

Newsletter

Oxford University Tennis Club



Spring 2022

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The Chairman writes...

Tennis is back and firing on all four cylinders. As well as the Brodie Cup, the Thames Valley League and the National League, we have at last held a proper Varsity match after the fixture last year without spectators or a dinner due to Covid. So, this year's splendid celebration at Lords included as guests a number of the 150th anniversary players, joining the teams for the 151st men's varsity match and the 30th women's match. There are full reports later.

One of the joys of playing at Merton is meeting the student players, and indeed the mission of the club is to support and promote student tennis. But we would like past players to be more involved in the future of the game.

So, this is why you will hear more about the Railroad Club. Andrew Davis and Graham Harding have been working hard to establish lists and networks of all those who have both appeared for the University or just enjoyed playing.

The refashioned Railroad Club will be launched on May 20th at the Oxford and Cambridge Club in London, and we hope it will be the start of a successful initiative.

It is sad to have to report the deaths of two of the most significant figures in the Club's recent history.

Bill Broadbent was the generous benefactor who enabled the club buildings to be refurbished a few years ago.

EDITORIAL

This Spring 2022 edition of the Newsletter reflects the energy with which life has returned to Oxford Real Tennis. A successful Varsity Match, some vigorous inter-Club competition and lots of battles for the various OUTC trophies – all reported here.

Sad news though, as well. We carry in this edition appreciations of two great supporters of OUTC: Simon Stubbings (a man of many talents who found time to be chair of the Club and a long-time supporter) and Bill Broadbent, one of the most generous of supporters of the Club in its long history, to whom we owe the current Clubhouse.

The Club has indeed had great supporters over the years, and we have established strong links with many of those who have played here as students. But we have become increasingly conscious as a Club that we have perhaps not done enough to build and maintain those links.

We want to remedy this omission and to that end, the Club is relaunching the Railroad Club

CLUB NEWS

New Club treasurer

Ian Barry has just joined the club committee as treasurer. He is a chartered accountant and moved to Oxford initially to join Oxfam as finance director, about 20 years ago. Until then he knew nothing of real tennis.

Simon Stubbings was a previous chair of the club and an enthusiastic supporter and Trustee of the Oxford University Tennis Foundation, our charity.

Descriptions of matches can be dry reportage, but not here. You wouldn't think you could get away with describing your player colleagues as a blobfish or Wally the Walrus, but somehow it works! Well done the Brodie Cup team for reaching the finals.

Please do be in touch if you have any suggestions or concerns regarding the Club.

Neil Mortensen

that Andrew Davis and George Peel set up a few years ago.

The aim of the Railroad Club will be to build links with and between past student players of the game and to support student tennis in Oxford for the long-term via an annual subscription. Andrew has done a remarkable job in contacting scores of past student players and persuading them to join us at a London launch of the new Railroad on 20 May.

Further sporting and social events will follow – thanks to the organising skills of three recent past players: Sophie Dannreuther, Georgie Willis and Laura Neill – and these will be trailed in future editions of the Newsletter for those who are interested.

For more information on the Railroad Club (which will in the longer term be open to all past and present members of the OUTC) please get in touch with Andrew Davis or Graham Harding.

Graham Harding

He was introduced to our wonderful sport of kings by a fellow squash player but initially didn't have the time for both sports and continued playing squash until continuing knee injuries ruled that out. He switched to real tennis and has never looked back!

Despite a new knee in 2020 and a torn Achilles tendon in 2021, each of which necessitated several months break from playing, he is as keen as ever to play as much as he can. Recently increased practice has however not, he says, improved his handicap, and he wonders if he will ever break 60 again!

He is currently trying to encourage fellow Unicorns to form a team to participate in the Boomerang competition in Melbourne in January 2023. He is pictured to the right, at Boomerang 2020 (see Chris Lintott's piece on page 5).



Ian (second from left) at the Boomerang

**John Simon Stubbings,
16 January 1945 – 31 March 2022**

OUTC is very sad to announce the death of Simon Stubbings, a great friend to many and a staunch servant and supporter of our club.

He served as President from 2009 to 2014 and until his death as a trustee of the Oxford Tennis Foundation, working to sustain the club for future generations and especially students of our University.

Simon was born in Dar es Salaam, then Tanganyika, to parents of the British Colonial Service. He took his first degree in history at Trinity College, Dublin where, by his own account, he devoted as much time to extra-curricular activities, especially rugby, as he did to achieving a good degree.

This was part of his motivation for undertaking first a Master's and then a DPhil after he retired from a legal career at Theodore Goddard in the City of London.



After retiring as a lawyer, Simon and his wife Joan moved to Oxford. He joined OUTC straight away, in 2001, having played ball-games all his life and having long been fascinated by the esoteric rules of tennis. He became a regular on the Monday/Tuesday evening doubles.

More recently he was a regular in a Saturday morning four, playing for several years opposite Judge David Morris, at the time the T&RA's oldest listed player at 94. The combination of these two legal brains made post-match conversations as competitive and amusing as anything produced on court, helped, of course, by their equal enjoyment of a beer or two.

