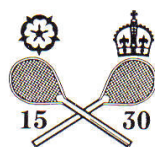


# THE ROYAL TENNIS COURT

## Hampton Court Palace



The Spring Newsletter 2009  
*Number eighty-seven*

# chairman's chat

I am pleased to be able to say that this is a newsletter packed with good news of the club's triumphs domestically and internationally. The quality of some of the reporting and the richness of the prose has reached new heights (or is it lows? – I have seen the unexpurgated versions!).

The letter accompanying the emailed tennis diary is regularly full of news of impending events to encourage you to participate even more, either as players or in support of club teams. Despite the recession, the club is thriving, and all credit to the professional team.

I am also very pleased to let you know that we have co-opted to the board James Sohl and Paddy Sweetnam. At 31, James is the youngest person to have been co-opted for many a year, and this was a deliberate move. We wanted someone who would be identified with the thriving younger section of the membership. He is a fine player, full of fresh ideas and focused on the future of the Club, and he has direct experience of club management at the family business – the London Tennis Academy. London.UK.

James will be chairman of the Tennis & Tournaments sub-committee. He will be seeking volunteers to join the sub-committee to assist him with different aspects of the role in due course, so if you get the "call" I do hope you will agree to serve.

In inviting Paddy to join the board we had very much in mind the fact that we will inevitably, due to the passage of time, lose at some stage some of the experienced businessmen who have contributed over the years to

our affairs. Paddy has 20 years in general management, latterly as executive chairman of Berkeley Homes Plc, a major housebuilder. He now runs his own consultancy business. He is relatively fresh to the game, immensely enthusiastic and, as in the case of James, has lots of new ideas. I have forgiven him for regularly thrashing me on court.

We will be proposing Paddy and James are elected to the board at the AGM in May, and I hope we will have your wholehearted support.

Finally, I have been "cautioned" about the little jokes in previous editions, so on this occasion I will return to the familiar equine theme. Subject to getting to post in one piece, the Champion Hurdle on 10 March should be won by Binocular – and a return of approximately 150% in five minutes should not be ignored in these straitened times. But I regret that I am unable to offer refunds, as, like the banks, I shall suffer an "impairment" if he fails to deliver.

*(Disclaimer: horses can fall but rarely get up to go on and win.)*

**Peter Ohlson**



## Wood's Words

*Head professional Nick Wood says you can help yourself and the pros if you avoid hitting the heights*

**About three times a week the professionals are seen dangling from windows collecting stray balls. It's a mystery to how they get there! Or is it?**

Please help the pros' safety by keeping your shots on the floor (where the traditionalists play). What an easy way to improve your game: simply keep the ball off the roof (this advice doesn't refer to the serve). By not putting the ball 'up', you do not give your opponent a chance of an easy shot.

Why does the ball go 'up'? Well, the main reasons are

bad shot selection and then overhitting. If you choose to 'force' the ball, then you'll have to suffer the consequences; it's best to leave that shot in your bag with the one iron!

My advice is to strive constantly to hit the ball to a good length – the firstst bounce should be at a yard worse than last, or hazard 1 yard. You will win points, or your opponent is more likely to lift the ball, making your next shot easier.

In the meantime, we'll keep up our thrice-weekly ball collection.

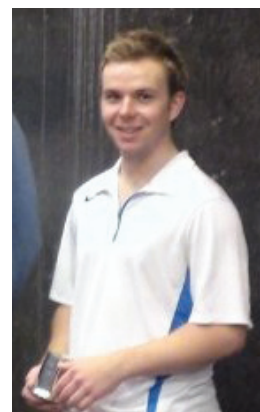
## ● CLUB NEWS ●

### Club nights

The club is continuing to arrange sociable club nights for members and any guests they want to bring along. It's an ideal opportunity for a new player to have a relaxed taste of what real tennis is all about. The next evenings are on **Saturday 4 April** and **Saturday 2 May**, and are open to players of all handicaps, with enjoyable doubles the order of the day.

### Ben Matthews

Ben (right) reached the final of the Seacourt Silver Racquet in February, eventually running into in-form 17-year-old Conor Medlow, who had earlier accounted for Stefan King. It was Ben's second final of the winter, having lost out to home pro Andy Chinneck in the Browning Cup at Holyport in December.





