



THE ROYAL TENNIS COURT



Picture: Doug Sheperdian

It's that man again

Rob Fahey triumphs in the Champions Trophy

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The Field of Cloth of Gold

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RTC pipped to the Pol

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CHAIRMAN'S CHAT

Having agreed to take the role of Chairman I feel privileged to serve in that capacity and hope to maintain our traditions and make improvements to a club that already serves us very well indeed. It's a truism that my time in this post will be relatively fleeting, during which I'll do my best.

Given the decisions which Michael, the Board and Nick have had to take over the last two years, I'm quite thankful for their work in a time of trial, and that I have stepped up at a time when the worst of Covid appears to be over.

What I have noticed immediately is the deep personal commitment from every Board member and a large cohort of our 430 members who actively support our club, the T&RA and the game.

It is instructive to look at the micro-world of Real Tennis - some 45 clubs representing about 8,000 players in four countries, of which the UK is by far the largest. We are essentially one extended family with all that implies. We depend on each other and the game's survival depends on us. There is no other place!

Many will be aware that the club has a set of strategic objectives which I personally subscribe to. The first objective bears repeating here:

"All members should have the opportunity to achieve their potential as players. They should be encouraged to play both socially and competitively and to enjoy viewing high-level tennis, within the club and beyond. We shall seek to achieve a reasonable balance between the different aspirations of members."

Put simply, the club IS the members and it exists to serve its members. I hope that all of us managing and directing club affairs are able to keep our fingers on the pulse and our ears open to listen

to the whole of our membership.

For those who don't know me, I hope to meet you in the course of playing or at a social event. Please take a moment to introduce yourself when the opportunity presents.

Here are a few things that may be relevant:

Despite our accents, my wife, Terri, and I are naturalised British citizens (dual with the US) and have lived here for 34 years; we are very much at home here.

I've been a keen racquet sports player ever since I was 14, because lawn tennis seemed my only hope for a varsity jacket (quite important at American high schools).

I've played the American form of Racquetball seriously (NCAA All-American), an obscure game called paddleball, handball (a little like fives), a lot of squash, some badminton, table tennis and am now happy to commit to a game at which I can still improve.

I've served on the board at St. George's Hill lawn tennis club and as squash chairman, roles that I trust will prove helpful here.

I play our game as often as my body will let me - mostly at RTC, with country memberships at Wellington, Cambridge, Hatfield and Leamington. I'm happy to play at any level (although you may find the racquet in my left hand) so I hope we do meet on court.

For those who do know me, I hope we can continue to enjoy this special game together.

Doug Sheperdigian



...and a former Chairman's last words

It is nearly 20 years since I arrived at Hampton Court Palace. I met Chris Ronaldson in those early weeks and, typically, he asked me if I fancied having a go on court. Having played Fives and Badminton I was instantly hooked on this intriguing, challenging, frustrating, rewarding, unique game.

Two decades later, I have played on more than half the world's courts, met countless wonderful people, won, drawn and lost hundreds of games.

I have many special memories: playing before dawn and after midnight (those long Night Pennant matches) and all times in between; watching the world's greatest players in the Champions' Trophy and hosting Chris Chapman's world championship challenge match; lessons from our Professional team as they continue to show infinite patience with me; social events in the garden and carol services in the Chapel Royal; the recent RTC match at Fontainebleau and so much more. I would not have missed it for anything.

This club is very special. All of you - its members - hold it to be so and you surely showed this though your support during the pandemic. It has nurtured and developed many of the world's

great players and in everything we do here we keep a flame alive of this, the game of kings, played in the best spirit in this centuries-old place. Most important, we welcome young and old from all walks of life to become devotees in their play, and members of the public to be able to watch the game in action - the only place in England where this can happen.

It has been a great honour to be your Chairman for the last five years. My sincere thanks go to Nick and his team; to everyone who has served on the Board and especially Paul Newton who as Honorary Secretary has been the most important part of our leadership double act; and to all members for the support and encouragement you have given me.

In a few months' time, all being well, Annie and I are heading to north to Scotland. I shall try to keep my game going at Falkland Palace, at Jesmond Dene and of course back here every time I visit London. The Club is in good health and in safe hands in your new Chairman, Doug Sheperdigian and I hope that he enjoys it as much as I have done. I wish everyone at RTC continued success long into the future.