Both were sensibly sceptical of modern medicine but nonetheless wise enough to play with medics. This proved a lifesaver when Simon suffered a brain haemorrhage on court just before Christmas 3 years ago. The combination of immediate diagnosis and a fast driver (there wasn't time to wait for an ambulance) meant that Simon arrived at the John Radcliffe Hospital in the nick of time, though it was touch and go for the next three weeks in ICU.

All the determination he had shown in undertaking his DPhil, climbing Mont Blanc and Kilimanjaro several

times, was demonstrated in his struggle to recover and to get back on court.

Sadly, his recovery was again held up a year ago when he underwent cancer surgery but, once more, he made an astonishing recovery, seemingly even better than before, riding his bicycle to the court to watch others and occasionally to hit a ball or two.

In September 2021, Simon, his family and others from Osney Island undertook to row the Thames from Osney to the Tideway in King Tom, a skiff built by Simon himself. The journey is told with Simon's typical humour in *The Osney Odyssey*, published privately just before his death.

This and his DPhil degree, "A Real Presence in Africa: Anglo-Catholicism and Colonial Rule", conferred in the days before his death, gave him enormous pleasure and justifiable pride. They are testaments to the unquenchable spirit of the man much loved by his family and his many friends.

Gordon Gancz

Bill Broadbent

26 January 1951 – 27 September 2021

It was with great sadness that we learned of the death of Bill Broadbent. He and Camille had retired in 2019 to Florida where he died in September, having been ill for several months. He was 70.

Bill was a lovely person, a man with great energy and enthusiasm for life and a very good and generous friend to OUTC. I hope some of you will have met him on one of his visits to Oxford. He enjoyed giving parties at the club for his friends.

Bill was educated as an undergraduate at the William College, Massachusetts and earned a masters at Stanford. He had recently retired after a successful career in banking.

I first heard of Bill when I received a call from the Bursar of Teddy Hall some fifteen years ago to advise that the Broadbent family was keen to make a bequest not only to Teddy Hall but also to Christ Church and

to OUTC. This was to mark the family's appreciation at how much daughter Avery (Teddy Hall 2004) and son William jnr (Christ Church 2006) had gained from their time as undergraduates at Oxford.

Both Avery and William represented OUTC successfully against Cambridge. William had been a junior squash champion in the US.

I had no idea what the Broadbents had in mind so when I met them for dinner at The Old Parsonage. I took along a "wishlist" for the Club, thinking that Bill and Camille might be generous enough to fund one or two items picked from my long list. A new net? Not a bit of it! "I think we can handle all of that, Martin, and how about us doing something about the changing rooms at the same time? The New York club has some nice panelling." And so it was ... redecoration throughout, carpets, furniture, tables, mirrors, new bar, refurbished changing rooms and more. That legacy remains with us and it was only three years ago that the Broadbents sent us another generous donation.



Bill Broadbent. Courtesy of www.Squashmagazine.com

The Broadbents also funded the refurbishment of the gardens behind the Teddy Hall library and a Junior Research Fellowship in American History.

I have written to Camille Broadbent on behalf of the club to express our condolences, expressing the wish that we may see a Broadbent or two in Oxford again

one day and reminding her that the “Broadbent plaque” and a photograph of all the family feature prominently in our club room.

We are proposing to name a future club competition in Bill’s memory.

Martin Mercer

BACK TO THE BOOMERANG?

Fittingly it’s the Royal Melbourne Tennis Club in Australia that hosts the biennial Boomerang Cup. The world’s biggest event by team and player numbers – over 30 teams and 130 players last time it was run – the Boomerang spans the world of RT.

Last time it was held, a Newmarket-led team which included OUTC’s very own Katie Leppard beat an Oxford Unicorns team featuring Clare Bucknell, Natalie Barber, Sophie Dannreuther, Grant Miller, Chris Lintott and RTC’s Owen Saunders. The quarter final came down to a playoff after the first four hard-fought doubles finished 22-22 all, and Leppard and co. went on to win the cup against some serious opposition.

The Newmarket team beat a team led by Julian Snow (ex world’s no 1) in the semis and then, wait for it, the ‘American Secret Service’ with Penny Lumley (ex women’s world champion) in the final.

Ian Barry – who played for Hampton Court in the last edition in 2020 – is hoping we can get another Oxford team to take on the might of the world again, from January 7 - 21 2023. Do get in contact with Ian if you fancy your chances in the world’s premier handicap tournament.

Boomerang serves are officially frowned on (says Craig) but the ability to deliver one might be an added bonus.

Chris Lintott

A TEN-POINT GUIDE TO PRACTISING THE ANCIENT GAME OF TENNIS

We all know that the best way to improve our game is to practise rather than constantly play matches. But be honest: how often do you actually do drills? Here I'd like to offer my own brief guide to practising effectively. But a word of warning: this is not a one-size-fits-all strategy. You'll need to adapt it to your own game and ambitions.

Let's begin with frequency. How often should you practise? Out of every five times I go on court, three sessions are drills, one session I hit baskets alone and in only one session do I play a competitive game. If that sounds too extreme, at least try to do drills every second time you go on court.

And what should you do during your precious practise session (with your equally willing partner)? Think of it as a three-course meal.

