



THE ROYAL TENNIS COURT



Just great, Scott

RTC's new Professional is raring to go

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Taking the Bisque-t

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The Autumn Newsletter 2019

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CHAIRMAN'S CHAT

Although our club is fully active throughout the year, I always feel that September marks the beginning of the new season. The nights begin to draw in, competitions and leagues start again and summer lawn tennis players retreat indoors. The work of the RTC Board has focused on our annual strategic review and especially on the appointment of a new professional to replace Chris Chapman.

As you will already have heard through email, we are delighted to have secured the services of Scott Blaber, who will be joining us from Jesmond Dene. Scott started his Real Tennis career at the Cambridge University Real Tennis Club and then, after 14 years, stepped up to become Head Professional at the Jesmond Dene Real Tennis Club. Scott will be moving to Hampton Court Palace around the end of the year to take up his RTC appointment, together with his wife Kerry and two daughters, all of whom play the game.

Scott's position at RTC will complement the existing professional team, managing the tennis programme, leading the office administration and supporting Josh Smith in his career and playing development.

As a result, we will have a balanced and experienced professional team, providing a top-quality service to members and supporting

the club's strategic objective - as well as gaining three female players. I know that all members will welcome Scott and his family to the Royal Tennis Court later this year.

These changes in the professional team have also created an opportunity for Josh Smith to take on the main

tournament-playing role previously occupied by Chris. Josh has already been active - heading off to Paris for the French Open, where he played Chris in the quarter finals, and then beating Claire Fahey in the IRTPA Championships at Wellington before losing to John Lumley. Josh has been keeping members up to date with his progress via regular emails. I know that we all appreciate his insights into what is involved in striving to progress in the demanding Real Tennis professional environment.

Our next big social event is the annual Christmas Carol Service in the Chapel Royal with drinks and mince pies afterwards – on **Tuesday 10th December** (not 17th as previously advertised) . I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible then – or around the Club over the next couple of months.

Michael Day CVO

Board Talk 24/6/19

Matters Arising: PN will draft a sign concerning risk and eye protection to display on court by the end of October.

Strategic Objectives: The Board reviewed our Strategic Objectives for suitability of purpose, milestone progress and identification of areas where more focus may be required. The Board concluded that the Strategic Objectives have been extremely helpful in guiding the energies and resources of RTC since they were finalised and published in 2015, and that they are largely fit for purpose. Nevertheless, it was agreed to add a ninth category: Communication, to capture the desire to raise the profile of RTC with visitors and prospective members, and to recognise the increasingly complex role played by social media in keeping club members and the public up to date with news from RTC.

The progress in the recruitment and development of juniors is seen by the Board as a particularly strong example of the success of our Strategic Objectives in driving action and investment in an area that is key to the future of the club, and the Board felt it was making good progress with the right spirit in all areas of our Strategic Objectives.

Professional's Report: With the departure of Chris Chapman at the end of July, the Board formally put on record its thanks to Nick Wood, Josh Smith and Les Ronaldson for their commitment and effort in maintaining the highest level of professional service to the RTC members. Whilst this level of individual effort is not sustainable, no member would have noticed the difference in service level in this interim period. NW noted that

10pm courts have been harder to fill than in the past, in spite of their being sold at a lower cost and them not counting in the limit of three future bookings. The Pro team will continue to push their usage.

The Board welcomed the commitment of HRP to The Champions' Trophy in 2020. Zack Smart is making good progress in his temporary assignment to RTC. The Board noted that his assignment will come to an end at the end of the year, and that Graham Tomkinson is helping with Zack's placement and continued development.

Finance: The low premises costs to date will enable the Board to ensure that the Ely Rooms can be suitably refurbished to provide a higher quality of accommodation for Josh Smith going forwards. While debt levels remain a focus, overall, the Board was pleased to see a continuing healthy financial position.

Premises: It was agreed that a programme of works on the Ely Rooms, and a deep clean of apartment 53 would be undertaken, primarily in the current financial year of 2019.

Membership: The Board noted that some other clubs believe that our club players with a handicap above 60 are playing to a handicap level up to 10% better than their handicap would imply. NW will consider with the T&RA whether any action should be taken. MD will update his chairman's notes for the latest revision of the new member pack.