Michael Day CVO



A glittering prize

After a two-year delay, 16 intrepid RTC members decamped to France over the weekend of 10-12 June to play Le Cercle du Jeu de Paume de Fontainebleau for the first Field of Cloth of Gold Trophy. The Field of Cloth of Gold was a great summit meeting between King Henry VIII of England and King Francois I of France in June 1520.

Held at Balinghem, between Ardres in France and Guînes in the English Pale of Calais, it was a lavish display of wealth by both kings. Arranged to increase the bond of friendship between them following the Anglo-French treaty of 1514, it is commemorated in a famous contemporary painting.

Around the same time that the original tennis court was built at Hampton Court by Henry VIII, Francois I was undertaking major improvements to the medieval castle of Fontainebleau. Today, these great Palaces are home to two of the oldest tennis courts in the world. So, it was fitting that our clubs should decide, as we approached the 500th anniversary of the Field of Cloth of Gold, to cement our bond

of friendship by committing to a formal twinning agreement and arranging an inaugural match between our two clubs.

Another reason for the special connection between our two clubs and palaces is that the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames and the town of Fontainebleau have been formally twinned since 1977.

We agreed on a format of doubles matches played over 50 minutes. All team members had the opportunity to play three matches over the two days from Friday lunchtime to Sunday lunchtime. Pairs were mixed for each series so nothing was predictable. After 24 hard-fought matches and some generous handicap adjustment to reflect the unfamiliar nature (for les Anglais) of the Fontainebleau court, RTC narrowly won by 13-11, which include four halved matches. Star RTC contributors were Chris Bartley, Freddy de Sibert and Alison Cryer, all of whom won their three matches.

The Fontainebleau court is a splendid place with added length to test the unwary and we all enjoyed the tennis immensely. But even more memorable was the generous

hospitality of our French friends who put on a wonderful event for us. There was a special champagne reception on the Friday evening in one of the Palace's 18th century rooms to mark the signing of the Twinning Agreement between our two clubs and on the Saturday, we headed out to a charming restaurant for dinner on the banks of the Seine.

We all agreed that the whole event was an unforgettable experience. Special thanks go from all of us at RTC to the Fontainebleau club president Thierry Bernard-Tambour who was instrumental in making the event happen and to the Fontainebleau professional Guillaume Dortu who supervised the play and marked all 24 matches in French and English. We say a resounding '*Chapeaux*' to them both and everyone there.

The splendid new Trophy will be on display at RTC for the next two years, at which point we look forward to welcoming Fontainebleau here for the next match.

Michael Day CVO



Thank you to all those of you who were able to join us recently to formally welcome Jack Josephs to RTC! Great fun was had on court with plenty of target-hitting - well done to Paul Heaver (left) for claiming the winning guess in the sweepstake challenge! It was great to be able to chat with Jack and hear more about how he has settled into life at RTC and all he is learning as part of our wonderful club.

We would like to thank the Italian trio Antonella Maiellaro, Gianni Ferrari and Davide Cason for making Jack's welcome to the club so special with their sponsorship and array of delicious, high-quality Italian Foods, tiramisu and plentiful Prosecco. We would like to extend particular thanks to Executive Chef Benny Robbio (<https://clubepicture.club/experts/>) and Pastry Chef Michela Sola (https://www.instagram.com/miky_micakes/)! Whether you were able to attend and taste the food for yourself or not, you can buy these and many other Italian products from <https://www.gusto-gourmet.com/>. There is 10% off your first purchase if you mention RTC!



Katy Doy

Rob runs rampant, again

Rob Fahey has added the Champions Trophy to his long, long list of titles, beating Ben Taylor-Matthews in a thrilling four-set final here at RTC.

The reigning World Champion was in magisterial form as he swept to a 6/2, 4/6, 6/2, 6/3 victory, roared on by a packed crowd in the Dedans and the Hazard viewing gallery and watched from the public viewing area by a fascinated/bemused crowd of Palace visitors, all suitably stunned to discover our noble sport's finest gladiators battling in front of their eyes.

