

THE ROYAL TENNIS COURT



Best of the best!

Doy and Dalton lift the Callender Cup

See page 4

New pair triumph in the Harris Watson

See page 3

Put that light out!

See Page 8

The Winter Newsletter 2023

Number 136

020 8977 3015 info@royaltenniscourt.com www.royaltenniscourt.com

CHAIRMAN'S CHAT

At the same time that we are stewards of the ancient game and part of a four-country microcosm of sport, we are also an integral part of the heritage preserved by Historic Royal Palaces (HRP) here at a fabulous place called Hampton Court Palace (HCP).

I speak regularly to Nicola Andrews, HRP's Palaces Group Director, to discuss RTC's relationship and can report that it remains at the high point inherited from our previous chairman Michael Day CVO, having been built and maintained by Nick Wood and, of course, Lesley. In Nicola's words: "The Royal Tennis Court is an important partner. When our guests see Real Tennis played, it brings history to life!" She never fails to ask if there is anything HRP can do to assist us in our objectives.

You will recall that our statement of Strategic Objectives includes: "A world-class court in a unique historic setting."

On the one hand we are akin to the Royal School of Needlework, a private club within the Palace, maintaining traditions and skills across the centuries.

An even more apposite comparison is to the Chapel Royal, a working church with regular services for a stable congregation... and a fabulous choir (as seen on TV!). Part of the living fabric of the Palace. For us, the HRP web site says "...it is a very active club, with many members, so your chances of seeing a game in play when the viewing gallery is open are very high." Very high indeed. It's a pleasure to see the interaction as our members walk to the court through the curious crowds, answering questions and giving Palace guests a lasting memory.

As I write, we are very close to the RTC Members' Carol service, a highlight of many of our Christmas seasons and a moment when these two worlds come together. As you read this, it will have happened and given us an oasis of well-being in a tortured world.

Many of you are members of HRP. As with encouragement to attend events, this message is only for those who are interested! If you are interested and haven't yet joined, I cannot recommend the HRP membership highly enough. It's a good cause in itself; it's our place of residence, and there is always something engaging, interesting and fun going on such as Christmas shopping, Members-only ghost tours, rooftop tours and more.

The synergy and symbiosis and serendipity struck me as I walked in to see the Harris-Watson final (awesome tennis, by the way). Nicola (Andrews) was at the gate and suggested I drop into the Chapel where the Evensong service featured the world premiere of "The Coronation Canticles" by Gabriel Jackson, commissioned by the Choral Foundation.



Many of you will know that the nightmare scenario for any court is for its fabric (walls, floors, roof) to fail. In our case, as a club licensed to use this facility, we do not bear the financial risk, a real privilege which relieves us of major fund

raising in a crisis as many of our fellow courts have had to do.

On a personal note, I'm typing this column with two incisions currently healing in my right elbow. If you see me on court it will likely be in my left-handed persona, currently playing in the high 60s. I look forward to meeting new friends and



Phil Dunn and James Sohl ready themselves in the Harris-Watson final

playing partners over the next few months!

You will note (see Page 5) that we have updated our guidelines on eyeguards based on research and testing by the T&RA - big shout out to Fred Satow, RTC member and Chairman of the T&RA for seeing that this has been done. I encourage you to read the notice on the club notice board carefully and to make your own decisions. You'll notice that I wear eyeguards to play. It was instructive in the Harris-Watson final when a ball hit the bandeau above the dedans, ricocheted off the handle of his racquet and firmly struck the orbit of one of our best players. Just saying...

When you see your Board members (there are 10 of us) take a moment to thank them for their volunteer work. And consider if you can support them in their various portfolios. We are looking particularly for a social committee for Katy Doy as Social secretary. Events don't organise themselves. She holds a full-time absorbing position, brings up young Kieran, and ensures that our social calendar buzzes (did I mention that she and Henry won the National Handicap doubles?). It's going to be a good year for socialising!

Doug Sheperdigian

New kids on the block

Sohl and Dunn triumph in thrilling Harris Watson final

An outstanding display of doubles saw Phil Dunn and James Sohl lift the club's premier Harris Watson trophy for the first time.