# Playing the Field

*RTC's leading players are one win away from glory in the prestigious Field Trophy*

**M**ake a note in your diary: Sunday 15 March at Moreton Morrell. That's when RTC will be playing Cambridge in the final of the Field Trophy. According to captain Simon Barker, this is the highpoint of the season: "It is the most prestigious tournament for amateur players. The Field Trophy is the FA Cup of real tennis."

It has been five years since Hampton Court last won that fine trophy, and the victory was earned in the same venue against the same club. It was a memorable day for the 20-odd RTC members who journeyed to support the team, in a school bus driven by Chris Ronaldson.

This year, however, things look a little bit different. Despite a convincing run to the final, Barker thinks that RTC are the underdogs.

"On paper Cambridge are the stronger team," says Simon. "This is an amateur competition so Rob Fahey won't be playing for Cambridge. To be eligible, players must be worse than 6.6 handicap and, on handicap, they are stronger than us in both singles and doubles."

The cup run started in the most positive fashion, a 5-0 drubbing of Jesmond Dene up in Newcastle. The quarter-final against Queen's was played at Hampton Court, where a full gallery saw David Watson beat John Prens (a former world rackets champion) in two sets. Simon Barker then beat Harry Eddis 6-2, 6-3, playing, he says, one of the best matches of his life. James Watson lost his singles in three but Fred Satow and Phil Squire teamed up to win the first doubles 6-3, 5-6, 6-3. The final match of the evening saw the first doubles pair of James Sohl and Karen Hird facing Dominic Wright and Andrew Reed Thomson. RTC lost the first set 6-2 but managed to squeak



*Field of dreams: the gleaming prize on offer in the final on 15 March*

the second set 6-5 after a tight struggle, with the score running 3-3, 4-3, 4-4, 5-4, 5-5 and 6-5. In the third set, RTC led 5-4, with Queen's serving and threatening to catch up. Then Karen hit the shot of her life, laying a chase of one yard (or close to it), a beautifully weighted shot down the main wall. On the changeover, Queen's were unable to beat the chase and so the game and match went to RTC, closing out a solid 4-1 victory.

"Karen played out of her skin," commented Simon. "James and Karen played doubles as a pair, as doubles should be played. It's rare that I see that."

That victory for Hampton Court put them into the semi-final against Seacourt. This was a true battle to the wire, the result hanging on the final game of the final doubles rubber.

In the singles, David Watson lost by a hair to Paul Weaver 6-5 in the third set,

but Simon Barker kept up his unbeaten record with a two-set victory over Charlie Danby. James Watson lost in two sets, which gave Seacourt a 2-1 lead. It was up to the RTC doubles pairs to save the match.

Mark McMurrugh and Fred Satow won in two sets to even the match at 2-2, leaving the outcome on the shoulders of James Sohl and Karen Hird. They didn't let us down and they won in two, but the final set was another dramatic squeaker, going to 6-5.

To the question of whether you play better with supporters, Simon replied: "Both David Watson and myself play better with a big supporting gallery. I certainly play significantly better when there are a large number of people watching. David almost always plays his best tennis in the Field Trophy. So it is important that we have some vociferous support."

So, as we said at the beginning, keep 15 March free and give the team the support that could help beat the odds and bring the Field Trophy back to Hampton Court.

*NB A FAMILY FEUD? Karen Hird's brother, Robert, could be playing at No 1 for Cambridge. Karen and Robert are two-thirds of triplets.*

**Martin Bronstein**

## **SUPPORT RTC AT MORETON MORRELL**

**Fancy cheering on the RTC team on Sunday 15 March? Contact the pros for details of travel arrangements.**

## **CLUB NEWS ● CLUB NEWS ● CLUB NEWS ● CLUB NEWS**

### **Court repairs**

The tennis court was closed for four days in mid-January for repairs to the bandeau and repainting of various lines. While the bandeau at the hazard end has

enjoyed a new lease of life (leading to your over-hitting editor setting far more hazard chases than he would prefer to), some faulty paint – possibly not helped by the harsh temperatures – failed to dry

in the corner of the floor at the hazard end, leaving an area of floor that was first sticky and then began to peel. The club is planning to remedy this as soon as possible with a new lick of paint.