It was a fitting climax to a thrilling week of tennis, with many of the world's top players gracing our court in a mix of fast-paced knockout games and knife-edge five-setters. The third-ever Champions Trophy was organised impeccably by RTC Head Professional Nick Wood, supported by his team, HRP and the generous sponsorship of Mitsubishi Electrical BV, who have done so much to support our club and our sport - everyone at RTC is deeply grateful for their contribution, which will allow this thrilling event to grow and thrive in future years.



This year's CT also served up a warning shot to many established players. The younger gunslingers - chief among them 25-year-old Levi Gale, looking hungrier than a man-eating leopard just released from a vegan crash diet - served notice that, waiting in the wings, there is a new generation of warriors.

Levi, who topped the qualifiers' group, gave

No.6 seed Darren Long a ferocious fight before just being pipped 6/2 in a five-set thriller that deserved a bigger audience, as did many of the early games. Neil Mackenzie played very well to qualify as the second contender before falling to his Queen's Club compadre, Bryn Sayers, while Lewis Williams and Josh Smith both missed the cut.

Board Talk—AGM 15/5/2022

It was agreed that the Notice formally convening the Annual General Meeting should be taken as read. Apologies for absence were received. The Minutes of the Annual General Meeting on 7 June 2021 were received and approved.

Ian Wimbush read a commentary prepared by the Honorary Treasurer, presenting the Report and Accounts for the company for 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2021. The Report and Accounts were formally received and accepted.

Ian Wimbush presented the Board's proposal for subscriptions. Like many other organisations, we are experiencing inflationary pressures in our utilities costs, which are expected to rise by more than 20% over the year, together with increases in our HRP Licence Fee and professionals' salaries. Whilst we are working to reduce consumption, these inflationary headwinds mean we need to increase subscriptions by 5% from 1 August this year. We are retaining the new 25-29 category to retain our increased junior cohort. The meeting agreed the Board's proposal and these will take effect from 1 August 2022.

The Honorary Chairman, Michael Day, delivered his report, including the following:

After the impact of Covid since March 2020, life (especially Real Tennis) has progressively returned to normal. In spite of Covid, with prudent cost management, and with help from the government's furlough scheme, we closed the financial year on a sound financial footing.

We have a backlog of maintenance work after spending relatively little in these prior two years, and a reduction of subscription income stemming from a net loss of 43 full members. We are focussed on recruiting new members, particularly younger ones. We are also keen to diversify our membership further in terms of gender, age and diversity.

We successfully shifted court timings to the half

hour, adding another hour to available court time. The court is now available for play between 6.30am and 10.30pm, increasing playing opportunities and court fee income.

Our professional team saw an important change in September, with Josh Smith leaving us after eight years to become Head Professional at Holyport. Josh reached No.15 in the world and became known for the quality of his teaching, especially in the development of our successful Junior programme. We were delighted to announce the appointment of Jack Josephs as our trainee professional. Jack was on the IIP apprenticeship scheme at Middlesex University Real Tennis Club and made a strong impression there. We would like to thank MURTC and the T&RA for their support.

Nick Wood designed and ran the RTC Development Tournament in September, a worthwhile initiative aimed at providing junior professionals with an opportunity for competition, training and feedback.

The Chairman thanked Nick Wood and his fellow Professionals, Scott, Lesley, Josh and Jack, who have led and operated the Club through such a difficult year. He also thanked fellow Board members for their contributions, including Paul Mather and Giles Doy who stood down at the AGM, and especially our Honorary Secretary, Paul Newton, who does immense work behind the scenes and has steered the Club through a revision of its Articles of Association, the latter with substantial help from club member David Blizzard.

With Michael Day standing down, Doug Sheperdigian was then elected to the Board of Directors as Chairman, and then took the Chair of the meeting. Paul Newton and Andy Anderson proposed a vote of thanks to Michael Day, carried unanimously.

Sarah Parsons was re-elected to the Board, her term of office having expired. Paul Wright was elected to the Board. PB Associates was re-

appointed the Company's Auditor until the next Annual General Meeting.

Doug Sheperdigian invited members' views on any item they would like the Board of Directors to consider during the coming year.

It was noted that RTC has previously considered building a second court on site, that this project failed, and has also considered building a second court offsite. Would the Board re-investigate this latter option? Doug Sheperdigian agreed that the Board would consider this, whilst recognising that complexity and cost would be a big hurdle.