The tournament started on Saturday morning with John Leach & Chris Kurkjian holding their nerve to beat Owen Saunders and Dick Cowling in an extremely tight preliminary round match. They continued this fine form and almost caused an upset, narrowly losing to Simon Edmond and David Blizzard 6/5 6/5.

The defending champions, David & James Watson, entered the tournament at the quarter final stage and made light work of their opponents, Edmond and Blizzard.

Richard Elmitt & Simon Barker was a last-minute pairing, the result of their two sons dropping out of the tournament. They also entered the tournament at the quarter final stage and looked like they'd been playing together for years when they dispatched Simon Boorne and Geoffrey Russell, who were playing very well considering the 6-0 6-1 score line!

These results set us up for a 'super Sunday', with the Watsons taking on Dunn &



James Sohl (left) and Phil Dunn with their trophies

Sohl in a mouth-watering tie. Dunn & Sohl stormed into a 6-1 4-1 lead and there looked no way back for the Watsons. However, they did not roll over and stormed back into the match, taking the second set 5-6! The match went right down to the wire and eventually Phil and James held

their nerve to take it 6-5 in the third set.

We were fortunate enough to have our top-ranked player at the club, Peter Wright, taking part in the event and a new partnership of Peter and James Hamblin entered the competition in the semi-final

stage. They certainly lived up to their impressive handicaps, beating Elmitt and Barker 6-2 6-0 in the semi-final.

The final was an epic match and there looked to be nothing between the two sides. The contrasting styles between each of the four players was evident and it made for an excellent watch. Dunn & Sohl caused the upset of the weekend, defeating Wright & Hamblin 6/5 6/5!

Phil was playing some remarkable tennis over the weekend, impressing with his retrievals and dominating the forehand corner. James Sohl, who had only played a handful of times in the past few years, returned to the game like he had never left. His dominating presence defending the galleries and volleying in the backhand side of the court made for a fantastic spectacle. A fantastic partnership who we hope to see competing in years to come.

The depth of the competition this year was extraordinary, with a handful of sub-20 handicap players competing in one of our strongest line-ups in years. Scott put on a fine display of marking on the Saturday and Jack then took over, doing a great job in the semis and final.

Take time to say hello to the Pros

Not so long ago RTC members would regularly visit the Pros office after their games to pay court fees and make future bookings. In doing so, organising your future games was easy and, just as important, a bond and friendship developed, helping the Pros get to know the members. We also kept you up to date on RTC news and upcoming events.

Remember, arranging your future tennis there and then helps you keep ahead of others. You are more likely to get the courts that suit you best.

Online payments (GoCardless) make sense financially and administratively, but since the transition from paying in the office to paying online many members are making a swift exit. The Pros have missed chatting, catching up on news, and, more important, enquiring about how your tennis is going. So please take a few moments to drop into the office, book some courts, report your score and chat about all things Real Tennis. We would happily comment on and provide some guidance on your game. We'd also be happy to make you a cuppa - and you may find a few treats too!

Your Professional team



Henry and Katy (with Kieran in support) with their trophy and fellow finalists, the Dicksons father and son team

Red-letter day in the Callender

In early November a clash of diaries saw RTC's Harris Watson trophy played on the same weekend as the LRTA handicap singles and doubles at Prested Hall as well as the Callender Cup at Wellington College. RTC were represented in the latter by Katy Doy and Henry Dalton as victors of the RTC handicap doubles earlier this year.

The Callender Cup brings together the club winners of handicap doubles tournaments across the UK to find a national handicap doubles champion. 14 clubs stretching from Canford to Cambridge took part in a group stage followed by a top 8 knockout on Sunday.

RTC's group stage could not have been any closer. Play started with a comfortable 6/2 win against Canford followed by RTC losing 5/6 to Newmarket. This left a winner-takes-all match against Holyport to secure a place in the quarter-finals. Katy and Henry resisted the pressure from a very strong Holyport pair to reach the knockout stages with a tight 6/5 win.