# Royals flush Down Under

*Richard East looks back on another memorable Boomerang Cup adventure*

**B**oth Mark McMurrugh's side and mine turned up in Melbourne in time for the start of the tournament, in itself a minor miracle, and then set about winning our pool matches in both the Boomerang team event, as well as the Handicap Doubles event, with a furious dedication to the honour of the club, only matched by the furious pace of the ingestion of Leaping Lizard or what ever else was going, when not furiously attending social events at a rate that would have killed the average ox.

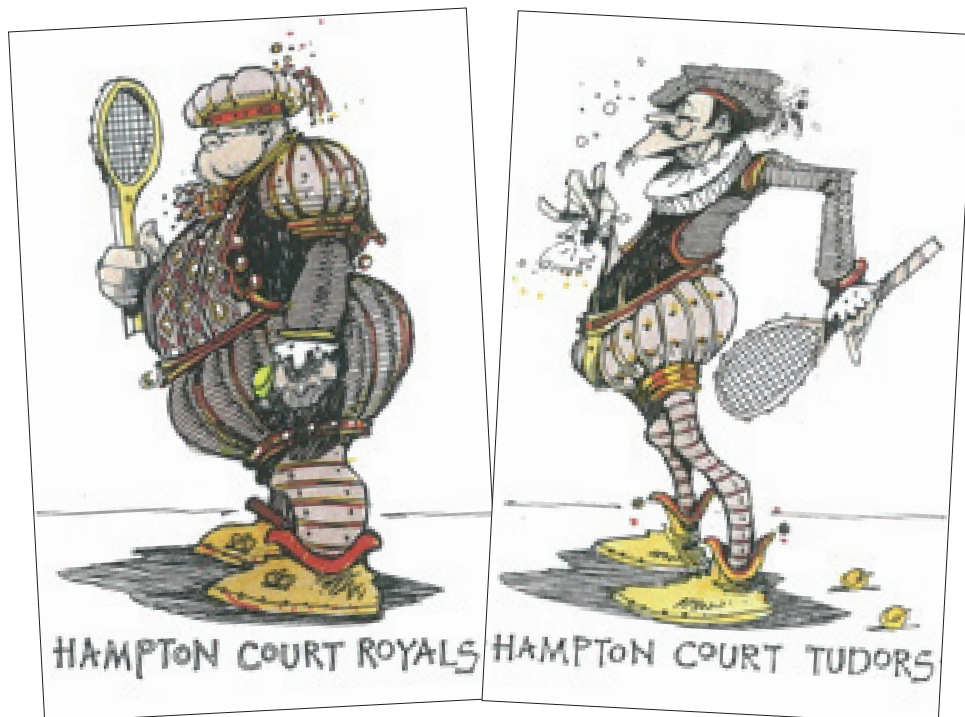
As a result of the above, and a bit of tinkering with the format, both teams were still alive in the Boomerang at the start of the second week, and most of us in the Handicap Doubles too. But then in the Boomerang, the Tudors sadly went down to the Hazard Belles, at enormous handicap difference (one serve only, banned tambour etc). The Royals went through, beating Henry Turnbull's side 4-0, to play Hardwick in the last 16, and then we beat Hardwick comfortably 3-1 to reach the last eight on the penultimate day.

In the doubles, Sue Haswell progressed to the last eight, and Alec Miller and I also did so by beating Nick Carew Hunt and Owen Saunders 8-2. (Our draw was a stitch-up by the Royal Melbourne club to get rid of one of the RTC pairs; they drew the two Newmarket pairs against each other for the same reason.)

But then we all blew out on the last Friday. In our Boomerang match against Jim Stephen's Ballarat side, James Wheeler of RTC played while injured when he should not have done and Nick Crunt blew up again, so the win for Alec and me obtained by disabling Wendy Whitehead with an indescribable injury had no effect on the result, and Ballarat cruised through.

Then we unfortunately had a four-hour interlude, during which Sue Haswell lost her doubles, again giving handicap points away (which she hates), before I had to go on court with one Alec Miller, who had had hours in the sun between matches, to compete for a place in the Handicap Doubles semi-finals.

We were 6-1 down before we woke



up, and 7-1 down before we started playing. From there, 5-8 was not that bad a result. Don't blame yourself, Alec, I was on court too.

During the interlude, Alec had had a very loud (but presumed private) conversation with Josef Brunhuber, the (Melbourne-resident) last Emperor of Austria.

