

April 2021

# Radley College Tennis Court

Better Than The Last Club Newsletter

**Welcome Back  
to  
Radley Real Tennis**



Relentlessly Positive - Positively Relentless

**We have missed you!!!**

**The court is open  
for Radley boys  
and supervising staff,  
with  
restricted play for  
club members**

(Household/bubble play; lessons; and solo practice only)

Welcome to the fourth RCTC newsletter of 2021 and welcome back to playing tennis (albeit in a limited way) from Monday 12 April.

The crocuses in the Radley College grounds have given way to daffodils and the bluebells will not be far behind. Days are longer and things are on the up, locally and nationally.

April is here, complete with a flash of extremely welcome warmer weather followed over the Easter weekend and since then by freezing temperatures and flurries of snow:

'Oh, to be in England,  
Now that April's there...'



The Radley College Mansion House and Chapel

However, the bad weather news is completely negated by the fact that we have been counting down the days until the court can re-open on Mon 12 April.

From this date, play will be once again permitted within a single household/existing bubble and those people may have lessons singly or as a group. Any member may book a lesson or individual practice.

The T&RA is still waiting to hear when singles can be again played between individuals from different households, in recognition of the fact that Real Tennis is a socially distanced sport. It is pushing the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), along with other relevant bodies, for this to be permitted. We are all hoping that normal singles and doubles will be allowed to resume next month, most likely from 17 May.

Every British club of which we are aware is restricting bookable hours and the number of lessons bookable each day. Instead, Radley is anxious to allow all our members to return to playing ASAP, and we will do everything we can to accommodate players without the prevailing Government guidelines.

We have 14 hours of court time booked on Mon 12 April, for example, of which 11 hours will be lessons and the rest solo practice. The pattern continues for the foreseeable future.

### Getting Ready

While the court is closed, we have been taking the opportunity to have some repairs carried out, although pressures on the maintenance team of the College to keep the buildings and campus facilities as Covid-secure as possible, have understandably limited the extent of the works at the tennis court.



These include remodelling the look of the grille, eliminating the wooden frame that has not proven to be a satisfactory arrangement. The pounding it receives dislodges it from the plaster, which then breaks up under impact, and things have just got worse and worse. But no more, we hope.

As you can see, the grille is now a plain alcove in the end wall and reports from early testers are that the edges of the grille are now quite 'springy', which all adds to the fun!

As you can see from the photo below, the winning gallery is also one of those areas of the court that has also benefited from some TLC. We hope that you will notice the small but positive changes at both ends of the court.



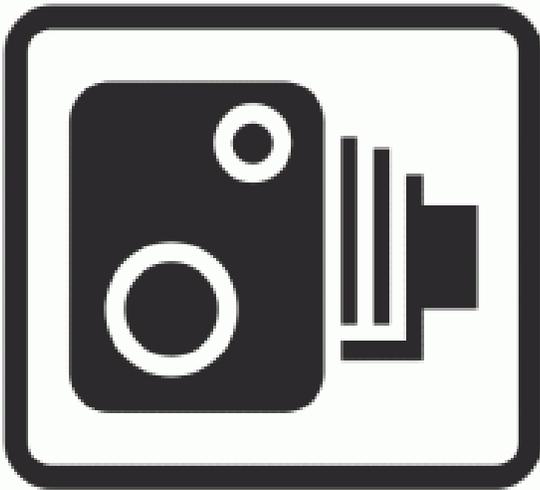
It was not possible in the time available to work on the bad patches around the window above the dedans. This is a high priority for the next round of renovations on court.

Please let the Pros know your thoughts on the changes when you have had the chance to get back into action.

## Tech Upgrade

We are delighted to announce that the long-awaited project to enhance the technology available at the club has been launched, with grateful thanks to Ian and Benedict Yorston for leading the project.

Orders for the necessary cameras, screens, wires and other bits and pieces have been placed and we hope that we can move into the implementation phase very shortly.