Starter

1. Down the Middle

Hit a warm-up basket up and down the middle of the court. Always aim for the first bounce to be on the centre line (the Hazard Line if you are at the Service End, and the Last Gallery Line if you are hitting from the Hazard End). This is really hard at first and don't worry if the ball is flying all over the place. The point is to keep focused on hitting the ball short, which not only yields good chases but, more importantly, improves overall ball control. Hit the ball firmly rather than pushing it and try to bend low. The dividends will be huge.

2. Cross-Courts

Now swap ends for a basket of cross-courts. The person at the Service End feeds a forehand cross court and the person at the Hazard End hits it back cross court. Again, aim for the first bounce on the centre line and direct your shot straight at the corner where the vertical walls meet. Do the second half of the basket rallying backhand to backhand (apologies left handers!).

Main Course

Now you're ready for the serious stuff. Choose two of the following drills, which are presented in order of increasing difficulty.

3. Serve and Return

Every rest (rally) has a serve and a return, so this is an essential drill. One person serves for the whole basket and you play point after point of Chase the Second Gallery (a Hazard is Chase Off). Aim to practise just

one thing. If you're serving it could be to improve the accuracy of your side wall serve. If you're receiving, it could be to cut as many as you can short into the backhand corner. You don't need to count the points but playing first to 15 can keep you focused. Now swap ends and do it again.

4. Third Shot

This drill is designed to practise the crucial third shot – the return of the return of serve. Put the basket along the middle of the wall at the back of the Hazard End. The person at the Hazard End goes into the receiver's corner and feeds a ball cross-court into the forehand corner of the Service End. Play out a point of Chase the Second Gallery (a Hazard is Chase Off). The best way to feed it is to throw the ball into the corner so it hits the back wall then the side wall (under the penthouse), bounces once and then you hit it – a simulated return of serve. After feeding one third of the basket to the forehand corner, hit a third to the backhand corner, then for the final third mix it up. Swap ends and do it again.

5. Dedans Volley

Put the basket along the middle of the wall at the back of the Hazard End. Feed a hard force out of your hand, aiming straight for the middle of the Dedans. The other person has to volley it back. Play out a point of Chase the Second Gallery (as usual, a Hazard is Chase Off). For extra punishment, if you lose four points in a row, you have to do five press-ups.

6. Figures of 8

This is really difficult. Spike Willcocks, an OUTC member who got down to +7, was obsessed with this one and we practised it religiously for years. Feed the ball cross court from the Service End. The person at the Hazard End returns it down the line, then the person at the Service End goes cross court, then the Hazard End player goes down the line again, and on it goes in figures of 8. You can vary this by feeding the first one down the line or starting from the Hazard End.

Dessert

If you've got time left, treat yourself to some points (but not a proper game). Here are two options.

7. Elevens

Play a game of first to eleven points. Until someone hits five, you play Chase Worse Than The Last Gallery (a Hazard is Chase Off). After somebody reaches five points, you play consecutively Chase Second Gallery, then Chase Last Gallery, Chase 5, Chase 3, Chase 1, Hazard Second Gallery and finally

Hazard 2. If nobody has reached eleven yet, return to playing Chase Worse Than The Last Gallery until you've finished.

8. Shrunken Set

I love this exercise, which was invented by former student player Rory Giddins. You play a modified set during which you never swap ends. Here's how it works. Each game starts at 15-all. Every point is a chase of Worse Than The Last Gallery on the floor, but you can also win it by hitting either the Second Gallery or the Last Gallery. This is very intense and keeps you focused on winning the first point of the game and hitting the galleries.

Before You Go...

An alternative way to finish a drill session is to do one of the following.

9. Main-wall Grilles

Both players go up the Service End. Throw the ball into the forehand corner, let it bounce, then try to hit a boast that hits the main wall then the grille (sneaking past the tambour). You can also feed it by throwing it onto the penthouse so it rolls down parallel to the main wall. Alternate with your partner, hitting three each time. Count the number of grilles you hit and try to beat your record.

10. Volley Returns

Both players go down the Hazard End. Throw the ball up on the side penthouse and hit the best forehand volley cross court that you can. Try to get the first bounce on the Last Gallery line and aim straight for the corner. Alternate with your partner, hitting three each time. If you're feeling brave, try to volley a few straight down the line into the dedans (my favourite shot).

You should be exhausted after doing all of this and feel that you've hit hundreds of balls. Stretch well. Make a note of what you did during the session and what you want to practise next time.

Disclaimer: Although I've spent years trying to work out the best practise routines, there are many others out there. So ask your friends and the Pros for advice and invent some new ones of your own! Please send your favourites and any feedback to me at info@romankrznaric.com

Roman Krznaric

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Putting targets on the court – in this case a seventeenth-century German noble's hat and cloak – can also be useful for drills.

THE BRODIE CUP

The Brodie Cup is the T&RA's version of the FA cup for 30-50 handicappers. It's also a competition in which we have a proud recent record, though it took a dent in the last running of the competition when we lost in the first round to Wellington. The 2019/20 champions turned out to be Seacourt, who tumbled out of this year's competition at the first possible hurdle, losing 5/0 to a Moreton Morrell team making use of their new floor.