On the Sunday the tight matches continued but with RTC as the highest handicap pair this meant steady heads and plenty of composure for Katy and Henry; and a mountain to climb for their

opponents. In the first knockout match Katy and Henry faced a Queens pair who arguably were not comfortable with giving away 22 handicap points difference. Preferring instead to stick to their Plan A of 'hitting the ball as hard as they could' that resulted in many errors for the Queens pair; the 8/1 scoreline to RTC perhaps more indicative of Queens losing the match rather than RTC winning it.

The semifinal against Wellington College saw Katy and Henry receive 30 and their opponents restricted with one serve and no tambour. The Wellington pair seemed a little put out by this large handicap difference but it didn't stop them from playing aggressive serves and aggressive tennis to put Katy and Henry under pressure at the hazard end. RTC kept their head above water and squeaked into the final with an 8/5 victory.

In the final Katy and Henry came up against the father-and-son Dickson family from Prested Hall. They had come through the draw with a knack for hitting the ball hard and consistently and with a brutal serve that kicked out straight to the floor.

The opening exchanges saw Katy and Henry stuck down the receivers' end, but they knew that they had receive-30, owe-

40 on their side. Katy and Henry needed to maintain their patience as well as finding ways to get the service end and reduce their own error rate.

At 3/2 to RTC and plenty of 40-all points it felt like the match was still wide open. However, Prested started racking up the errors and in the blink of an eye they were 6/2 down. Katy's backhand volley in particular was creating some pressure and surprising their opponents with tricky balls coming back to them. Armed with plenty of dedans forces and some tactical play on leaving chases, RTC kept the pressure on Prested, who were unable to recover. In the end Katy and Henry took the title with an 8/2 victory.

Many congratulations to Katy and Henry! Not only are they RTC handicap doubles champions but they are the UK handicap doubles champions! An impressive achievement and tantamount to the hard work and dedication both players put into the game.

And so, as Katy and Henry defend their RTC handicap doubles title next year just remember: you're coming up against the best in RTC and against the best in the country. Consider yourself warned!

Giles Doy

Best of the Bisques



The 'Giraffes' Team of Alex Fell, Linda Sheraton-Davis, David Atherton and Guang Xu (pictured with their prizes) won the most recent running of the RTC Bisque Tournament at the start of October. This one-evening team handicap doubles event brought eight players with handicaps of 45-90 together, where bisques are used instead of the full handicap differences. (See Law 23.3 of The Rules of Tennis to know what a bisque is!). This was a very sociable evening on and off court, with plenty of strategising in the dedans and a light supper in the club dining room mid-way through the matches. The next Bisque tournament takes on 6th April 2024; look out for more information in your inbox in the New Year!

Giles Doy

Your eyesight - your call

As a Board we take the safety of our members extremely seriously, a good example being the new policy on eyewear. Although the chance of an eye injury from an errant tennis ball is low, it is non-zero. With this in mind, the T&RA has made some concerted efforts to test eyewear for effectiveness in preventing injury in our sport. The full exposition of this work can be found on their web site <https://www.tennisandrackets.com/news/t-ra-eye-protection-notice-2>.

The headline is clear: **The T&RA strongly recommends the use of eye protection for both Real Tennis and Rackets.**

In our Board deliberations this is a perennial topic, and perennially frustrating because of the maze of implications and inability to be certain. We therefore welcome and support the recent testing and step forward in advice leading to our

updated policy. As a Board we have mirrored the T&RA advice - that is, we strongly recommend the use of eye protection. We are working on having a selection of eyeguards which can be loaned to members, selecting those that tested the best; none tested perfectly. You will soon see our new policy on the notice boards.

The T&RA strongly recommends that eye protection should be worn for Real Tennis and Rackets. The choice of whether to use eyewear, and its selection, is entirely a matter for each individual player and is undertaken at their own risk. More information is available in the T&RA advisory document on eye protection (a copy is on the Club noticeboard).

It is not mandated. It is your decision. Please choose wisely!