En passant, it is surprising that the ubiquitous representation (above) of a camera persists and is comprehensible to anyone under the age of about 70, as the production of folding cameras declined sharply from the 1930s and use tailed off accordingly over the next decade or so.

This club tech project is known, for short (or is that long?), as 'RTV-21', and the specification has now been agreed between the club and College. It will be implemented on an incremental basis, to see which of the innovations prove most useful and popular and then develop them as fully as possible. It is also a way of spreading the cost of the project.

'RTV-21' will enable the capturing and streaming of on-court activity through the creation of a simple but extendable system that will include provision of shock-proof cameras, sound, scoring and data overlay, with streaming via YouTube Live, made available through wall-mounted Smart TVs capable of relaying the stream throughout the club.

## Appeal for Funds –

To bring this project to fruition, and to refurbish the clubroom simultaneously (improving its appearance and the facilities), will require the club to raise some funds, as we first mentioned in a newsletter last year. The effect of Covid has been significant on the College, with significantly increased costs and reduced income, and it regrets that it is not in the position currently to pay for all these improvements at the real tennis court.

We are currently discussing with the College the best way to organise the fund-raising effort that will be needed to cover all the intended works and more information on this plan will follow quickly. When we can be more detailed about the scope of the works and the appeal for funds, we will also give as much clarity as we can about the timescale.

RCTC might indeed follow the current fashion for 'roadmaps' and 'traffic lights'. Or we may try to go for the more radical approach of simplicity and clarity and avoid dependency on jargon and cliché. HM Govt take note!

Irrespective of the style and content, we are confident that our redoubtable and dependable members will rally to the cause and express their enthusiasm for the Radley club by supporting the appeal.

For example, if every member of the club were prepared to donate to the appeal the amount of their annual subscription that the College did NOT debit from their accounts in view of the Covid closures, we would achieve our goal at a stroke.

Looking at it another way, this would not cost any member a penny, as those amounts of subscription would have already been budgeted for as predicted expenditure in the past year. It is just a thought, anyway, as a possible approach.

Whatever is decided, the normal sort of fund-raising events, such as exhibition matches, supper parties and other social events, will not be options open to us in the present circumstances. Instead, we must rely on your goodwill and generosity to help us to build a(n even) better club. More in due course on this subject.

## College News

The College boys came back onto the Radley campus on Sunday 7 March, with live lessons starting the following day.

After months of 'Virtual Radley', the boys were encouraged to make the most of being back with their schoolfriends and almost all the school's facilities were made available to them.

This included the real tennis court, which was extremely well used every afternoon and evening during the three weeks until the end of the Lent Term.

The boys will return on 18 April for the Summer Term and will be back to using the court occasionally, with club members having access for the majority of each day for whatever forms of play will be allowed.

## Tournament News

"Rien", "*gun dad idir*" (Scots Gaelic for 'nothing at all') and "nothing" to report from the UK and France.

It remains the case that we do not expect it will be possible to stage matches or any small or medium-sized larger gatherings at the court for the rest of the 2020-21 season, which ends on 31 August.

Quel dommage.

## Tennis Down Under and Tennis Over There

### **Australia –**

**ERRATUM:** it was quite rightly pointed out to us by historian and enthusiastic player of tennis, Mike Garnett from Romsey, Victoria, that the 2020 US Open Doubles Final was not contested between a Briton (Ben Taylor-Matthews) and three Americans, as was erroneously asserted in the most recently edition of 'Better Than The Last'.

The players were, in fact, two Americans (Camden Riviere and Tim Chisholm) playing one Brit (BTM) and one Australian, Steve Virgona, who is from Ballarat in Victoria.

The Americans prevailed, winning 6-5, 6-5, 5-6, 6-3 in just under four hours of play in Chicago.

You can enjoy the USCTA's coverage on their YouTube channel:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0SI7HyUKFXA>.