Making it to the last eight in each tournament down here represents for me the apogee to my career in my 66th year, and I now plan to invoke the RTC youth policy to FIND a REPLACEMENT for ME. I resigned at the closing dinner on the last night, but my resignation was immediately spurned by all those who had a vote (Doris and the dwarf).

On the upside, Julian Snow failed again, and we have now started a dining club for all those who have ever beaten him in a handicap doubles, with him scheduled to speak at its first outing (Melbourne 2011), when I plan, as above, to be present but NOT as captain (unless anybody suggests that Susie F should replace me).

It's been a wonderful tournament. Practice and ever so careful team selection pays off. Next time, we need a couple of fast-improving youngsters to balance the overweight we have in experience. Owen Saunders was a great

addition, but even at his age a little too heavy to challenge for the title of Real Tennis Dwarf Tossee of the year. Nevertheless, he has established himself as No 1 candidate and hot prospect for the inaugural title of Real Tennis Monocular World Champion, a sport we plan to push for the Paralympics in 2012. Perhaps the club could have word with Tessa Jowell.

I think that about sums it up. Newmarket lost in the Boomerang final to a new Melbourne side, run by a very entertaining man called Andrew Schneider (how Australian is that?), but Eric the Nutter and Ken Smith won the top flight in the Doubles, thus qualifying for the "I've beaten Julian Snow" club (which they won't be invited to join - and anyway they are unlikely to be around in 2011 after Alec Miller has rearranged their facial physiognomy).

And Alice Wheeler, happily paired with Nick Namby Pamby, won the lower flight in the Doubles, after disposing of Alec and myself.

In all, it was the best ever result under my leadership, but we need a new team manager now. Over to the committee to appoint my successor. To happier times.

**PS** Applications for the Newport Handicap doubles (18-21 June) are open now.



# The start of a two-year itch

*A first-timer's recollections from the Boomerang Cup*

**F**riday 16 January – what a day! Days like this are why I signed up for the Boomerang. In the morning we play our final group match, coming from 1–0 down to win.

No time for a post-match celebratory glass of Leaping Lizard as it's straight off to Kooyong to watch the Australian Open warm-up tournament. Then straight to the MCG for the one-day international between Australia and South Africa. Dinner in the Long Room restaurant with window seats and perfect view. I cheering the Yarpies all the home (for the first and last time ever).

After a day like this, all I can think of is George Best and of how a waiter found him in bed with Miss World



*Owen Saunders shows the two-handed dexterity that won so many games*

and thousands of pounds scattered around the room. "George, where did it all go wrong?" the waiter asked.

A few days later, when I mention I can only see in one eye, we discover that there is another monocular player in the tournament – an Aussie called Jeff. Sensing my one opportunity to win a world title, I propose a one-off game for the title of real tennis world champion (Monocular). Jeff has a sore hamstring and reluctantly declines.

Unfortunately, Gina D'Etorre then challenges me. Despite being biocular, Gina proposes to wear an eyepatch. In the ensuing contest (stipulated by Susie Falkner as quickest to thread a needle), I am soundly beaten.

So now the biocular and monocular real tennis world champions are both Australians. Bloody Australians.

**Owen Saunders**

# Aiken breaking hearts

*Oh Carolina! Batman (aka Richard East) and Robin are hit squarely in the handicaps after showing early form*

**A**fter the predictable embarrassed shuffling of feet, inability to meet my steadfast gaze, and lame excuses, the number of those left to go contest the nicest handicap doubles in the world for those with handicaps of 30 or worse came down to three from RTC. When even Leamington got three players there, you will understand the depths of my despair.

Not only had I got the whole of the USA decked up in bunting for our arrival, but I had even had an election put on for our delectation. Indeed, on the evening of my arrival on 4 November, while sitting in the bar at the revamped curry restaurant in the Hotel Aiken, surrounded by rabid Republicans of the loony right variety, all pontificating about how the Bradley effect was going to cut in any minute now and blow this upstart Obama away, I was able to advise said crowd that they should start to watch the TV screen behind the bar, on which their man McCain was at that moment making his concession speech.

The three who travelled were Alec Miller (two-times winner), Richard East (yours truly, also two-times winner), and 70-year-old aspirant Robin Mulcahy. I had fixed up Alec to play with Kip Curren from Newport – larger than life, twice as ugly and three times as noisy (a perfect partner for Alec, come to think of it), while I planned to play my usual sedate game with Robin.