RTC uses the T&RA's RTO system for court bookings. Would the Board consider establishing an automated booking system? Attending member and Chairman of the T&RA, Fred Satow, noted that work is under way to release a new version of the RTO software, with RTC member Owen Saunders also involved. The Board will consider future options for booking arrangements.

Any Other Business: Fred Satow (T&RA) noted that the T&RA is seeking to establish a 'best of breed' live streaming capability. He also noted current discussion about the production of graphite racquets.

It was asked whether an updated printed members' handbook would be considered. Production of this had ceased as it was viewed as less valuable to members given electronic communications, and that it presented data protection issues. The idea will be kept under review. It was asked whether members may have access to contact details for other members. It was noted that data protection issues do not allow communication of such details.

There being no further business, the meeting, which had begun at 11:00am prompt, ended at 12.01pm. There followed an entertaining exhibition match between Nick Wood and Jack Josephs.

It was great to see the return of RTC professionals Ben Taylor-Matthews, Josh Smith and Chris Chapman, who made the long trek from Down Under and thoroughly enjoyed meeting up with old friends before sadly crashing out in a three-set semi-final to, guess who...Rob Fahey.

In the other semi-final John Lumley came up against an in-form Ben Taylor-Matthews and lost in an amazingly high-quality three-set match.

The final on Sunday brought some of the most brilliant tennis ever seen at the Royal Tennis Court. To take on the 'G.O.A.T.' Ben brought his 'A' game and battled hard.

Immense rallies ensued; spectacular

defending of the Dedans ultimately brought the battle back to the floor, where Ben was rattling the WC with long and testing rallies, but ultimately just could not crack the fortress that is a fully focused Fahey.

After the game both world-class players (other sports please note!) mingled freely with spectators and guests in the Club gardens, which were blessed by a sunny day, flowing Prosecco and an excellent spread laid on by Miss Polly Café.

The trophies were presented by Hans-Joerg Hinkel on behalf of Mitsubishi Electrical BV and acceptance speeches were suitably gracious - and short.

The Club, all Professionals and all members now look forward to an even bigger and better (if that is possible...) Champions Trophy in 2023!

This event would not be possible without the generous help of an army of volunteers. These include all the Stewards who were on hand to explain the game's complexities to tourists, to all those who generously provided accommodation for players, to the scorers and to all those who lent a helping hand in some way.

All matches were superbly streamed and were watched by enthusiasts around the globe. Huge thanks to Oliver Buckley and Ben Geytenbeek. **Andy Anderson**

RTC just pipped in the Pol

First round (Dec 2021) – Away vs Moreton Morrell

A squad missing the usual second doubles pairing of James Sohl and Charlie Packham travelled to Moreton Morrell for the first round Pol Roger Trophy match.

First up were RTC's newly/doubly crowned doubles champions, David and James Watson, playing Moreton captain Phil Shaw-Hamilton and Tom Lewis. Despite some errors the RTC pair cantered to a 6-2, 6-1 victory. In the first singles, RTC's Peter Wright was occasionally stretched by Tom Bomford but ran out the winner 6-2, 6-1.

Phil Dunn (RTC captain) took on Vaughan Hamilton in the second singles and, despite few first serves in, won comfortably 6-1, 6-2. The third singles saw James Hamblin of RTC make his RTC Pol Roger debut against Doug Holden and the gap in handicap proved decisive as another victory was secured 6-1, 6-2. The final match pitched Simon Barker and David Blizzard against the rackets-player pairing of Paddy Sutton & Rich Wills. Simon and David played well but Paddy and Rich were able to win three games in each set, so a 6-3, 6-3 victory to RTC to round off a 5-0 match win.

Semi-Final (Jan 2022) – Home vs Petworth

RTC hoped for a full-strength team in the semi-final at home against Petworth, but this was not to be as Sohlman withdrew due to injury then James Watson caught Covid leading up to the match. Simon Barker and Geoffrey Russell stepped in, in Geoffrey's case at very short notice!

Petworth's Freddie Bristowe was over from the USA playing in the British Open Rackets and would likely feature in their team - always helpful to be able to slot a 10-handicap player into a Pol Roger Trophy team! Suddenly, RTC faced trouble.