Chris Lintott, the Brodie captain, has not only master-minded a highly successful team attempt (despite the blow of a narrow loss in the final) but has contributed a series of brilliant reports of the matches – featuring not just great tennis but also a range of denizens of the deep, a fair amount of cheese and a decent quantity of beer. Now read on...

Graham Harding

Brodie First Round: Home vs Hardwick

Our superb home record in the competition - one loss in five years - continued as a friendly Hardwick team were swept aside 4/1 on a autumnal Sunday on Merton Street. At least that's what the final scores seem to indicate, but for the crowd of supporters and teammates in the dedans for a large part of the afternoon this match felt much closer than it appears in retrospect.

First up was Jean de Pourtales, who ensured man of the match status before a ball had been hit by handing over an unnecessary but rather welcome bottle of '98 claret on the way into the match. Wine-searcher.com tells us that 'in Bordeaux, 1998 was a good year with some real gems but there were also some losers.' Alas, this was also true on court as Jean struggled through one of those days that all tennis players will recognise where nothing comes right and where the ball just won't seem to go where it is wanted. The truth is that the Oxford man was hitting a nice length and fighting hard, but opponent Jules Lambert - who celebrated her first game after previous losses to love on our lovely court - was getting everything back and making it very difficult for Jean to uncork the vintage tennis we know he's capable of. A tough loss put underdogs Hardwick a (bottle) neck ahead.

The Greenland shark can live for up to 500 years. Had one spent a lifetime hanging out in the side galleries, it would surely never before have seen a performance like that from doubles maestros Bruce Morrison and

Wayne McLennan who were up next, against Katie Leppard and Peter Buckley. Every year I ask Katie to play for us, and every year she reminds me her loyalty in this competition is with the Maple Leaves from down the road; it is somewhat ironic, then, that she hardly got a chance to play in the fixture, Bruce and Wayne rigorously targeting her partner with every opportunity in an attempt to ensure the match would not last [sic] long. Wayne kept things tidy while Bruce in particular went on the attack, hitting clinical boasts, low and hard around the opposing pair, whose afternoon was summed up by the final game of the second set where Oxford defended seven advantage Hardwick points before closing out the match 6/0 6/0. (Note to self: Perhaps prepare Greenland shark for next home match; Wikipedia says (a) it's a delicacy and (b) it smells distinctly of urine).

Having - uniquely amongst Unicorns – played only two sets last time out, Matt Alden seemed determined to maximise court time this time round. At 1/2 down in the first set he predicted a 6/5, 5/6, 6/5 score, and between Matt and a wily and determined Simon Constantine, the match of the day certainly seemed to be heading that way. Simon led throughout without looking too troubled and eventually hit a winning gallery to take the set 6/4. Hardwick were so confident their captain disappeared in search of lunch and the cheeseboard - a critical mistake, as he missed Matt building first a 3/0 and then a 4/2 lead. Hardwick were back in the dedans to see Matt even things up, 6/2 in the second, and then run away to 3/0 in the third, despite my absence attending to garlic bread. Tennis is a momentum game, though, and a nicked game for Simon quickly led to 2 and then 3. At 4/3 Matt fought back from 0/40 down to a sequence of six deuces, including the rest of the day which featured Matt sliding on his knees to make a perfect contact with a low ball. There was no way back for our plucky visitor, and at 6/3 Matt took the spoils.

Next up, and fresh from the library to make his Brodie debut was history student Otis Brankin-Frisby, who hit cut shots to all corners, many of which were intentional! His play proved way too strong for experienced Candida Nicholls, who didn't have an answer for Otis' ability to dig a winner out of almost any situation. Some sort of essay crisis was clearly on Brankin-Frisby's mind, as he kept rests short and games sped by; unperturbed by having hit the bear, normally a sign of imminent catastrophe, a beautiful backhand grille helped him wrap up the tie and the

match 6/3 6/2 allowing him to disappear back to his books. Job done.

All that was left was the showcase doubles, with James Kempton making a delayed Brodie debut alongside Natalie Barber. They built a victory out of targeting the weaker of their two opponents, an approach that didn't exactly fill the Hardwick pair with untrammelled joy, but which was very effective. Unfazed by James breaking a string, they rolled on 6/1. The key to doubles is communication (well, good tennis, and then communication) and despite never having played together Nat and James had this down; I very much enjoyed the query 'Where is he?' answered with a shout of 'Urm...in the middle'. This clarity served them well as their opponents - one of whom had turned down the opportunity to pay for lunch - left hungry, losing the second set 6/4. As the match turned out, this victory was mere icing on the cake, but Oxford's first-string doubles looks to be a real strength this year, ready for us to turn to them when a close game makes it necessary.

I'm also happy to report cheese consumption is back to normal, after an inexplicable anomaly in the previous round. Sharpham Brie from Devon proving the most popular of a strong (smelling) bunch; I wonder if it pairs well with shark?

Brodie Cup quarter final vs Leamington

The Brodie Cup quarterfinal took the Oxford team on the road to Leamington. Accompanied by a brace of supporters (thanks to Chris Peri and Paul Brown), and Clare the Bear who was stashed behind a stanchion in the home dedans, we set out to deflate a confident home side who had weathered a close match against varsity rivals Cambridge in the previous round.