Given Steve's many years living and working in the UK and the US, the important fact of his patriality had slipped the Editor's mind.

Our apologies to Steve and thanks to Mike. He is working hard on plans to restore the Cope-Williams court in Romsey to use and prevent it being lost to the game. As reported in a previous newsletter the court and a good deal of surrounding property, with winery, accommodation, conference centre, art gallery and cricket oval are for sale currently.

Since the death of the owner and builder of the court, British architect-turned-winemaker, Gordon Cope-Williams, the future of the court and rest of the estate has been in doubt. The asking price for the tennis court, and 23-bedroom, 20-bathroom range of accommodation and a goodly plot of land is about AUS\$2m, but that number is, we assume, pretty flexible by now.

The uncertainty over the future of the court has continued for a considerable time, given that the celebration of the life of Gordon Cope-Williams was held on the Royal Tennis Court at Cope-Williams Winery, 160 Glenfern Road, Romsey as long ago as Thursday August 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019.

Romsey is a small town about 50 miles and an hour's drive due north of Melbourne, but only 30 mins from Melbourne's airport.

In news from the other courts in Australia, Hobart staged its Club Handicap Singles Championship over the Easter weekend and the enduringly popular handicap 'Night Pennant' team competitions (started by CJR in the mid-1970s) continue throughout April at the Royal Melbourne Tennis Club.

### **USA -**

The American clubs have had differing responses to the challenges of Covid and the dilemma of encouraging as much play as possible, while keeping the professionals and members safe.

A quick survey confirms that the hours of weekly and monthly play are increasing everywhere and even some tournament play is tentatively being discussed.

Prince's Club in Washington is planning to hold an invitational event for the best players under 26 years old in that country.

The Clothier Cup, the Van Alen Cup and the Limb Cup, for the U26s, are all termed "Junior" events that rotate between the UK, USA, and Australia, and a U26 event is staged every year in one of the US clubs to enable the eligible players to practise together.

Being less than 26 years old is an unusual definition of being a 'Junior', but as we are all very well aware, real tennis is an unusual game!

### Tennis Closer to Home

#### **Ireland -**

CJR was called recently by those planning the restoration of the court on Lambay Island, off the coast near Dublin, as a follow up to the visit he made there in 2012.



Louis Jebb from the Lambay Island Trust and CJR on court on 30 August 2012, facing the main wall and the Irish Sea beyond.

It has been nearly a decade in the contemplation, but it seems that there is every prospect of a return to playing condition of this extraordinary court, which was built in 1922 by Sir Edwin Lutyens to a design by Cecil Baring, the owner of the island, scion of the banking family and fine amateur player.

Plans to renovate the court are moving ahead, overlapping the extensive renovation programme for all the accommodation and other facilities on the island. The objective is to transform Lambay into a destination resort, and to ensure that it will be a welcoming, luxurious and exclusive place to stay and play.



View of the court from the beach towards the exterior of the main wall, with gaps for missing storm doors.

The Trust responsible for Lambay will be launching an international appeal for funds, as the current owner's resources cannot stretch to the court, on top of all the other pressures on the family purse.

The intention is to bring the court back into playable condition, preserving its unique features, such as penthouses on all four sides of the court, and the absence of a roof. While the location and design of the court makes running a regular kind of full-access and all-year-round club run by a Professional team impractical, the objective will be to make it a special venue for regular tournaments and gatherings of committed supporters of the venture.

Further details will follow in due course, but the vision is ambitious and serious and there must be a very real prospect of tennis returning to this part of Ireland.

How splendid it would be if 'The Marble Court' in Dublin, could be bought back to use at the same time. It is a conventional roofed *cours de dedans*, built by Joseph Bickley in 1885 for the Guinness family and which hosted the World Championship in 1890.

This court was where Tom Pettitt, the American holder of the title, successfully fought off the challenge of Englishman Charles Saunders by 7 sets to 2. Later that same year, Saunders claimed the title, which he held for the following five years, unchallenged, before losing to Peter Latham in 1895 at Prince's Club, Brighton.