Tennis and Tournaments: The Board was pleased to see that the King's Goblet broke even for the

first time. The format of A grade practices has been changed after feedback from participants, and B grade players are invited to fill empty slots. NW will clarify de Laszlo Bowl rules for entrants in the competition at the end of September.

Social: OS has confirmed Lachie Deuchar as guest of honour at the RTC prize-giving event on October 19th.

Juniors: The Board confirmed that proceeds from next year's Chairman's quiz will go to the Junior fund, and that the fund will continue to pay in full for junior coaching session court fees. SP will work with NW on the viability of and potential for RTC to host an annual junior tournament. It was noted that the Peter Luck-Hille tournament is to become a knock-out format.

Any Other Business: a) **Update on recruitment of a professional after Chris Chapman's departure.**

MD noted that from a strong field of applicants we had a shortlist of two. The interview panel (MD, PN, NW) were looking at all aspects of suitability, including administrative/office leadership and playing and coaching capability and potential, and were taking full account of the desire of Josh Smith to progress his playing development strongly.

b) **2020 WC eliminator bid** The World Championship eliminator first round will take place between 20th and 30th January 2020, with bids to be submitted by 10th December 2019. The Board agreed that we would be happy to host this and would support a bid. OS will engage in the planning with Giles Doy and PN.



Blabers on board!

Meet the new first family of Real Tennis

RTC, hello!

It's a real pleasure to introduce myself. My first experience of Real Tennis was when I attended my interview at Cambridge University Real Tennis Club. Having never played before I was hooked - and here we are 16 years later!

From Cambridge I moved on to Jesmond Dene Real Tennis Club to take on the role as Head Professional. My main role was to increase the membership and the standard of play, and to bring better structure to the club.

Whilst having this opportunity it also gave me the time to introduce the game to three very important ladies in my life: Kerry, my wife, and my two daughters Darcie and Eadie, who are all very keen players.

This then brings me to RTC and Hampton Court. I can barely express how excited I am to be able to join the team! This move will enable me to strengthen my all-round Pro abilities. I am so looking forward to gaining knowledge from Nick, helping Josh to achieve his playing goals, and working with Les. I am also greatly looking forward to meeting and getting to know all you lovely club members!

Scott



Meet the Blabers: Scott, Kerry, Darcie (left) and Eadie

Since the Summer Newsletter a lot has changed for me at RTC including competing in two tournaments as RTC's newly denoted premier player: The French Open and the IRTPA Championships. I had the fortune of competing against Claire Fahey, the Ladies World Champion (a victory for me) and the men's World No.3 Chris Chapman and World No.7 John Lumley – these were both losses, but a great experience overall and quite a selection of players to test myself against. Zack Smart also featured in two events during this time: the Taylor Cup and the Ged Eden IRTPA Satellite - a productive month for RTC's younger professionals!

Zack's tennis is going from strength to strength and is developing in both approach and execution. Under the tutelage of Nick Wood what else would we expect!? In his recent tournaments Zack played Lord's Professional Jack Clifton in the Taylor Cup (6/3 5/6 4/6) and Radley Professional Nino Merola (1/6 3/6). Despite the disappointment of those two losses he is

Just Joshing

processing the experiences learned. Keep watching as he continues his development!

As to my tennis I am really pleased with my application and the direction that my game is headed. Tournaments are the testing ground; experience against some of the best players in the world shows where points are won and lost, how weakness is exposed, where my strengths lie and crucially, how to move forward. At this point I will say this: I have learnt a lot and there is much more in the pipeline! I won't be giving away all my secrets just yet but the team and I are working hard to keep moving forward!

As one improves previous targets are achieved, and new targets present themselves. I am absolutely delighted to have achieved two targets in the last month: making a Quarter Final in a ranking event and breaking into the World Top 20.

My delight comes with a large dose of gratitude – in order to achieve these targets, one needs team support and I am grateful to be part of a brilliant one. I would like to say a huge thank you particularly to Steve Hunt, my trainer and adviser extraordinaire, Head Man Nick Wood, Giles Doy, all my practice partners, and of course the RTC Support Team! The number of good luck wishes I received was humbling and absolutely increased my drive and determination.

As I write this, my match with Chris in France is the most watched (don't mention that the stream went to Facebook midway through the event!) and my battle with Claire is the second most watched match of the IRTPA Champs, after the final. Awesome! But it is not over yet...there are new targets to work towards, and things have only just begun...