First up were Georgie Willis and James Kempton. They had arrived hungry - literally so in the case of James, who asked about lunch within seconds of walking through the door - and were soon getting to grips with the fast, bouncy Warwickshire court. Leamington had lost the highly fancied Charlie Wells to injury, and the Oxford pair took full advantage in rushing to a 5/2 lead marked only partly by some eccentric positioning. Tennis is a game of momentum, though, and when the home team saved three set points thanks to canny serving by captain Henry Bryan, the Oxford supporters were worried. Georgie and James regrouped, eventually converting the eighth set point to lead 6/3. Despite nearly losing James, who

stood in front of last gallery while Georgie scooped the ball up from chase 4 (he's 'quite tall from that angle' apparently), the second set was comfortably won 6/2; lunch well deserved.

Next up was Natalie Barber, moving to the middle singles slot for the first time in this campaign. She'd made sure of energy levels with three separate breakfasts, but the memory of a recent national league loss to her opponent meant she had a lot on her plate, and the task ahead was weighing heavily on her, and she was quickly in a 0/3 hole. Natalie's far from liverish these days, though, and helped by occasional advice from the brains trust in the dedans she fought back, playing tennis that was full of (baked) beans. A crucial shot to beat chase 3 put her 4/3 ahead, and a peach of a volley return secured the set. The match wasn't done, though, as her opponent hit bangers and fought back to open a 4/1 lead as Nat struggled with serve. A quick adjustment suddenly saw her attacking the ball, poaching volleys where she could, and from 5/4 she served out to win 6/5 6/4. Her opponent was toast, and Oxford 2/0 up.



Travelling support: Leamington pro Chris Aley and Clare the Bear (top) at the QF. The latter left her usual vantage point in the Oxford dedans to 'support' the team on our travels. She stayed behind after our win at Lemington to glare at Chris some more.

Next up was Liz Leach, resplendent in bobble hat (equipment, as per Brodie rules, so pleasingly striped rather than white). Her approach is calculated and, if not countered, deadly, and a left-handed serve-right handed backhand one-two was causing all kinds of problems for her opponent. At 2/0 down he removed his tracksuit top - blue and yellow in the colours of the Swedish national team - and at 5/0 down he was swearing in Swedish. Despite finally serving, he couldn't stop Liz taking the set 6/0 in one of the more tactically astute performances of the year. Leach has form in turning Brodie matches into stories worthy of Scandinavian sagas, though, and I feared for the worst when I stupidly interrupted her serving with over-enthusiastic cheering in the first game of the second set. One simply doesn't interrupt an artist at work. That game was won, but her opponent's dastardly bobble made life hard and though she fought to 5/5 he took the set 5/6. A brief break - the hat long gone - refocused Oxford's champion, and to increasing yelps of disdain from a now packed dedans Liz moved from 4/1 to 5/2 to 6/2 it was a procession nearly as one-sided as the first set. Liz had won all the important points and given Oxford the tie.

The wobbegone, or carpet shark, is an Australian fish of some renown that wanders the ocean floor. Camouflaged with a bold dazzle pattern, they catch smaller fish that swim too close, using powerful needle-like teeth to prey on anything in their reach. Wayne McLennan performed brilliantly in the second doubles of the day, the Australian with bold headband in place and covering the court well to snap at any loose balls. Backed up by the steady influence of Bruce Morrison, only occasionally leaping like a salmon at the hazard end net, the two saw off a determined resistance from a younger Leamington pair who looked slightly confused at the notion of doubles. Despite there being So. Many. Deuces our heroes wobbegoned to a 6/4 6/3 victory. No worries.

Last up to attempt to try and complete a clean sweep was Matt Alden, who was facing recent winner of the Leamington club handicap singles Will Todd. This was a brilliant match to watch, with the two players well matched in terms of their ability to keep the ball in play and to hit the right length from almost any position. Matt found moments of brilliance to keep the ball out of Will's reach, and to stretch his opponent to the limit. At Oxford, he would have won easily. At Leamington - well, Oxford won the tie handily.

Bristol, coming up next, was our fifth semi-final in six years. Up the Unicorn.

Brodie semi-final vs Bristol

Bristol aquarium is well known to cephalopod cognoscenti as one of the few places in the country capable of keeping a giant pacific octopus entertained. Their latest specimen, Velcro, has been set the challenge of getting his tentacles around an increasingly complex and difficult set of tasks in order to receive rewards. In similar spirit, the Oxford Brodie team arrived at the newly resurgent and Chris Ronaldson-trained Bristol Real Tennis Club for their fifth semi-final in six years confident that they would cope with whatever this tricky court could throw at them.

First up were doubles specialists Bruce Morrison and Wayne MacLennan. An early Sunday start was no challenge for the Oxford pair who were 2/0 up without losing serve and quickly 4/0. Bruce had employed (or considered employing - I lost track) lucky seagull pyjamas, socks, rackets, shirt and everything else, but there was no need to trust to chance as two dramatic volleys gave Oxford the set 6/2. Wayne, whose blue headband matched red and white versions worn by the opposition was moving fluently around the court, with little of the drama seen in previous rounds. At 2/0 in the second they were cruising, but tennis is a momentum game and a wobble - 1/2 - became a worry - 2/2 - then increasingly tentative play threatened a wipe-out - 2/3, 2/4 and then 2/5.