Wouldn't it be splendid if that tours to play both of the Irish courts could become a permanent highlight of the tennis year?

**Yorkshire** - The prospect of building a court in Harrogate was mooted a couple of years ago. The idea rose and fell, as these things so often do.

It has recently come to life again, as the possibility has emerged of building a court at Harrogate Spa Tennis Centre which operates on land leased from Harrogate High School Academy. There are currently six outdoor lawn tennis courts there and the club is expected to proceed this summer with the construction of four indoor courts.

There is a space alongside the indoor complex that could accommodate a real tennis court and there is a willingness by the Tennis Centre to consider such a proposal, provided it is funded by the real tennis community.

Conversations with the clubs in Sydney and Washington about their successful lawn tennis club collaboration and court building projects would seem likely to provide some helpful information.

Paul Seakins has recently taken over the role of championing the Harrogate project from Robin Barlow and, although these are the early days of this particular proposal, they are hopeful of success.

They are in close touch with Chris Davies (CEO) and Richard Dalzell (Head of Court Development) at the T&RA.

If Betty's Tea Shop, taking the waters at the Spa and gorging yourself on the fabled toffee are not enough to tempt you to visit Harrogate (and they should be!) then the presence of a court will undoubtedly swing it.

I assume than the Manchester club is already working on plans for a Trans-Pennine Challenge match. and we know that any sporting contest between Yorkshire and Lancashire sides will be fiercely contested.

### Tennis Professional News

It has just been announced that a young trainee professional, Jack Josephs, will be joining the team at Middlesex Real Tennis Club and working with Chris Bray and Will Burns there. He is being employed by the T&RA who will pay most of his salary while he is in training and Jack has been recruited as a result of the liP (Investing in Professionals) programme, on which we have previously reported.



Welcome to the world of Real Tennis, Jack!

The T&RA has recognised that over the next ten years a number of our sport's professionals will be retiring, and overseas courts will continue to recruit professionals from the UK, thus depleting the ranks here.

The IIP programme (<https://www.realtennisiiip.com/>) intends to prime the pumps by recruiting up to four trainee professionals into the game each year by offering access to court-related skills combined with education in business skills. The programme offers new trainees and existing young professionals a highly professional educational environment to develop a meaningful career in Real Tennis.

Jack writes:

*'I am 23 years old, living in Woodside Park and have recently graduated with a First-Class Honours degree in Industrial Economics BSc at the University of Nottingham Business School.*

*I have a strong background in Table Tennis, which has taken me all over the world, competing in Sweden, Israel, Austria, Germany and most recently representing my University at the Tri-Campus Games in Malaysia. I am a driven individual with a passion for all sports related activity, including the social side!*

*I am determined to excel at the game of Real Tennis and hope to make the most of this fantastic opportunity. I am also excited to immerse myself into the culture of the Middlesex University Real Tennis Club, getting to know all the staff, members, and students.*

*I would lastly just like to say a massive thank you to everyone who has contributed to the development of the IIP programme, it sounds like an extremely exciting and unique opportunity and I am eager to get started!*