The second doubles was first up and RTC were able to field David Watson with Geoffrey Russell to take on Angus Williams and Nick Harris. David rolled back the years with a faultless performance while Geoffrey was at his energetic best allowing the RTC pair win 6-2, 6-4.

Peter Wright took on Freddie Bristowe and won

the first set comfortably 6-3 but found himself 3-5 down in the second. A potential upset was quashed as Peter won the three games needed for the set and match, once again showing the youngsters how it's done.

The two captains played each other at second singles and Phil Dunn (RTC) took on Adam Dolman (Petworth). Adam has been a sub-10 handicap for many years so Phil was up against it. Lunch was announced during the first game, but luckily most only missed one game, as the second was an epic. Phil won that game and maintained pressure to win the first set 6-2. Adam won the second set 3-6. The final set was pure nip-and-tuck, Phil was behind until 4-4, led 5-4 but couldn't capitalise while Adam played a very good final two games to snatch the victory 6-5 in the third and keep Petworth in the match.

Third singles confusingly matched up two players who are members of both RTC and Petworth – James Hamblin played for RTC while Tom Freeman was playing for Petworth this season. Tom has not been on court much and despite his abundant talent, James was able to take advantage and, having snatched the first set 6-5, won the second 6-3 to give RTC an unassailable 3-1 lead.

The dead-rubber first doubles pitched RTC's Charlie Packham and Simon Barker against Charlie Braham and Ollie Taylor and the RTC pair won 6-2, 6-3.

Final (March 2022) – vs Queen's at Wellington

Another year, another Pol Roger Trophy final for RTC and the second in a row against Queen's - a perennially tough opposition. When the team line-ups were revealed RTC were still confident that a win was possible as a full-strength team made its way to Wellington.

The day started with the second doubles, RTC's Charlie Packham and James Hamblin took on Queen's Captain Jonny Whitaker and Richard Elmitt. Despite being 0-40 down in a couple of games, the RTC pair managed a 5-0 lead in the first set but from then on Jonny and Richard were more aggressive and the first set slipped away 5-

6. From there on it was one way traffic with the Queen's pair completing a 12-game streak to take the match.

First singles saw RTC's Peter Wright (recovering from Covid) take on Matthieu Sarlanque (if being able to call on a 10-handicapper in the Pol Roger is handy, calling in a +2 from overseas is bordering on unfair!). Matthieu won the first set 6-2 and Peter decided his lungs had had enough and (wisely!) forfeited the match.

0-2 down with three to play isn't ideal, so RTC's Captain Phil Dunn took on Rory Giddins knowing a win was vital. The first set was tight but went to Queen's 4-6. The second set was remarkable - a complete change in fortune for Phil who blitzed it 6-0. The third set was as tight as the first to 3-3, then Rory won two to get to 5-3. Phil got back to 5-5 but in the deciding game found himself at the receiving end. Despite laying a chase to swap ends at 15-40 down, Phil was unable to win the final game giving Queens their third match win and therefore championship victory.

In the dead-rubber third singles, James Watson (RTC) took on Henry Mullan (Queen's). James took the first set 6-5 but early in the second he heard a 'pop' as he headed into the forehand corner and, having fallen to the floor, wisely decided not to move. A torn Achilles was the diagnosis and a trip to A&E ensued for the Watsons, leading to two more forfeits.

James W did make his birthday dinner the next day (on crutches!); Peter W did play the following day in the final of the UK Amateur Doubles, losing a tight four-set match; and James Sohl did manage six sets of doubles in a week without tearing his calf (again).

We also learned that in Geoffrey and Blizz (and Simon Edmond who didn't play this season) we have very capable players who belie their handicaps in doubles. Most of all we learned that the RTC Pol team has a lovely bunch of supporters - Wellington was full, with barely a Queen's supporter among them. Thank you all!

It all bodes well for next season (provided Phil wins in straight sets!)

Phil Dunn



RTC triumphs across the board

RTC members had great success in a wide range of tournaments earlier in the year, with the (slightly) more senior statesmen holding their heads up high. Well done to all!