Somehow Bruce and Wayne battled through a very scratchy couple of games to bring it back to 4/5. A black coffee served courtside revived Oxford chances, and despite having to fend off one match point by setting an excellent chase they came through 6/5 to take a game that should never have been close. Impressive resilience, under the kind of scrutiny from the crowd normally reserved for Velcro at feeding time.

Leading the line for our singles was Matt Alden, who had been training hard after a slightly disappointing result in the previous round. Facing a determined opponent, whose scrambling was appreciated by the dedans, Matt made slightly fewer errors and quickly opened up a 4/2 lead. What followed was the game of the day with long rests featuring shot after shot dug out of the court's corners but hit straight or crosscourt

each time. Matt took it after what seemed like an eon, and then gained the set with a direct hit to the dedans. Matt kept the pressure on, and his opponent - who for some reason had his shirt on backwards - became visibly frustrated waiting for the Oxford man to tire (Do people not read the Guinness Book of Records from cover to cover?). A retrieved shot from the tambour bounced off the net and beat last (practice clearly paying off) was more or less the last straw and a 6/2, 6/2 win put Oxford in the driving seat.

Unanticipated success in the British Open rackets meant Georgie Willis had had to pull out at the last minute (she went on to win the final!). Hero of the hour was thus Jean de Pourtales, who responded to a midnight call to make it to Bristol for the second singles. He was escaping what sounds like a stressful kitchen renovation but hoped to turn up the simmering heat on an opponent very aware that without a spicy performance Bristol's hopes of a first final were toast. From the start, though, it was clear that Jean had a lot on his plate, as signs of a player responding well to the Ronaldson coaching recipe and thus producing a sumptuous dish of a game that was more than its ingredients. The mise en place was immaculate - great footwork, solid tactics and a whole buffet's worth of different serves - and we all feared early on that Jean had bitten off more than he could chew. He had to think quickly; for starters, dealing with chases being laid at two or better more or less at will, but appetising tennis dragged him level at 2/2.

Unfortunately, that was as good as it got, and though Jean got close in almost every game he just couldn't find the cherry on top of the cake; I'd steak [sic] a glass of decent French red that Bristol's Max Gunning will be playing the top string singles next year. 2/1 Oxford, and the nerves in the dedans were beginning to mount.

Not that Otis Brankin-Frisby, recalled to the team after a victory in round 1, seemed nervous. (Nor did Nat Barber, who pulled her woolly hat over her eyes for a strategic nap in the corner of the dedans). Otis, a history student - having earlier experienced Oxford before 7am for the first time in his short university career! - ambled around the court like a librarian on a Friday afternoon, serving carefully and reaching almost anything his opponent fired at him. Otis' forcing with a whipped forehand was particularly effective, beating short chases by hitting the dedans. However, his Bristolian opponent was made of stern stuff, fighting back several times from 15/40 to



Student life: Natalie Barber and James Kempton partying hard in the Bristol club room after our tense semi-final win.

remain at parity before the set was ended by probably the worst shot of the match, scuffed into the corner by Otis to win 6/5. Fate, it seemed, was with us, and then...the wheels came off. Forces were suddenly hitting the edges of the dedans, the tambour was being missed not middled, and in most of the games it was Otis chasing. Second set was 3/6, and then Bristol were 0/3 up. The next game went to deuce, taken by Otis, and the dedans sniffed a turning point. At 4/5, beautiful, calm cross court shots put the Unicorns within 9 points of the final, but a fourth match point for the home team was converted to put everything down to the final doubles.

Luckily, we had James Kempton and Natalie Barber, two of the more thoughtful players of the game up for us. Nat in particular had perhaps had too much thinking and, having risen from her nap, spent much of the previous match pacing the clubroom, car park and half of Clifton. The first game involved faults, deuces, and James beating worse than one on the floor, but after more than ten minutes it went to Bristol. The experienced west country pair were soon on top, pushing Nat and James around the court like schoolyard bullies and taking the first set 6/2 to give Bristol the lead for the first time in the match. A switch of receiver by Oxford didn't initially seem to have made much difference, but from 0/2 down our heroes came back into the match, Nat volleying aggressively in piratical style and James hitting length on the cutless court. ('cutlass?' - Ed). The crucial game came at 3/3 when our pair came back from 0/40 to win at deuce. From there, despite James forgetting the difference between a yard and hazard a yard, the set was won 6/4.

Our season now rested on the last set of the match. You could have cut the tension in the dedans with a small lightweight sword of the kind used onboard ships, as on court the players gave it everything, James shoulder charging and then spinning off walls to no avail. From 0/2 good tennis and the occasional badger led us to 3/3, and spectacular play from James got us to 4/3 and Nat volleyed us to 5/3. Bristol got one game back, but the Oxford pair served out to produce a roar from the assembled supporters (thanks Chris Peri, Paul Brown, and Clare) in the dedans and set off wild celebrations as you'll have seen in the photo on the previous page. Bristol dispatched 3/2: Goodnight Irene, and up the Unicorn.