### **From the Archives**

#### **The First World Champion**

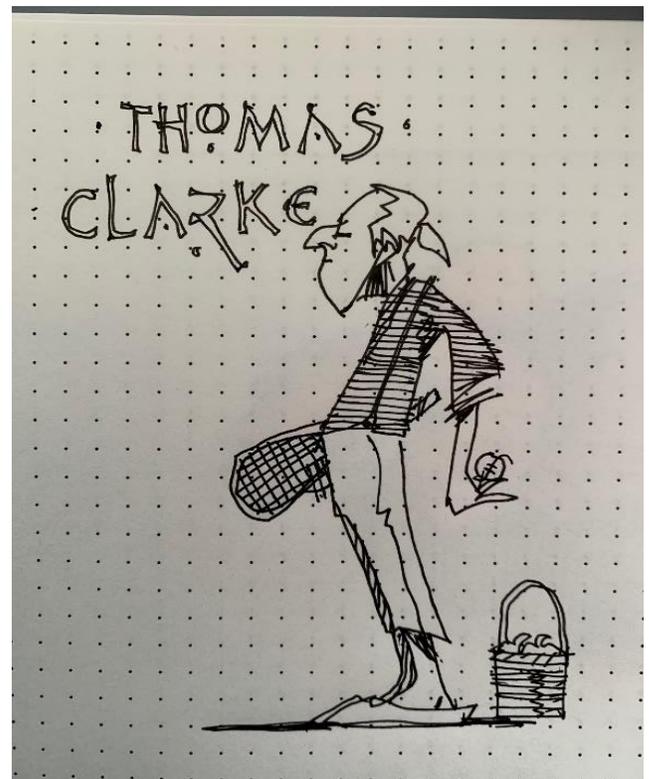
In last month's newsletter, we reported on some exciting news for those interested in the history of tennis and for all sports trivia buffs.

This announcement excited the interest of many in the world of real tennis, not least the renowned, Melbourne-based caricaturist and fanatically-keen player, Michael Lindell, better known to fans of his visual delights over the decades as 'Mikko'.

As a reminder of what the furore is all about, we repeat here the substance of the story:

We have been proudly saying for ages that real tennis has the oldest world championship of any sport. That remains correct, but it may be that the contest is even older than we thought, as RTC member and noted historian of the game, David Best, has recently discovered important documents.

They show that in 1733 a match took place at Whitehall that could well claim to be the inaugural world championship. In it, the Frenchman, Clergé the Elder, who was the incumbent Marker (Professional) at Whitehall and thus playing on his home court, was beaten by an Englishman, Thomas Clarke, who was the Marker at the James Street court, just off the Haymarket.



‘(Probably) The First World Champion’, by ‘Mikko’

The challenge match between them, it is reported, was a fierce encounter over five sets and, although the result was close, it was won by Clarke, who took the then-huge sum of £500 in prize money that had been put up by the backers of the match.

Clergé is acknowledged as the greatest player of of the mid-18th century, the height of whose career was attained about 1753 in France. In 1733, he was relatively young and inexperienced, but not so much so that he could not be appointed at a royal court in London in succession to his father, which suggests that he must have been already regarded as a player of some consequence.

The great significance of this research is that it strongly suggests that Clergé, long credited with being the first world champion of any sport, by dint of holding the real tennis title from 1740 until 1765, was, in fact, the second champion, and that the first person to hold that title was, in fact, an Englishman.

Well, well, well, that is enough to set a cat amongst the Gallic pigeons...'

### Keeping Entertained

Although the imminent ending of Lockdown III means that we will need fewer tennis-related ideas to keep us all entertained at home, we nevertheless give notice of a forthcoming addition to the real tennis literary *oeuvre*.

### **Reading (and Writing) about Tennis**

The real tennis specialist press, Ronaldson Publications (a.k.a. 'RonPubs'), is to add another book by CJR to its list of publications.

We can reveal that a plethora of tennis-related puns were considered before the title was hit upon: *Marking Fifty Years*. The book is currently at the printers.