Doug Sheperdigian

Juniors round-up

Following Jack Joseph's attendance at the St Mary's University Freshers Fair, we are delighted to have some female students attending weekly sessions at RTC run by Jack. The students have their sights set on the Cambridge inter-university tournament in March. We also have some girls from Kingston University who will be joining the sessions in the New Year.

Our existing juniors are going from strength to strength and the coaching sessions are always very well attended.

Particular mention goes to Robert Blizzard, whose regular matches on court are paying dividends with his handicap now down in the 40s. Robert also admirably represented RTC as a member of the Brodie Cup team.

Congratulations too to Henry Dalton who partnered Katy Doy to success to win the Callender Cup held in November at Wellington. Martha Rait also reached the final of the LRTA U21 Girls Handicap Singles at Radley in November, having got through as the winner of two group stages.

We will also have juniors competing in December in the British U18 Handicap Tournament at Wellington and in the U21 and U24 British Open Level Singles at Middlesex.

Sarah Parsons

Get your kit on

The Pro shop now carries an exciting new range of tennis clothing including tops, bottoms and quality sports shoes- do drop by the Pro shop before or after your match and browse, either for yourself or for top-quality Christmas gifts!

The secret of Sevenoaks

Giles Doy steps out on a mystery court

Should you find yourself in discussion with other Real Tennis players and someone mentions the Real Tennis court at Fairlawne, you will either find hushed excitement, mystery and intrigue, or complete indifference.

If you know, you know... so it was with considerable excitement that Simon Barker and I joined Radley Pros Nino Merola and Alex Machin, and six other tennis players, to play at the Fairlawne tennis court recently.

Situated near Sevenoaks in Kent, the court was originally built in 1625 but was renovated completely in the late 1800s. The court has a number of idiosyncrasies which require time to acclimatise to: a very steep penthouse that does not take railroads well (or certainly not my railroad!); a harsh tambour

which pushes any cross-court shot deep into the hazard chases; a main wall that is so rough it feels like it's made out of sandpaper while the gallery and penthouse walls which are smooth as silk; and a floor which looks typically flat but disguises some very uneven bounce.

Perhaps the most intriguing feature is its roof, the middle of which is glass covered, but then a large panel hangs underneath it to dissipate the sunshine around the court. That said, it won't stop the morning sunshine coming straight through the windows above the side penthouse, which is most aggravating under a return of serve. The two best skills you need to succeed on this court are extreme flexibility and masses of patience!

The current (private) owners of the court are not



The Fairlawne court with its intriguing roof panel

interested in the game but won't knock down the building either.

They will allow people to play on their court for a total of three hours every year, and often with only a few days' notice.

It's for this reason that spending a morning there, rotating through doubles

pairs, becomes one of the truly rare experiences in Real Tennis, even if it is not somewhere you would ever go to achieve your best ever handicap!

Fairlawne also completes my personal bucket list of having played at every Real Tennis court in the UK - now on to the world tour!

Dates for your Diary

20th January - Pol Roger Trophy match (Home)

2nd & 3rd February - Barker Camm Cup C Grade (H'caps 30-39)

29th February - Spring Night Pennant starts (H'caps 50-74)- enter early to secure your spot

16th & 17th March - Barker Camm Cup B Grade (H'cap 20-29)

26th & 27th March - Barker Camm Cup Singles Club Championships 1st rounds

16th & 17th April - Barker Camm Cup Singles Club Championships 1/4 finals

27th April - Barker Camm Cup Singles Club Championships semi finals

12th April - Barker Camm Cup Singles Club Championship Final

19th-21st April - RTC Handicap Doubles

27th-30th June - King's Goblet - RTC Open Handicap Doubles

28th July - 4th August - Champions Trophy with a host of extra events!

New court in US

American Court Tennis has its newest venue - this one at a resort more well-known for another royal and ancient game, that of golf.

Brothers Michael and Chris Keiser have just completed the country's 11th court, the centerpiece of a new Tennis Center at Sand Valley, Wisconsin, that features dining, a Pro shop, locker rooms and 15 outdoor grass lawn tennis courts.