As it transpired, we were well into the party swing of it by the time we had to go on court. Kip and Alec had no trouble interrupting their interminable feasting to secure passage to the semi-finals, while Robin and I were drawn against local favourite Marge Goodyear, playing with that turncoat George Hayward from Leamington. Somewhat to Robin's surprise, we crushed them.

Then we had to play the captain of polo, partnered by a smartass New Yorker, and yet again we won comfortably, to Robin's amazement. After this, we went up against two patricians from Boston and smeared them too. I think it was after this third win, interspersed as they had been with nonstop revelling, that Robin, who is a doctor, expressed the view to me that

we were doing rather well, given the way I was behaving day and night.

"Just you wait," I advised. "They can see me coming from a long way off, and I have won here before." Our next round was against a resurrected Hayward and Marge (how did that happen, I wonder?) and, *mirabile dictu*, our handicaps had been negatively adjusted. "This is not fair!" exclaimed Robin. I snarled at him: "You beat the local favourite on her home court in front of her home crowd in America and expect fairness? Get a life. Let's just beat them again." Which we did.

After this, now in the final in his first ever tournament, Robin thought nothing could go wrong. You should have heard his wail when the handicaps for the final were announced, us against the local bankroller for the tournament and his smart Boston lawyer. It was as fair as it was ever going to get. As I said to Robin, after we had lost the final 6–4 in the third set, it would have helped us somewhat if we hadn't put four unforced errors into the net from 3–2 up to gift them the next three games, but he would not be consoled.

Much the same pattern of bandit handicapping and poor shot selection had taken Alec and Kip out at the semi-final stage, but at the end all that remained was to drink the bar dry at the finals-day brunch, go to the Witney field for the afternoon to watch the polo and quaff whatever was on offer in the hospitality tent, sleep off the effects of five nights on the tiles for a couple of hours, and go to the Diwali and try to pull ourselves together ready to leave. When you think that in earlier years we have gone from Aiken to Washington for a match, and then on to Philadelphia for another tournament, one marvels at our recuperative powers.

The next overseas event will be Newport, unless I decide to have a little side trip to Paris in the meantime. Volunteers are invited to apply, without standing on ceremony or being bashful about it. Ask Robin or Alec if you want a reference, or for that matter John Clark or Oliver Buckley, whose tour write-ups appeared in the last issue.

**Your ever emollient overseas tour manager, Richard East**

# Welcome to the board...

## James Sohl

Some people are born with silver spoons in their mouths; James Sohl was born with a racket in his hand instead. He owned a sawn-off squash racket at the age of two, was playing in lawn tennis tournaments at eight and rose to the higher echelons of the junior game before turning pro.

It was at the age of 24, however, that James realised that he would never be the reincarnation of Fred Perry. "I had to ask myself some very hard questions," he recalls. "How good could I be? I decided that 400 in the world was about as far as I could go, and that would take another four years. It simply wouldn't be enough to earn a living." So the outdoor game's loss was real tennis's gain, as he gave up competitive lawn tennis and turned his

attention to the royal game while putting his sports science degree to use in his work at the family business, the Sutton Junior Tennis Centre (now the Sutton Tennis Academy). His father had been "secretly playing" real tennis for 18 months in an attempt to get a head-start on James. Sadly for him, 18 months wasn't enough.

Despite having to get to grips with the game's peculiarities ("the stupid back wall was my enemy at first"), he swiftly worked his handicap down from an initial 50 and it now stands at 14.7. On 15 March he will be an integral part of the RTC team in the Field Trophy final at Moreton Morrell.

Off the court, meanwhile, James has helped to expand the Sutton academy through rebranding and the development of new programmes for emerging players. His experience in the running of the academy is sure to stand



him in good stead in his role as chairman of the tennis and tournaments committee at RTC.

With all that to keep him busy, not to mention organising events for the BMW car club, one wonders how he manages to get anything else done. But with a wedding coming up in May, he may have to find the time...

## Paddy Sweetnam

Paddy Sweetnam will bring a successful business pedigree to the board, having worked for several years in planning around the world before becoming a property developer, first in a variety of senior roles at Berkeley Homes and more recently with his own consultancy firm. His career has taken him to many corners of the Earth, from the Middle East to Libya, the Far East and even as far as Cardiff, giving him an almost unique appreciation of such diverse foreign cultures.