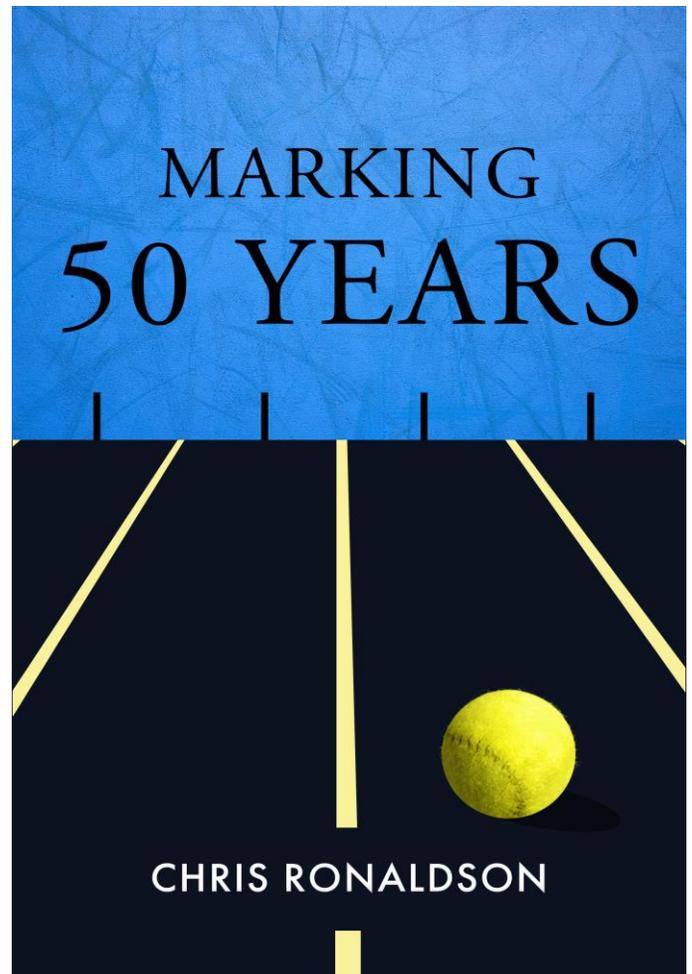
The blurb reads:

*'CJR has wielded his pen for a third time, making great use of Lockdown III by distilling his thoughts about changes he has observed during fifty years as a tennis professional. It is called "Marking Fifty Years".'*

*The world of Real Tennis has changed a great deal in the fifty years since Chris Ronaldson started work as a professional.*

*A player from 1971 or earlier would find that the game itself has changed little, just a rule refinement here and there, but he (and it would be a 'he') would find almost all contemporary clubs transformed in atmosphere, with increased levels of activity and a greater variety of players. The game is in far better health than it was in the early 1970s and has a sense of global identity for the first time.*

*Chris Ronaldson is well placed to reflect on this period. He is the world's longest-serving current professional; he has scaled the heights as a tournament player, contributed on and off the court to many aspects of the game and worked tirelessly to attract a wider range of players, including more women and juniors.'*



The book will be available in two formats: the limited Library Edition at £75 and the standard paperback edition at £15. It can be pre-ordered via the website <https://ronpubs.com/catalogue> and will be available to be bought, in due course, at the club, and it will be possible to make payment through your club account.

While on the matter of club accounts, a reminder that the account details for all non-membership related payments (i.e., court/lesson fees, clothing, racquets, grips and re-strings) has changed to the following:

**Radley College Leisure Ltd - Real Tennis**

**Sort code: 60-01-01**

**Account number: 46625836**

### **Quiz Corner**

The photo below, that appeared in March's edition of 'Better Than The Last' showed a famous tennis player from an unusual angle, playing an unorthodox shot.

The question we asked was: Who is he?



The answer is .....(drum roll)..... Roger Federer.

Congratulations to Roland Budd, OR, and leading light of the Irish Real Tennis Association, who was the first to email the Editor with the correct answer.

This shot of Federer was taken on court at Hampton Court in 2005, when he had a hit with CJR. Although surprised by the back wall on his first time on court, the great Federer still managed to find a way to retrieve the ball.

It was as impressive a debut as one might expect from the GOAT himself.

### **Last, but not least.....**

The lights are on, but there is no one at home. We are ready and waiting eagerly for the return of play on 12 April.



Until we see you back at Radley,  
stay safe, fit and well.

*This Newsletter, the fourth of 2021,  
was compiled by Club Captain,  
Maggie Henderson-Tew.*