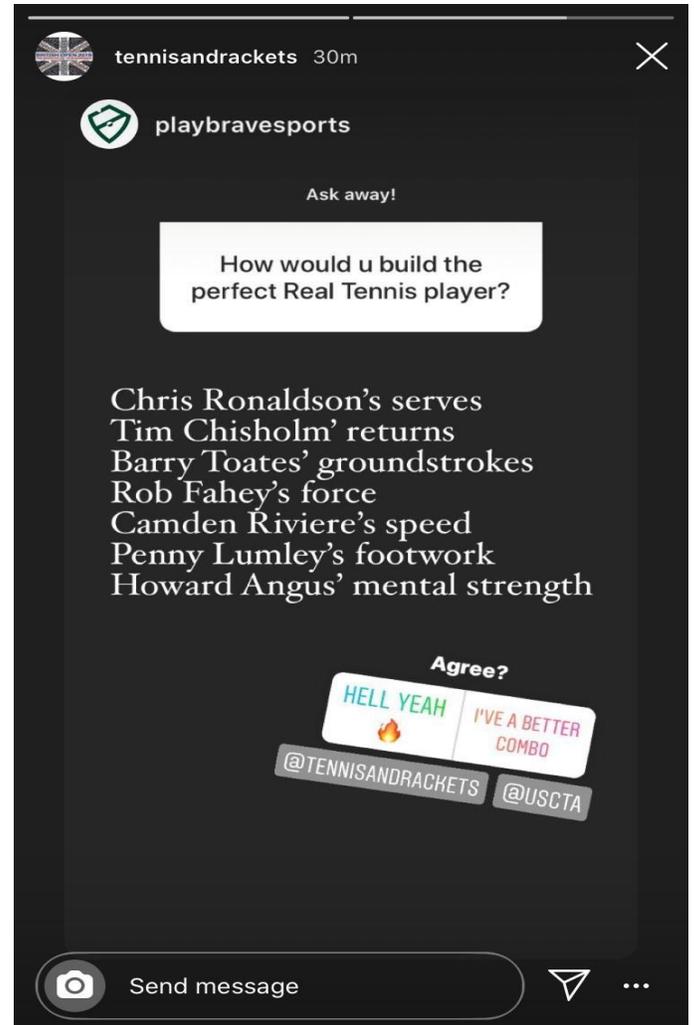


Answers to all these questions, and perhaps a few more for you, in the next edition of the Shutdown Newsletter.

Stay Fit and Stay Safe!

## The Tennis Cyborg:

This appeared on the T&RA Instagram page a week or so ago:



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

Stay Well and Stay Cheerful!