World Masters:

Over 50s singles main draw winner: **Peter Wright**
 Over 55s singles main draw winner: **Simon Barker**
 Over 60s singles (plate winner): **Nick Jeffery**
 Over 65s singles (plate winner): **Doug Sheperdigian**
 Over 50s doubles main draw winner: **Peter Wright + Roman Krznaric**, Over 55s doubles main draw winner: **Simon Barker + Peter Holmes**, Over 60s doubles main draw winner: **David Watson + John Hamer**, Over 60s doubles plate winners: **Nick Jeffery and Geoffrey Russell**

Cockram O/50s Cup won (retained) by GBR, including **Peter Wright and Simon Barker**

Bostwick O/60s Cup won (retained) by GBR, including **David Watson and Geoffrey Russell**

British Age Group Tournaments:

O/40s Doubles won by **Peter Wright and Charlie Packham**, O/50s Singles won by **Peter Wright**
 O/50s Doubles won by **Peter Wright and David Watson**

Ladies' World Championships:

Singles quarter finalists: **Izzy Candy, Nicola Doble**
 Doubles semi finalists: **Nicola Doble (& Alex Brodie), Jess Garside (& Tara Lumley)**
 Doubles finalists: **Izzy Candy (& Saskia Bollerman)**

RTC Spring Night Pennant

The Spring Pennant was won by Team 5, comprising James Durie (gallantly and successfully subbing in for an absent Andy Anderson), Richard Lewis and James Robinson, who defeated Team 1 comprising Ian Wimbush, David Goldsbury and Simon Cripps (gallantly but unsuccessfully subbing in for an injured John Watkins).



Peter Wright

Visitors are welcomed back

A gentle reminder that the Court is now open to visitors as part of the Hampton Court Palace visitor experience. The Court will be open between the hours of 10am and 5pm Wednesday to Sunday; the Palace is currently operating on a five-day week.

To maintain security, whether the Court is occupied or not the Tennis Court door must be locked at all times. Also, the access doors to the RTC members' areas – changing room and courtside loo – should be closed and secured with the number lock, and the courtside corridors cordoned off with the 'Private' barriers. Contact the Professionals for the code.

Reminder: smart and appropriate tennis clothing should be worn, predominantly white clothing and clean appropriate sports shoes. It is always appreciated by a visitor, and particularly by HRP, if RTC members were to take a short moment to help a visitor with an understanding of the game.

Early bird training sessions

Together with the existing Wednesday Drill sessions, the Monday Early Bird training sessions make a welcome return.

All RTC members are welcome to join training sessions with Nick Wood each Monday morning from 6.30am to 7.30am as well as Wednesday mornings from 8.30am to 9.30am and 9.30am to 10.30am with Scott Blaber.

Complement your tennis development with regular training sessions with a member of your Pro Team! These 60-minute sessions of tennis provide specific training to help you on the road to the next level. There is space for four attendees per session. The cost is Monday £18.00 per session, Wednesday £23.00 per session.

These sessions do not count as one of your regular bookings; however, we would encourage members not to book more than four of these sessions at any one time.

National League round-up

The Royal Tennis Court entered four teams into the National League this year, Divisions 3/4, 5, 6 and 8.

Our crowning glory was Division 8 (captained by Alex Fell) who against the odds played Leamington away in the final and beat them two rubbers to one - see the separate report for details!

Div 3/4 was captained by James Hamblin who played most of his matches with James Watson (Phil Dunn played in two matches). Although they enjoyed the challenge of their games it was a hard task as the handicap range was 10-20 and many of their opponents had lower handicaps than the James's. When James Watson snapped his achilles tendon in the Pol Roger final James Hamblin did a great job in fulfilling his fixtures.

In the Div 5 Handicaps 20-25, David Watson, Simon Barker (c) James Sohl and Jed Dalton also suffered from injuries leaving Simon Barker to rally the troops and reserves. Despite this they came a respectable 7th out of ten in the ladder, but no club stood a chance with the Seacourt pair improving by 6 points each during the season!

The RTC NL Div 8 team travelled to Leamington for the final. Home court advantage was theirs as a result of winning all their matches in the season, including beating us at home (2-1). They fielded a strong team with Will Todd 'The Toddler' at number one whose handicap, whilst within NL tolerance at the start, had reached terminal velocity and was now playing off 28. Consequently he had to give enough points to bring his handicap back to a nominal 33 in the 35+ league. Observing the trophy and MVP prizes laid out on a table in Leamington's elegant lounge, Dick Cowling and I made a wry joke that we would enjoy bringing them home. However, had the bookies been there (generally available in Leamington), we would have declined a bet on ourselves.