Brodie final vs Wellington

Bridport! Beaches, Broadchurch and beer, being home to Palmers' Ale, a staple of the (hopefully) temporarily erstwhile Lamb & Flag but best consumed close to the source. Bridport is also for Brodie, the final of the competition being traditionally held at the gloriously incongruous Hyde tennis court, a short hop from the sea. Having gathered (see picture below) for the traditional training dinner with friends and supporters the night before, the Oxford team were ready for whatever opponents Wellington could throw at them. Our friends from – basically it's Reading – had travelled in force, joining a strong travelling Unicorn support to fill the dedans for the match of the season.

First up were James Kempton and Georgie Willis, facing Willem Sweet and Francis Moore who hit the ball hard enough that DI Alec Hardy himself would struggle to find it. One of the travelling Wellington support, unfamiliar with our pair, professed themselves 'Worried for Georgie' as a result, but the Oxford pair were unflustered and flinty when facing



up to the barrage. The first set disappeared 1/6, but strong comms meant James and Georgie were able to keep their opponents in sight. I especially enjoyed the conclusion of a midcourt meeting at 2/1 up: 'Just try and win'. That's exactly what the pair did, but from 4/4 a string of close points gave Wellington the rubber and early advantage. A brilliant, battling performance...and no need for me to mention a certain team member's late Saturday night or early Sunday morning in Cheltenham night clubs, eh?

To get us on the board, we turned to Oxford's number one, Matt Alden. Matt's preparation and focus on Brodie matches this year has been inspirational, working round injuries to make sure he was ready for the big day. Playing an inspired Simon Roundell in what was probably the match of the day, restes lasted for ever as both players picked ball after ball out of the corners and sent their opponents scrambling. Simon took the first 4/6, followed by Matt - inspired by noises (cheers?) from Oxford's youngest supporter, Craig's son Cooper - taking the second 6/3. For the third time in the match Matt raced to 2/0, but this time stayed ahead to take the crucial third 6/3.

Making his debut in the final was Quentin Gueroult, with an assist from my predecessor as Brodie Captain, Tim Dadd, who sacrificed a lazy morning by the sea to dash to Taunton and back to grab Quentin. Playing Benji Barnes, another of the Wellington young guns, Quentin had to use all of his skill and guile to stay in the points and in the games. Some lovely forehands hit while at full pelt were hugely effective, and there were periods where the grille seemed just to suck the ball in. At 5/5 Oxford hopes were high, but despite having the serve Quentin lost out to Benji. The second set was similar, with Quentin receiving well to force Benji to change serve as we reached 4/4. The next two games went to deuce, but both fell Wellington's way - 4/6, and we needed both wins.

Liz Leach played the third singles, despite injuries and niggles to foot and shoulder. Her opponent, Cesca Sweet, is clearly one to watch, bringing a game honed on the rackets court to the expanse of a tennis court. Liz took the first game of the match, and following advice relayed from Craig and two brilliant volleys a second game, but lost the first set quickly: 2/6. Liz is nothing if not determined, and took the first game of the next set but then could do little to prevent Cesca disappearing into the middle distance - 1/6 in the second, and the cup was heading to Wellington.

The blobfish, a deep-sea fish of the family Psychrolutidae inhabits deep waters off the coast of Australia. As such, it has adapted to conditions of extreme pressure, and when brought to the surface and displayed in very different conditions it loses shape and form, leading to it often being voted the ugliest animal in the world. Similarly, Wayne McLennan and Bruce Morrison had spent all season playing first, winning crucial matches for us in each round while under enormous (albeit often self-imposed) pressure.

Released into the unfamiliar habitat of a dead rubber, the pair struggled to adapt, looking out of sorts and out of position as the first set went 1/6. That loss seemed to startle the pair, who rebounded to take the second set 6/3. Saving four match points along the

way - two by hitting the dedans - Bruce and Wayne triumphed 6/5 to secure an extremely rare unbeaten Brodie record.

I'm very proud of them, and of the entire team who took us to the brink of glory. All season the Unicorns had managed to win close matches, and if just one of the three 4/4 sets in losing rubbers had tipped the other way, I'm sure we'd have got there. As it was, we watched as Wellington celebrated their first Brodie triumph - marred, perhaps, only slightly by their pro and coach Danny Jones crediting Seacourt with the win. Many thanks to the team, and the supporters, particularly ever-present Chris Peri and Paul Brown. Here's to next year. Up the Unicorn!

Chris Lintott



CLUB SILVERWARE

It's a rare event when the Club's silverware is gathered together for engraving and, with many competitions skipping a year, now somewhat overdue. It was lovely to see it all lined up and polished. Once the engraving is done, it will go back on display in the cabinet and pro's office. We're also in the process of updating the Honours Board in the Clubroom and the plan is that it will go into a larger and better quality frame once done.

Thank you to all of our sponsors for their generous support for these competitions.

It's a shame of course that the Brodie Cup wasn't added to the haul, but what a great run again and the Club's thanks go again to Chris Lintott for his excellent captaincy and for his remarkable reporting too – we've had an exceptional run in this competition. A lot of fun had by all too.