Josh Smith

The spirit of the game

On moving from Chiswick to East Molesey, Peter Taylor, recently divorced on grounds of his wife's boredom, had found himself friendless and adrift. For a while he was comfortable in his loneliness, but once he had exhausted the delights of such previously proscribed indulgencies as eating as much offal as he wanted, playing loud music and having complete control of television viewing, he was at a loose end which was in danger of becoming terminal.

The humiliation of his separation had fostered a reluctance to mingle with his old cronies but he was of a sociable disposition and had high hopes of acceptance into the local sporting circles through joining first the cricket club, and more exciting, his new tennis club membership. This was no ordinary lawn tennis club but real tennis as played by Henry VIII, steeped in historical vigour and tone. He was intrigued and delighted by the courteous traditions, court etiquette and arcane rules. He still had reasonable hand to eye co-ordination and felt that he could give anyone a game.

Initially, he was encouraged by the warm welcome and flurry of new faces on the court. Further evidence was the ready supply of cheerful opponents eager for his presence in the mixed doubles tournaments. This had been particularly gratifying for he had, if not a fear of loneliness, then at least a faint hope of meeting someone to provide some companionship.

He had already lost the battle of the children, never saw either of them. They were still cross that he hadn't taken advantage of cheap property on the South coast and had instead bought an absurdly overpriced cottage in one of East Molesey's premier roads. To his surprise his wife, with her half of the loot and a lot of his pension, had moved in rapidly with a widowed GP, for some years their family doctor. She was currently exercising her wings in Barbados.

But as the pain of rejection waned Peter immersed himself in village life. But it was in the real tennis club that he invested most hope. The Palace, the gardens, the eternal flow of the Thames; if only he could become a part of that. The club secretary organised matches for him and he waited to get into the swing of the social calendar, enwrapped in seasonal events and his cosy inclusion.

The problem was that these were not forthcoming. There were various reasons. His desirability as a tennis partner had been damned by a sequence of unfortunate accidents. In the halcyon early days of his playing career he had been fortunate to secure a delightful partner in Trish Harvey, a slim, attractive business woman in her late 50s, who had delighted him by providing useful on-court advice.

Trish and Peter had played several matches before the first incident occurred. One of the few rules Peter had managed to grasp was that if you hit the Grille, you won the point, so when Trish returned his serve with a lob towards the Dedans he had no hesitation in unleashing an unholy overhead swipe which, combined with hitting the sweet spot, sent the ball hurtling with the velocity of an Exocet missile, not at Henry's head but at Trish's knee, which it struck with the crack of a wooden ball on a coconut.

Before Peter's mortified gaze, she collapsed, for the blow had fallen on an only recently repaired cartilage operation. What made it worse was her bravery under fire as she

called for cold compresses, kept in the First Aid cupboard on the wall. Peter could only fumble blindly with the door. He tugged wildly at the handle and with a splintering of wood pulled the whole thing off the wall, just in time to be witnessed by a pair of muscular young club professionals, radiating authority and calm who, alarmed at Trish's cries of pain, had come to investigate.

Raised eyebrows and grim smiles indicated that Peter was on very thin ice indeed. One of them, Zak, picked sadly through the wreckage, "I suppose we can repair it, pity about the damage, some members become quite attached to these Victorian relics." He sighed and walked onto the court to assist Trish. "Where are you going Peter?" cried Trish, bravely, "we haven't finished the game." The coaches demurred but Trish insisted and Peter went back on court.

RTC's Paul Davis tells the tale of the Night Player of Hampton Court

Trish served and the ball landed invitingly for Peter's favoured half-volley smash. Trish, anticipating his cross court return, bounded across and as her full weight tested the knee she screamed and pulled up in agony. The ball hurtled towards her head; with a reflex flick of the racquet she attempted to protect herself but merely guided the ball onto her face and she was flattened again.

Zak quickly called for assistance. Peter hovered miserably, consumed with guilt and anxiety, as Trish drifted in and out of consciousness. An ambulance was suggested but Trish was adamant that was unnecessary. Her husband was contacted. She was too shaky to drive. Peter was tempted to stay and apologise but he could sense that he was beginning to get on everybody's nerves and saw little point in meeting the husband, a City lawyer. He collected his belongings and crept away.