Court Tennis, including games, lessons and equipment, will be available at Sand Valley starting next spring.

Season steams ahead

The Tennis season is well under way. RTC provides a comprehensive calendar of tennis events to encourage participation for all ages and abilities, and it is great to see so many members participating with such enthusiasm and vigour.

Already we have concluded the de Laszlo Bowl and Harris Watson Trophy; and the Lathom Browne, Barker Camm Cup, Seal Salver and Night Pennant matches are progressing well.

The RTC team in the Brodie Cup achieved a home win against Holyport, with the Pol Roger Trophy team due to host Prested Hall on the 2nd December. RTC has teams in 4 divisions of the FLM National League - providing competitive matches both at home and away. Spectators are always welcome.



Jack Josephs narrowly lost to Adam Player of Wellington in an exciting and most enjoyable evening of tennis, and will be taking on challenger number two - James Law (Hatfield) on Friday 22nd December.

At this time of year the court is at its busiest, so all are encouraged to maintain the three-booking allocation, and to top up by getting involved with all the other opportunities to play - Drill coaching sessions, unlimited off-peak courts and tournaments play. We recommend booking your courts whilst at the club - it helps to maintain regular play and improves on

choices of court availability.

Congratulations to:

Doug Sheperdigian & Jen Newitt - de Laszlo Bowl champions
Phil Dunn & James Sohl - Harris Watson champions
Jack Harper - Winner Barker Camm Cup H Grade
Max Beddall - Winner Barker Camm Cup G Grade

Nick Wood

A social shout-out

The RTC comms team has been upping its game across all of its social media channels: Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn.

This is not intended to replace our regular club e-mails but is intended to enhance our communications with members in their favourite environment.

We also want to spread the word about the club and the sport, not just to players but also to spectators. Join in and spread the word!

To do this we need your help: please connect with us through your preferred social media channels and send us your handle so that we can connect with you too, or if your prefer just tell us which is your favourite and follow us to find out all the news, event reminders and match updates.

Ali Cryer

Wood's Words

We all know that being on our toes is important. But what are we achieving (or not achieving) with our footwork?

First, if you look at the top players you'll see many different approaches to footwork - some with fast feet, others with explosiveness, and then there are those with deliberate footwork. No one shoe fits everyone (apologies!).

Footwork is not just about getting from a to b, it is of paramount importance for the effectiveness of arrival, execution and recovery of every shot played; and therefore the overall outcome of your game. The aim of footwork is to create effective positioning and momentum both of which are fundamental in executing the shot. Practice and improve footwork, and your game will inevitably improve.

Advantages of good footwork: 1. Increased shot options; 2. Reduced unforced errors; 3. Increased control and power; 4. Conservation of energy; 5. Prevention of injuries.

Conversely, with bad footwork the opposite is likely!

Improving your footwork does not have to be a major overhaul. Start with a few changes to some of your daily habits: take the stairs rather than the escalator, include a few footwork drills during your regular run/walk, take up skipping, or start a class at your gym. These will improve your footwork tennis! Take a lesson from your coach and find the ways to best improve your footwork.

Shedding light on the matter

After considerable analysis it was identified that the court lights use a large amount of costly energy. We have therefore installed a light control system to automatically control 'on' and 'off' times for the court lighting.

The lights are currently set to automatically turn on at 6.30am and off at 11pm. There is a booster button to increase the period the lights are on for an extra two hours per press. There is also a release button - for example if the booster button has been pressed at 10.30pm (so the lights will be on until 12.30am) by pressing the release button at 11.45pm the court lights will revert back to the set controlled timings and go out.