Paddy was a latecomer to real tennis, having taken it up as recently as 2004 in his early 50s. "I had one try some

years earlier at Queen's at a corporate bash hosted by Christopher Griffith-Jones, aka "Bomber", and had always fancied a go when I had more time," he recalls. "I called Chris after I fled the corporate world and started my own company locally."

Possibly because of his late introduction to the game, few RTC members can match him for enthusiasm on the court, and as a result his game is still improving bit by bit. But that should come as no surprise, as sport is clearly in Paddy's blood: he played rugby at full-back for Hong Kong, among others, and was a sub-three-hour marathon runner - which, he says, "explains the knackered knees!". He also took up squash in the early 1970s and confesses that he still plays lawn tennis like a squash player.



Now free from the shackles of long-distance running, Paddy has been known to enjoy a long day watching rugby at Twickenham, followed by a late-night Big Mac. (A tip for all members: if you're going to indulge in a cholesterol binge, make sure you're not spotted by the club's head pro!)

## DAVID CULL

David Cull, who was a tennis professional at Lord's from 1957 to 2002 and the head professional there for 27 years from 1975, died on 15 February. Such was his contribution to MCC, and to tennis in particular, that he was awarded a members' testimonial in 2002 and a special dinner in the Long Room, and he was awarded honorary life membership of the Club.

David will be missed throughout the world of tennis, and especially at Lord's.

## ● WINNING GALLERY ●

**Bernard Weatherill** has won his first **Seal Salver**, defeating Brian Rich in the final. In a competition where your age is your handicap, Bernard (far right) had to give Brian a 23 allowance but he still managed to open up a commanding 7-3 lead in the first-to-nine match before Brian had to retire. No mean feat, considering Brian has won the title five times in the past 10 years.





# News from the pros

By Nick Wood

## Australian Open

It seems very strange travelling halfway round the world only to bump into Richard East! (Richard was thoroughly enjoying himself with food, wine, sunshine, and oh yeah, some tennis).

Melbourne had been invaded by pale-skinned, sun-seeking, winter escapees, and why not? It is a great place to go! The hospitality, facilities, location and entertainment are all there. If you are tempted, why not start saving up for the 2011 Boomerang Cup, or the other possibility would be to improve your handicap to zero and join Ben and me for the 2010 Oz Open!

It was then time to fight for court time and get some practice. It worked out well – sightseeing during the day and a good workout on court in the cooler part of the evenings. We had three days to get over jetlag and prepare for the Boomerang Pro/Am event, where at the tournament dinner, held at the amazing MCG, the professional players were auctioned – a case of parading on stage while crazed fans throw money at you.

The Pro/Am was a fantastic success, with all the group matches ending up extremely close, sadly without success for the Matthews/Wood faithfuls.

On to the Oz Open – not the game going on just down the road at Melbourne Park, where the likes of Federer and Nadal were swanning around, but the real Open at RMTTC, Sherwood St, Richmond. For Ben it was a brick wall: Ruairaidh Gunn, seeded two, was in no mood to let some young talent step on to his parade ground. And when I had my chance in the semi-final, I threw the whole toolbox at him without much success. Not to say he was invincible but on this day, on his court, he wasn't to be budged.

So on to the doubles, in which Bryn Sayers, Ben's partner, valiantly strode on to court despite gastro-something or other and gave it his best shot but had to retire. I had paired up with the 'Snowman', who has been living in Melbourne for three years with no sign of a tan yet! Julian and I won the title in 2006, were kicked out in 2007, runners-up in 2008 and, as it ended up, runners-up in 2009. The final, although a loss, was still one of the most thrilling matches of my career.

Thank you to Stef and Lesley for keeping the club running so smoothly while we were away. I'm sure Stef prefers it when Ben and I are not getting under his feet!

## Junior programme

After the success of the introduction of the junior programme in December, we will be repeating the coaching sessions during the Easter break.

Any youngster of up to 14 years, be they members or non-members, are welcome to sign up to some fun coaching at the Royal Tennis Court. The coaching sessions are as follows: 9 April 2pm, 10 April 10am, 11 April 10am, 12 April 10am, 13 April 10am, 14 April 2pm, 15 April 10am.