Much to his surprise, Peter wasn't immediately thrown out of the club and when the head coach, Richard, phoned later it was not to admonish him but to suggest a game with the highly-competitive Hugo Carter-Clements, a new member. Peter was surprised and flattered to find himself included in this competitive category but was content to accept the plaudit. He was encouraged by a text from Trish absolving him of any blame for her injuries and he gathered that the consensus was that you jolly well get out of the way of the ball... if you don't, hard cheese.

Bolstered by this forgiveness, Peter hurried on court and was only slightly disconcerted to meet the towering figure of Hugo, who gave him a quick up and down smirk and bellowed "Call" before spinning his racquet with a hand like a bunch of bananas. Hugo was clearly a man who believed in muzzle velocity in all aspects of the game, for Peter had plenty of time to call "Smooth" before the racquet stopped being a blur and toppled over. "Rough it is," barked Hugo and strode, creaking slightly, to the server's end.

Hugo had had an extensive career in rugby, and his aggression on the field was matched on court. He gave no quarter and expected

none. Faced with this ferocious apparition, Peter, in his nervous state, started to giggle and ducked just in time as Hugo's first serve rifled along the penthouse, ricocheted off the wall and whistled past his head. "Out! First serve," snarled Hugo and they began to play a game that suited them both. Neither had the remotest idea of the rules so they agreed to play ping pong scoring, without hazards or chases or any other such effete nonsense. In this game you *won* the points, they included hitting Henry and walloping the ball into the Dedans. That made sense and soon Hugo had an impressive lead.

Peter countered by making life difficult with careful placement. Frustration began to govern Hugo's play and his competitive streak came to the fore. That determination meant he surged from penthouse to chase at a speed that couldn't be sustained. Eventually his rugby-battered knee collapsed and the momentum of his considerable bulk sent him crashing into the wall.

Peter, aghast at this turn of events, hovered over his latest victim. His gloom was heightened by this dashing of the seeds of an incipient blokey camaraderie. He looked sadly on as Hugo was helped from the court. Peter felt the chill of rejection. Avoiding the gazes of those around him, with heavy heart he returned to his empty home.

His dismal mood persisted for the next two days but on the third Peter was relieved to be offered the chance of redemption with an invitation to take part in a doubles match involving stalwarts of the club. The players were three survivors of a quartet who had recently lost a partner, not to the great marker in the sky but to a triple by-pass.

His partner was to be Alistair Coupland, a venerable, near octogenarian member of many years standing, who was, as it turned out only briefly, impressed by Peter's comparative youth and athletic warming up. Peter was thrilled to be playing with someone of such quality. Alistair's on-court appearance was impeccable, the epitome of sporting elegance. From his pressed white flannels, spotless club shirt and gleaming tennis shoes to his pomaded hair and natty yachting cap, he exuded distinguished prowess, plus a faint aroma of bay rum.

Their opponents, an elderly French couple radiating a desiccated chic, gave him cause for unease, their glances informing him that he fell short of what they were used to. He knew he would have to overcome their suspicions by application, concentration and skill. As luck would have it, Alistair was left-handed, complementing Peter's right-handed play to enable them, in theory, to cover the court. But from the onset he proved to be a disappointment; he was inclined to hit the ball too hard, a solecism akin to shouting on your mobile, unnecessary and somehow ill-bred and rather vulgar. The jovial cries of "Six!!" as the ball soared out of play yet again were soon replaced with dark Gallic mutterings.

The game soon drifted hopelessly away from them. Peter consistently failed to return his opponent's serves and his play descended to the level of a myopic monkey swatting flies. Ridiculous. This was made worse by Alistair's encouragement and consistent kindness, generous to a fault - and the faults were all Peter's. He began to sink into a familiar pit of depression. On changing ends, his female opponent advised him to hit the ball more gently - "You are letting down



your partner" - and his misery mounted. The self destruction continued when a desperate swipe resulted in a painful self-inflicted blow and an audible "F***!". A brittle frost crept into the atmosphere...

Desperate and increasingly dysfunctional, he watched as Alistair received service, the ball skittering along the penthouse to fall perfectly placed in Peter's arc of swing. "Mine!" he bellowed, and unleashed a ferocious forehand.

It was Alistair's hearing aid, in combination with his thick hair and yachting cap, that saved him from a skull fracture. On being struck he had fallen like a poleaxed steer and the ambulance had been summoned immediately. Peter, paddling in the gore, was surprised to find out that only four stitches

had been required. His recent playing partners had no kind words. The situation was beyond apology.