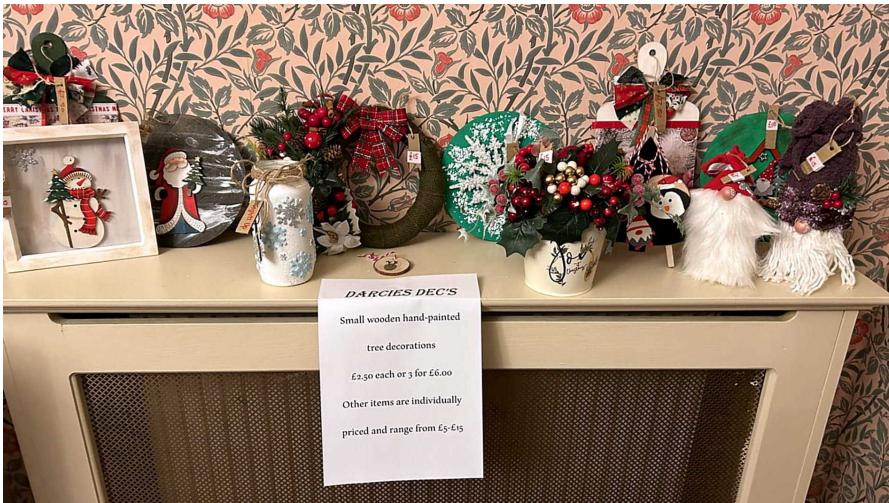
This provides two major benefits: 1: It means the lights will not be left on all night when 'late-nighters' forget to turn them off. 2: We can control the lights and experiment with ways to save additional energy.

For example last summer we tried automatically turning the lights off at 10.30am and back on at 5.30pm as the lights used to be often turned off during the summer when the sun was bright enough to play tennis without them.

There has to be a balance between member experience and energy savings. It would be interesting to hear some feedback about your experience - please e-mail premises@royaltenniscourt.com

Full instructions on how to delay the lights turning off by using the booster and release buttons are on the club noticeboard.

Paul Wright



Darcie's delights

Young Darcie Blaber has added a new role to her ever increasing talents as a Real Tennis player - that of a Yuletide interior designer.

Visitors to the garden club room at RTC have been treated to a splendid display of Christmas ornaments, all hand-made by Darcie (with a bit of help from Mum and Gran) using a plethora of ribbons, baubles and berries.

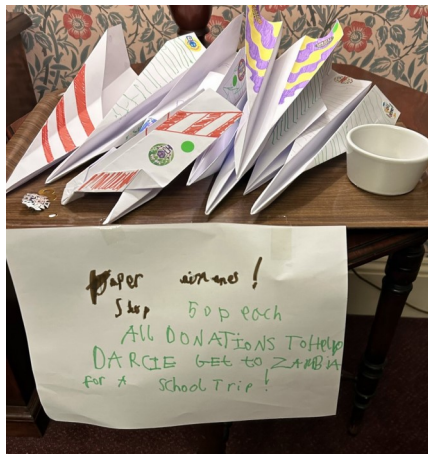
All are on sale at festively low prices and all proceeds will go to fund Darcie's upcoming trip to Zambia next July with her school, Esher High. Darcie and proud Mum Kerry Blaber have even set up a JustGiving page to fund her trip, which states:

"Since her first day at Esher High School, Darcie has carried a single, unwavering dream in her heart: to join the school's esteemed trip to Zambia. For over a decade, Esher High has fostered a bridge of knowledge and sport between the UK and Zambia, sending groups of dedicated students to teach Tag Rugby to local children.

This initiative is more than just a trip; it's a chance to touch lives, teach, learn, and grow."

A splendid initiative indeed - you can find Darcie's JustGiving page on this link: <https://www.gofundme.com/f/towards-her-school-trip-to-zambia>

In a festive fit of support, young Jasper Wood has helped the cause by designing and making a series of paper aeroplanes - Mach 1 guaranteed - which are also on sale at a bargain 50 pence each!



Keep our garden growing

Andy Anderson has led a small group of members helping to turn the RTC garden into a nicer space for events and for members to "hang out" in after their matches and enjoy this tranquil space.

The Palace has now scheduled a pruning of the larger trees in the walled garden to make it even nicer, and a

quantity of spring bulb has been planted in the borders to cheer things up early in the season.

But we need a few more enthusiastic helpers - not to do a lot, it's more of a case of a little weeding and little watering, particularly through the spring / summer months. Any volunteers please let Andy or the Professionals know.

Paul Wright