At a cost of just £5, it's a great way to entertain your children, teach them skills and generally have a fun time. To sign up, please contact the pros.

## Pro shop

The pro shop is almost complete – have you seen the smart new chairs for the members to relax in after a tiring game of tennis?

We are fast approaching the end of the 2009 season but there is still plenty of tennis to be played. The Lathom Browne handicap singles is progressing – but please assist by arranging your games as soon as possible.

The pros will be helping (ie badgering) you to fit the group matches in before the end of March, so that we can progress to the Lathom Browne Finals.

## Handicap doubles

How quickly is time passing by? Last July we held a very successful tournament – the RTC Handicap Doubles – and it is now time to sign up for the 2009 event. Please look out for the entry form for more information.

## PRO RESULTS

### Australian Open

**Singles, 1st rd:** Ruairaidh Gunn bt Ben Matthews 6–1 6–0 6–2; Nick Wood bt Peter Escourt 6–0 6–0 6–2. **Quarter-finals:** Wood bt Frank Filippelli 6–4 6–2 6–3. **Semi-finals:** Rob Fahey bt Bryn Sayers w-o; Gunn bt Wood 6–0 6–5 6–5. **Final:** Fahey bt Gunn 6–5 6–2 6–4.

**Doubles, semi-finals:** Fahey & Gunn bt Filippelli & Tabley, 6–1 6–2 6–3; Snow & Wood bt Happell & Richardson, 4–6 6–3 6–3 6–2. **Final:** Fahey & Gunn bt Snow & Wood 6–3 5–6 6–3 6–4.

### Browning Cup (handicap)

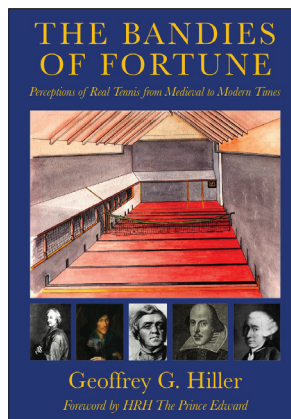
**Quarter-finals:** Andy Chinneck bt Stefan King 6–4 4–6 6–4; Ben Matthews bt Adrian Kemp 6–5 6–5. **Semi-finals:** Chinneck bt Andrew Knibbs 5–6 6–1 6–4; Matthews bt Angus Williams 2–6 6–3 6–3. **Final:** Chinneck bt Matthews 6–4 6–1.

## Read all about it

A new book from Geoffrey Hiller, *The Bandies of Fortune*, is a scholarly appraisal of the social status of real tennis through the ages as seen through the writings of poets, dramatists and prose writers.

The book examines how writers have enriched and enlivened their work through tennis imagery, metaphor and analogy. Additionally, an index to allusions to tennis in English literature lists every literary reference to real tennis known by the author, from the 14th century to the present.

*The Bandies of Fortune* is due to be published in April; hardback edition £20 plus £2.50 P&P. Please email orders or enquiries to [kathryn@ronaldsonpublications.co.uk](mailto:kathryn@ronaldsonpublications.co.uk); the book will also be available online at [www.ronaldsonpublications.co.uk](http://www.ronaldsonpublications.co.uk).



# A vicious cycle

*RTC member Richard Barber decided real tennis wasn't punishing enough – so he rode 931 miles instead*

**W**e made it! By bike from Land's End to John O'Groats on a sunny June afternoon, 19 days and 931 miles later. The team – four friends from Oxford days, all in our mid-60s – had decided that an attempt to recover our lost youth was in order.

Things which stand out in retrospect are: the continuous hills of Cornwall and Devon; riding 70 miles in a day against the wind from south of Bristol to Tewkesbury; the three most fearsome hills of the journey – the Cheddar Gorge in Somerset, Shap in Cumbria and the infamous Berriedale Braes south of Wick; my three punctures and two tumbles; the gear mechanism shearing clean off one of our bikes on the steepest Scottish hill, obliging its owner to abandon it and complete the last 50 miles on a borrowed child's mountain bike, pedalling with his knees round his ears; and the relentless daily struggle into my "armour" of double-layered padded Lycra to tackle yet another 50–60 miles into the unknown.