Peter hoped he might be able to open some sort of dialogue with Alistair, a return match perhaps, but these overtures had been politely rebuffed and Liz Cavendish, the ever-exuberant club secretary, had cheerily suggested other clubs that Peter might like to consider. Peter bridled at this and huffily enquired if there were any other players of his handicap or worse that would like to play him. He was told, a little too quickly for his liking, no, not at the moment. Well, were there any court vacancies that would enable him to practise his skills?

Here he was more fortunate, for a regular player who had booked the graveyard 10pm slot for five days solo practice had just

cancelled. Peter booked the lot. And so it was that he made his lonely nightly pilgrimage to the court, a mantle of self-pity around his shoulders. He walked down the deserted corridors, enveloped in their night time hush. He needed to get changed but he simply couldn't face the other player. He sidled into the netted gloom of the Dedans and started to remove his trousers. He was startled by a voice emanating from the darkness.

"You know old chap, there is a changing room for that sort of thing." The voice, patrician in tone, was gently reproachful, almost sorrowful. Peter squinted into the darkened corner. He did not recognise the stranger sitting there.

"I'm terribly sorry, I didn't know anyone was there." And then in sudden hope: "You're not playing me, are you?" The man stood and Peter was thrilled to see a flash of light from his monocle. He was tall and had to crouch in the confined space. He extended a hand as he walked towards Peter. "Yes, I'm here for a game, my name's Aubrey and you are....?"

Peter, overcome with gratitude that the club should have found an opponent, stammered his name and, now changed, followed Aubrey onto the court. The man had a languid elegance and carried himself with an aristocratic bearing that spoke of the ruling class and entitlement. His next remark confirmed Peter's assessment.

"Can you lend me £500?"

It had always been Peter's experience in his dealings with the upper classes that they always seemed to feel they were doing him a tremendous favour in acknowledging his existence and that some recompense was expected, but this was a bit sudden. Nevertheless he was impressed by the sheer effrontery of the request; he felt it showed evidence of breeding. He usually carried a fair amount of cash but was reluctant to part with quite so much on such short an acquaintance.

"Sorry, I'm afraid I'm only carrying my card and the match fee, why do you need £500?"

Aubrey studied him with disappointment and let his monocle drop. "Oh, it doesn't matter, shall we begin with a knockabout?"

Peter felt uneasy, that he had somehow let himself down by not stumping up the cash like a proper gentleman would, but put his discomfiture to one side while they played.

Aubrey was the best player Peter had encountered. He understood the economy of the game and played with such precision that Peter felt honoured to be beaten with ease. He was generous with his advice. When he suggested they played some sets he gave Peter a handicap so generous that Peter felt he couldn't fail to win - but fail he did and the three sets were completed in 30 minutes without Peter winning a single game. But he was delighted for the instruction he had received at the hands of a master. His indebtedness to his opponent was deepened when Aubrey suggested 20 minutes of service tuition. Peter found himself galvanised with an almost supernatural enthusiasm by Aubrey's instructions as he rattled through a repertoire of serves that skimmed and bounced along the penthouse and dropped like dead birds into inaccessible corners of the court.

"So that's the bobble round arm serve?" "Well," answered Aubrey, "at the last count, excluding Ronaldson's Diablo, there were 73 variants of the bobble but that, as you rightly observe, was one of them."

And so began Peter's induction to the mystery of the serve, from the humble

Turn to Page 6

The de Laszlo Bowl is done for another year - RTC's version of the High - Low handicap doubles, with a tricky centre-line rule that means strategy and planning are crucial!

It has to be said, this has been the best de Laszlo in a long while – the number of entrants was up, as were the number of low handicap participants - truly a tournament that brings the whole club together.

Congratulations to both Owen Saunders, pictured right, handicap 36, and Freddie de Sibert, left, handicap 81, who won the final. Massive thanks as well to Owen for cooking up a storm of a barbecue on Saturday afternoon.



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bobble through the teasing railroad, the power of the picquet, the subtlety of the demi-picquet and the dizzying clamber up the side wall of the giraffe, Aubrey guided and coaxed Peter's ineffectual flailings into some semblance of control.

"Keep your game simple Peter, less is more," intoned the master, "you must practise the railroad and the bobble and tomorrow we will introduce the high lob to baffle your opponent. And that conclude today's play." For the court clock read 11.30pm.