First up was George Parsons versus Will Todd. Doug had played Will in the season's match at Leamington and managed to win just one game in 13 (6-1, 6-0) even with an owe-15 handicap. George, who at 17 is really coming into his game, was undaunted by the solid opponent or the occasion. He played a blinder; nothing made it to the back wall as George put a racquet on everything, frustrating many an otherwise winning shot, upsetting 'The Toddler' by 6-4, 6-1 and putting RTC in the lead with only one match needed from Doug or Dick. That put a lot of pressure on the number 2 match, Doug versus Charlie Wells, both at the same handicap. Charlie's level varied from untouchable to just manageable, so it was with great relief that the final ball fell RTC's way after three sets. (6-5, 3-6, 6-1). Dick Cowling and Ben Andrews (ex RTC Member) were in the final match. For drama's sake, sadly it was a dead rubber. And it would have been dramatic,



Div 6 Handicaps 25-30. The team which consisted of Simon Edmond, Simon Boorne, Geoffrey Russell and Nic Jeffery (c) were pipped at the post.

Despite their being second as it appeared on the ladder, because they beat Oxford on a sets ratio basis, they lost their place in the final on the 'matches won' ratio. A great effort by the RTC team.

Div 8 Handicaps 35-40. Our heroes: Alex Fell (C), John Leach, Doug Sheperdigian, George Parsons, John Mather. And congratulations to Dick Cowling for winning second most valued layer of the division!

Many thanks to FLM and their team, especially Sam Candy who has supported many of the matches. They have kindly agreed to sponsor the league again next year so please, if you are seeking help with planning your financial affairs, consider using them and we hope they will continue their successful association with Real Tennis! More details can be found at www.flmltd.com

Lesley Ronaldson



swinging both ways, with Ben winning in 3 sets off an improving railroad serve, using his long limbs to advantage in retrieving. (6-5, 4-6, 3-6 to Ben).

Taking an opportunity to watch a Shakespeare play in Stratford-on-Avon later that night, Doug's attention was caught by an apt passage in *Henry VI - Part III* which goes as follows:

King Edward IV (Plantagenet). The harder match'd, the greater victory:

My mind presageth happy gain and conquest.

[Enter SOMERSET, with drum and colours] Etc. etc

And lo, where George of Clarence sweeps along,

Of force enough to bid his brother battle;
With whom an upright zeal to right prevails
More than the nature of a brother's love!
Come, Clarence, come; thou wilt, if Warwick call.

Doug Sheperdigian



George Parsons in full flow Pic: Doug Sheperdigian



The Goblet of fire (well, smoke)

Lewis and Davis bring home the bacon in an eventful weekend of tennis

The King's Goblet moved from its regular slot at the end of June to the last weekend of May for the 2022 edition. But very little else had changed since the last time we ran it three years ago: 24 doubles pairs, five matches each, one giant league table, 15 clubs across the UK and Netherlands represented and four days of top-quality handicap tennis.

Such is the way of hosting tennis tournaments in a post-Covid world that last minute withdrawals were inevitable. And thus it was so when defending champion Nigel Penna pulled out the night before the event with a positive Covid test. Some scrambling of phone contacts later and Jack Joseph successfully recruited a ringer from Middlesex Uni. Further scrabbling of contact books was needed in only the 4th (of 60) group stage match on Thursday when John Watkins injured his ankle on court 15 minutes into his match. That meant a trip to A&E for him, and super-sub Scott Blaber playing left handed for John's partner (Lucie Stewart) to finish their matches. Scott's left handed play did not bring much success, consigning Lucie and Scott/John to the bottom of the table.

Player availability meant a reduced order of play on Thursday, with several pairs playing multiple times. Oxford's Chris Lintott and Grant Miller were one such pair, playing 4 of their 5 group matches and recording wins in all of them. They could enjoy spectating on Friday and Saturday knowing a space in the knockout stage was assured. Thursday was also a strong day for Petworth's Jane Taylor & Holyport's Daniel-Konrad Cooper (2 wins from 2), RTC's Giles Doy & Prested's Dan Worboys, and RTC's Kevin & Claire Hanley (both one win and one draw from 2 matches).