What a memorable moment it was to see the sunlit sea stretching out to Orkney ahead of us, and to ride four abreast for those last 200 yards to the finishing line, singing Harry Lauder's famous song "Keep right on to the end of the road....". We resisted the temptation to ride another few hundred yards to the shore of the North Sea and throw our bikes into the water, and



*A saddle-sore Richard Barber (second from right) at journey's end*

instead we just succumbed to the waves of fatigue, elation and champagne which swept over us.

By the end we were all agreed that we would never want to do it again. But the fun, the companionship, the challenge, the encouragement of so many people rooting for us and the final triumph of crossing the line convinced us that we wouldn't have missed it for the world.

Through the generosity of so many people, including members of the RTC, I raised just over £51,000 for the Home Farm Trust, a national charity of which I'm chairman, caring for people with learning disabilities (Downs Syndrome, autism etc). What a reason for gratitude to everyone that is, what a difference that sum will make to the quality of life of those we care for – and what a huge part that result has played in the inspiration I have derived from this whole unforgettable adventure!

## RTC Top Ten

Leading handicaps  
February 2009

1. Dave Harms	6.6
2. David Watson	10.1
3. Simon Barker	10.9
4. James Sohl	14.7
5. Buster Mottram	17.8
6=. Karen Hird	19.9
6=. John Ward	19.9
8. Sam Halliday	20.5
9. Mark McMurrugh	20.9
10. James Watson	21.4

## The Royal Tennis Court Newsletter

*is published four times  
a year and welcomes all  
contributions from members.  
Please get in touch by  
early May if you have any  
ideas for the summer issue*

Editor: Simon Edmond  
simonrichardedmond@  
yahoo.co.uk

## RESULTS

### National League

**Premier Division:** Prested Hall 1 bt RTC 1 3–0; Bryn Sayers bt Nick Wood, 5–6 6–0 6–1; Ricardo Smith bt Ben Matthews, 6–2 6–1; Sayers & Smith w/o Wood & Matthews.

**Division 2:** Queens 2 lost to RTC 2 0–3; RTC 2 bt Petworth House 2 2–1.

**Division 4:** RTC 3 lost to Paris 1–2; CURTC 5 bt RTC 3 3–0.

**Division 5:** Oratory 2 bt RTC 4 2–1; Petworth House 3 bt RTC 4 2–1; RTC 4 lost to Oratory 2 0–3; RTC 4 bt Petworth House 3 2–1.

**Division 8:** RTC 5 lost to Petworth House 5 1–2; RTC 5 lost to Canford 1–2; RTC 5 bt Oxford 4 2–1; RTC 5 lost to Oratory 5 2–1.

### Field Trophy

**Quarter-final:** RTC bt Queens 4–1 David Watson bt John Prens 6–3 6–2; Philip Squire & Fred Satow bt Robert Frost & Patrick Lawrence 6–3 5–6 6–; Simon Barker bt Harry Eddis, 6–2 6–; James Watson lost to Tom Seymour-Mead, 6–5 5–6 4–6; James Sohl & Karen Hird bt Dom Wright & Andrew Reid-Thomas, 2–6 6–5 6–4.

**Semi-final:** RTC bt Seacourt 3–2 Mark McMurrugh & Fred Satow bt Nick Jones & Spencer Davies, 6–5 6–5; David Watson lost to Paul Weaver, 4–6 6–2 5–6; Simon Barker bt Charlie Danby, 6–1 6–3; James Watson lost to Conor Medlow, 4–6 1–6; James Sohl & Karen Hird bt Martin Higney & Josh Dodgson, 6–3 6–3.

### Seal Salver

**Final:** Bernard Weatherill bt Brian Rich 9–3 (retired at 7–3).



*Night owls: Pain, Parsons, Cavill*

### Winter Night Pennant

**Semi-final:** Bruce Leith, Virginia Fisher & John Sparkes bt Simon Edmond, David Jeffcoate & Martin Daly 9–5.

**Final:** Nicola Cavill (sub for John Dagnall), Mike Pain & Sarah Parsons bt Bruce Leith, Virginia Fisher & John Sparkes 8–5.

### Barker-Camm Cup

**Grade finalists**

**'C' Grade:** Gareth Quarry and David Durham or David Johnston. **'D' Grade:** Nicola Cavill and Simon Edmond.

**'E' Grade:** Tom Carew Hunt and John Halliday. **'F' Grade:** Oliver Lewis and James Pain.