Peter was overwhelmed at the perfection of the game, the complete joy of his evening. He felt there was only one thing he could say.

"Aubrey, I can't manage £500 I'm afraid...but would £200 be of any use to you?"

"My dear fellow, how civil of you," said Aubrey, folding the notes into the pocket of his tennis whites. "That would be very useful...and shall we say the same time tomorrow?" "Yes," laughed Peter, "I think that might be even more useful."

He watched Aubrey vanish in the direction of the changing room. Reluctant to follow, he collected his belongings from the Gallery, looked lovingly at the court and left, waving a joyful goodnight to the security guards.

The next four days were governed by a fresh devotion to the game. He no longer skulked into the Palace but strode in with purpose. With Aubrey, he sensed a new belonging and when he spotted his pal studying the racing pages of *The Times* in the sitting room, he grinned with pure joy. On court, a torrent of information was forthcoming: the terminology of the shots, the boast off the wall, the cut and drive, drop and volley and the exhilarating force for the Dedans.

Peter no longer felt overwhelmed. He was rewarded with fulsome praise and further guidance in the intricacies of the game. At the end of their hour, Peter felt such a glow of contentment that he was barely aware of Aubrey's murmured comments about a conspiracy of the bookmakers ensnaring him into a run of damnable misfortune at Hurst

Park. He was happy to press a further £200 into Aubrey's manicured hands. His loans seemed almost trifling compared to the riches heaped upon him in return - but still, it might be best to get some sort of framework for repayment in place.

"Whenever it's convenient you can always give the money to Richard to look after, if I'm not around," said Peter. "Richard?" queried Aubrey. "Yes, the chap who looks after the court timetable." "Oh, the booking wallah, yes, I'll leave it with him."

The next three late-night sessions passed in similar vein, with Peter hopelessly outplayed but the handicap system ensuring play was at least meaningful. The generosity of Aubrey's play had restored more than Peter's self-esteem on the court: it had bolstered his flagging will to live.

After their final game, Peter tried to express his gratitude but this was brushed aside with a cheerful "Think nothing of it dear boy, the pleasure has been entirely mine. But if you could see to advancing me an extension of our loan, there is," murmured Aubrey, "the King George the Sixth being held tomorrow, it would be criminal not to back the winner."

"Oh quite," enthused Peter. Having envisaged such an eventuality he had already been to the cash machine and handed over the now traditional £200.

They shook hands in farewell. "Oh by the way Aubrey, I never did catch your name," said Peter.

"Aubrey St John Harmsworth...and you?"

"Oh, Peter Taylor." And once more they shook hands.

Peter was delighted the next morning to receive a phone call from Richard that Trish Harvey was looking for a game and was Peter available. He could scarcely contain his excitement at the prospect of exhibiting his new-found prowess on court. In buoyant mood, he entered the booking office.

"Thanks so much for arranging those games with Aubrey," he gushed, "it's been an education, actually a privilege." Richard

looked at him blankly. "That's £70 please."

"Cheap at the price" quipped Peter.

"Incidentally, did Aubrey leave me any cash, he said he might."

"Aubrey who?" spluttered Richard.

"Harmsworth, the fellow you organised my games with - Aubrey St John Harmsworth."

Richard gazed at him in bewilderment, then said, slowly, "Follow me, will you Peter." He led Peter down the corridor to the honours board, where he pointed to a faded gilded entry. "Do you mean *that* Aubrey St John Harmsworth, the 1934 club champion? *That* Aubrey St John Harmsworth?"

After his match with Trish, a thoughtful Peter returned to book another game. Richard was at the desk and Zak was constructing tennis balls. "Yes, got one tomorrow," said Richard. "The 10pm graveyard slot. Is that just you...or is Aubrey coming as well?" His attempt at keeping a straight face failed.

Peter thanked him coldly for the booking and, with what dignity he could muster, headed for the showers, sniggering echoing behind him.

The weak winter sun was setting over the Grandstand at Kempton Park. Aubrey, ankle deep in a scree of discarded betting slips, stood gazing sadly at the enclosure where so much hope had paraded, hope that now lay dead and crumpled underfoot. But with the optimism of the inveterate sportsman he thrilled at the possibilities that tomorrow may bring, the golden opportunities of the Gamespirit Chase at Newbury, the Victor Chandler, Ascot, the Roland Merryck at Wetherby, all glistened before him.