Friday brought a new scheduling challenge when some exuberant cooking of bacon in the club kitchen led to a smoky evacuation of court and club; thankfully not much time was lost. Friday also saw Nick Hyams and Ali Cryer begin their charge for victory, with several pairs giving them over 35 points in handicap difference. That didn't matter when Nick and Ali kept consistently retrieving and returning the ball over the net, waiting for their opponents to make an error. Indeed, 3 wins from 3 on Friday,

followed by two more wins gave them top spot on the league table. Friday's matches also maintained a 100% win record for Taylor & Cooper, and RTC's Richard Lewis & Paul Davis.

Saturday was bookended by two massive wins, both involving the same pair: Prested's Ian Hawkey and Amy Pye. First thing Hawkey & Pye demolished Doy & Worboys 10/1, effectively ending their hopes of repeating their success at the Leamington Doubles back in November. And just before the tournament dinner in the evening, the Hanley's inflicted a 13/1 win over the Prested pair.

While Sunday morning only had 7 group matches, almost all of them would dictate the final standings for the top 8 and the knockout. One notable pair not making the top 8 were Owen Saunders and his Jesmond partner Tony Harrison. Two heavy losses against Hyams & Cryer, and Taylor & Cooper meant Owen's dream of a 'threepeat' of wins would remain just a dream. Minty Oldham and Tom McNeillis needed a solid victory in the last group match to progress, but alas an 8/5 loss to already-through Lewis & Davis ended their chances of progression.

The first knockout match saw league leaders Hyams & Cryer up against Bridport's John Pengelly and Joy Hennessy who snuck into the top 8 with three close wins. The Bridport pair gave away nearly 40 points handicap difference and they went 7/1 down very quickly. However, the game's not over until the buzzer sounds: Team Bridport then took control of the service end and rallied to make an incredible comeback with a 9/8 win.

The other knockout matches saw Simon Edmond and Steve Brewerton dismantle Miller & Lintott 10/3, Lewis & Davis edge out the 2016 champions Katy Doy & Sarah Lambie 5/4, and the Hanley's beating Taylor & Cooper 6/4.

Edmond & Brewerton had been used to giving away big handicaps and yet winning in the group stage. But they could not repeat their antics in the semi final against Lewis & Davis, the latter reaching the final with a 8/6 win. The other semi was more one sided as the Hanley's put pressure on Pengelly & Hennessy from the

first point and completed a 10/3 win.

The final started on a surprising note when at 40-all in the first game, a rogue second serve by Kevin Hanley rolled over the back penthouse service line, only for Paul Davis to catch the ball before it fell on the floor. First game to Team Hanley. The match ebbed and flowed between both RTC pairs with no team able to take a stranglehold. The buzzer sounded with the score at 5-games all, so one final game would decide a winner. At 40-30 a superb serve from Richard Lewis flummoxed Kevin Hanley at the receiver's end, and Richard Lewis & Paul Davis were crowned 2022 King's Goblet champions!

Many congratulations to them, and also to the Hanley's whose performance all weekend had been consistently powerful. On another day their performance would surely have made them winners. Elsewhere, Lucie Stewart won the target sweepstake for a second event in a row. And it was great to see RTC's new purchase of a table tennis table being put to good use in the club garden, Theo Bollerman in particular showing how it is easy to play table tennis with a Real Tennis racquet!!

The event ran a book for the first time in a few years, which saw plenty of interest across a number of pairs for the outright win. But only one person backed Richard Lewis and Paul Davis to win, and that person was....Richard Lewis, at the longest odds for any pair at 26/1. So he takes home not only the title but also a sizeable chunk of change!

Thankyou's must go to the Pro team for keeping order and serenity on court for over 42 hours of marking; to Paul Wright, Fraser Shorey, Peter Brown and Tim Church for hosting a fantastic BBQ on Friday night; to Minty Oldham for organising an excellent tournament dinner at Zizzi's over the bridge; and to all those who helped with food and catering over the four days (except the guy who burned the bacon!) Owen Saunders takes the helm for the tournament for next year, so look out for the 2023 dates in your calendars soon! (And huge thanks to Giles as well – Editor).

Giles Doy