Of greater importance right now was the proximity of the Desert Orchid Chase; for that funds were needed, a substantial win would prepare him for the rich pickings of the Irish Gold Cup in February. Where to turn to? The answer came without shame. Friend Taylor was to be the gift that just kept on giving. Yes, a thousand pounds should suffice.

Warmed by that thought, Aubrey St John Harmsworth stepped through the wall in front of him to begin the walk to Hampton Court Palace.

Ever played a tournament where you substitute handicap for Bisesques? Four RTC members gave it a go at a one-day inter-club tournament at Radley at the end of July. Giles Doy, Katy Doy, Sarah Lambie and Owen Saunders paired up with Tom Robertson of Hardwick to compete in a round robin of 10 doubles matches throughout the day, up against teams from Oxford, Radley and "East Anglia" (Cambridge and Prested Hall).

Some RTC players interpreted the relaxed atmosphere of the tournament a little too liberally, choosing to explicitly flout the "predominantly white clothing rule" [see photo]. The distraction technique seemed to work as RTC won five out of 10 matches, coming second in the league table only to the home team, Radley.



Tempted to give it a try? We are organising a Bisque tournament at RTC on Saturday 2nd November - ask the Pros or Giles Doy for information and to sign up. Not sure what a Bisque is? Rules 23.3 and 23.4 of the rules of Real Tennis have all the details.

Rule 23.3 Bisque:

A "Bisque" is one point in a set conceded to an opponent. The player receiving the Bisque may take it to win one point in each set at any time subject to the following: (a) he may not take it during a Rest; (b) if Server, he may not take it after serving one fault; (c) if he takes it to win or to defend a Chase, he may not

do so before the time comes to change sides. Then, if there is only one Chase, he may take it and need not change sides or he may take it after changing sides but, after he has passed the Net, he may not go back again; and (d) if there are two Chases the players must change sides before the Bisque is taken to win or to defend either of them.

Rule 23.4 Half-Bisque: The player receiving a Half-Bisque may take it:- (a) to call Chase Off and so to annul a Chase about to be played for, or (b) to annul a first fault served by him; or (c) to add a second fault to one served by his opponent. Apart from (c) the conditions regarding taking a Bisque apply equally to a Half-Bisque.

I hope that makes it all clear!

Giles Doy

By George, he's won it!

Congratulations to George Sleightholme (pictured left) who, with diligent practice and play, overcame the young up and coming Ivan Barker in the final to become the Lathom Browne Handicap Singles Champion 2018/19!

The Lathom Browne is an historic tournament, and we are delighted to add George's name to the honours board.



News in Brief

Still nifty over fifty

Congratulations to RTC members who won the British T&RA Over 50 Doubles Championship at Prested Hall. Peter Wright and David Watson beat Simon Barker (also RTC) and Peter Holmes 6/4 6/5 in the final.

Your safety, your responsibility

RTC Members: do look out for a new sign on the club noticeboard concerning your safety on court, specifically on the subject of eye protection. Do remember that Real Tennis is potentially a dangerous game involving a hard ball travelling at speed. All members should play the game with that in mind – think safety first.

Individual members are responsible for taking any precautions they feel are appropriate when playing. The game is played at members' own risk. Unfortunately RTC cannot recommend any specific equipment for protection as none has currently been suitably tested in Real Tennis conditions by any tennis body, including the T&RA.

Juniors update

The Junior Autumn Term programme is progressing very well. We have 5 groups running this term (from Beginner to Elite) which are proving very popular. A number of juniors are also regularly booking games which is paying dividends as their handicaps are improving fast. Particular mention to Ross Morrison, George Parsons and Henry Weekes who are playing at least weekly.

Sarah Parsons

Baffled? Stick with me...

If you think Real Tennis is a niche sport, think again...I've recently had a rare opportunity to play an even more obscure version of tennis, called Stické.

We know that lawn tennis evolved in the 1870s through Major Walter Wingfield, who invented a version of Real Tennis that could be played outdoors on a lawn. He called it 'Sphairistike' (Greek for "playing ball"). Wingfield sold boxes with two posts, a net, rackets and rubber balls, plus instructions about laying out the court and actually playing the game.

Then in the late 19th century, another variant emerged, combining elements of real and lawn tennis, and took its name from a shortened form of 'Sphairistike' – Stické.

Over 50 courts were built throughout the British Empire and in the Edwardian period, Stické was a popular recreation at many country houses and one of the few games played by both men and women. It is played with standard lawn tennis racquets and low pressure balls in an enclosed court, which is somewhat similar to a real tennis court in shape but smaller and different in construction. Play uses all the basics of lawn tennis and the same scoring system, with the addition of side and back walls.

As in real tennis, there is a penthouse, used throughout the game as a playing surface and on which the service has to land to start each point. Some courts have a penthouse only down the side, while others also have a penthouse at both ends.

Today, only three courts survive in the world: at Knightshayes, a National Trust property in Devon, Hartham Park in Wiltshire and at Shimla in India. There are only around 100 or so active players worldwide so



The Stické court at Knightshayes, with David Fursdon. The court dress code is more relaxed than in Real Tennis!

I am very fortunate to know David Fursdon, Lord Lieutenant of Devon, who is a fellow Trustee on the board of the National Trust and who kindly invited me to an evening of doubles at Knightshayes.

The first impression is of a slimmed down lightweight real tennis court without any openings. But as soon we start to play, it's a different game. The ball bounces more slowly, higher and sits up, so the rallies tend to be long and fun - especially as it's hard to hit it low and put it away for a winning shot.

An opponent's shot hitting the opposite back wall hard and low is tough to pick up - but carries risk as it loses the point if it returns into the net before the second bounce. The serve has to land at least once on the

penthouse but can then go anywhere. Serve alternates with games so the ball is served back along the penthouse (the wrong way as it were) every second game.

The internal roof structure is out of court if the ball hits it directly from the racket but not if it hits a playing surface (including the penthouse) first. This causes odd bounces and unexpected changes of direction.

We had an energetic and evenly-matched three sets; many thanks to David and our fellow players on the evening, James and Tim, for hosting me. If ever you get a chance to play, do give it a go. Now, I'm plotting a return match for David at RTC!

Michael Day

National League

It's early days in the season, so Divisions 1 & 2 were combined into one single division because of a lack of entries (three teams in total). It was a similar story for Division 3, which was combined with Division 4. To give a quick wrap-up:

Div 1/2 - Josh Smith is playing with Roman Krznaric in RTC 1 - no matches played yet.

Div 3/4 - Phil Dunn, Simon Barker and David Watson form the RTC 2 team with Tom Freeman and James Watson together in RTC 3. The latter have lost their first match, the former are yet to play.

Div 5 - Jed Dalton, James Hamblin, Zack Smart and James Sohl make up RTC 4 – they have won the only match they've played.

Div 6 - David Blizzard, Simon Boorne, Nick Jeffery, Geoffrey Russell, Fred Satow and Simon Fox form RTC 5 and have lost their only match so far.

Div 8 - Dick Cowling, John Leach, Owen Saunders, Doug Sheperdigan and Paul Wright (RTC 6): played two and won one.

Div 9 - Alex Fell, John Mather, George Parsons, Julian Sheraton-Davis, Ben Simonds-Gooding and Julian Webb (RTC 7) have also played two and won one.

Phil Dunn

Pipped by Petworth

Ten RTC members took some crisp Autumn sunshine with them as they headed down to Petworth House in early October for RTC's first away social of the season. Giles Doy and Richard East started the match with a tight loss against Rhona Russell and David Hay, losing a deciding third set 6/3. The fixture score returned to parity after Nick Hyams and Freddie de Sibert made light work of their opponents with some ferocious serves, winning their match 6/1 6/4. While most other players tucked into lunch, Owen Saunders and Chris Swan got stuck into a three-set thriller, and despite losing the first set 6/5 they fought back to take the second 6/3. But it wasn't to be, losing the third set 6/5. Peter Brown and Katy Doy were too strong in the fourth match, with Peter's persistent volleying making the difference in a 6/2 6/3 victory. Sophie Dannreuther and John Halliday went into the final fixture with the overall score finely in the balance. After edging a close first set, Petworth re-grouped and took the second set comfortably. John's volleying from the galleries kept posing questions, while Sophie's floor shots kept finding the gap in the middle of the court. But it wasn't enough to get over the line; pinned down at the receiving end at 5 games-all, they couldn't find a way through. Petworth won the overall fixture 3 matches to 2 in a fun, competitive and tight day of tennis enjoyed by all. A big thank you to our Petworth hosts - look out for dates on the home fixture soon! Giles Doy