Derek Williams

THE VARSITY MATCH 2022 – HONOURS SHARED

Men's match

Though Benedict Yorston remained from 2020 and 2021, having bid farewell to both James Bates and Rory Giddins after last year's last gasp victory some recruiting was needed, but we were fortunate enough to get a fair bit of talent in to step into those large shoes. Alfred Backhouse, who grew up playing on the Radley court, brought a lot of experience to 2nd string despite being just a fresher, whilst some increased time on court brought Rackets captain Louis Manson down into the 20s to be our number 3. The fourth spot was hotly contested with Lawn Tennis captain Ross Martin improving rapidly, but James Kempton worked hard and kept a hold of the position he held last year.

On the morning of 4th March, the match began. Though the Cambridge number one of many years, Ed Hyde, dropped out of his PHD and therefore was unable to play, there was still the prospect of a strong opposition with Patrick Smart having impressed in 2021, and some very promising racquet-sport players

making great progress. The 4th string singles promised as much, with James facing off against his younger brother (who is presumably the family disappointment having chosen Minty-Green over Oxford-Blue. Pushed all the way to three sets, James was victorious in the battle of the Kemptons, taking the match 6/0, 3/6, 6/1 in a game of momentum swings. Debutant Louis was up next and looked as if he'd been playing the game for years, sweeping aside his opposite number 6/1 6/1 with some particularly impressive volleying proving decisive. The final men's match of the Friday was the 1st String doubles, with numbers 1 & 4 from Oxford (Benedict and James) taking on Cambridge's 1 & 3, with both sides picking tactically to try and gain the upper hand over the whole match. Some excellent doubles was played, with Cambridge's Lawn Tennis experience shining through at the net, but James and Benedict came through 6/2, 6/5, 6/3 after a particularly close third set.

We returned to the court on Saturday 5th with a commanding 3-0 lead needing just a single victory to secure the trophy for another year. This was swiftly



Left to right: Ross Martin (reserve) Louis Manson, James Kempton, Alfred Backhouse and Ben Yorston (Captain)

provided by Louis and Alfred in the 2nd String doubles, as they cruised to a 6/0, 6/3, 6/0 victory, dominating from the service end for long periods. With that the trophy was secured, but plenty of pride remained to be won with the 2nd and 1st string singles match, and Alfred was back on the court for his second match of the day against an opponent a few years older than himself. A brutal display of hitting, combined with a rather deadly Railroad, gave Alfred a dominant 6/2, 6/0 win, which bodes well for the future of the team given such success as a mere fresher.

The final match of Varsity 2022 was Benedict vs Patrick Smart, both playing at first string for the first time. Benedict's experience shone through as he stayed focussed throughout, remaining in control throughout and running out a 6/1, 6/0 winner, winning 12 straight games after losing the opening exchange, though the tennis was much more competitive and closely matched than the score line suggested.

As such it was a fantastic victory for the men, 6-0 in matches, taking the trophy with a dominance that underlines the strength of this team. With all four



This time, there was enough time for a Reserve doubles match. Pictured above in full flight is Ross Martin

members eligible to play next year, Cambridge will have their work cut out if they want to reclaim the trophy anytime soon!



The Long Room at Lord's set for the Varsity Dinner



Unicorn themed support from Craig in the dedans at Lord's. Unfortunately for Craig, those glasses can't hide his left eye, blacked from a ball off the tambour struck by Women's 1st team captain, Mary Strevens, which also broke his nose!

Worth a brief mention is the Inter-Universities Tournament that took place a week later in Cambridge, where Benedict, Louis, and James combined to take on teams from Middlesex, Durham, Bristol, St. Andrews, Exeter, and Cambridge. Having started on opposite sides of the draw it ended up with a Varsity rematch final between ourselves and Cambridge 1 with the same result, as a clean 3-0 sweep of both singles and the doubles match was secured even on away territory. A fine end to an excellent season!

Huge thanks must go to Andrew and Craig for all their efforts throughout the year, and likewise to the entire OUTC committee for their fantastic support of student tennis. The MCC and Brian Sharp were as accommodating and generous as ever, whilst the continued sponsorship of the Varsity match by Pol Roger is hugely approached by all of us involved. Here's to another Oxford victory next year!

Benedict Yorston

Women's match

The 151st anniversary match was hosted at Lord's and kindly sponsored by Pol Roger. According to handicaps this match looked the tightest it has been in years, especially with some very talented Lawn Tennis players on both sides who have only recently taken up the game.

Our ladies knew they would have to play well to retain Oxford's recent winning streak...

The first match of the day was the second string between Izzy Marshall and Kureha Yamaguchi. This pairing have faced each other on a Lawn Tennis court before but never at the 'sport of Kings' and both sides were eager to see how this clash would unfold. Izzy however played a blinder, romping to a 6/0, 6/0 victory and giving the crowd a masterclass. Kureha kept fighting throughout but today Izzy was unstoppable! Let's go Oxford!

Next up for the ladies was captain Mary Strevens playing at third string against the Cambridge captain Rosie Taylor. On paper Rosie was a better handicap but the first set was nip and tuck, with one game lasting at least 15 minutes! Despite Mary clinching the first set 6/4, the match then started to shift momentum with Rosie really starting to find her feet and hitting some beautiful shots at the tambour. Alas, it was not to be for Oxford with the final result being 4/6, 6/1, 6/2 to Cambridge.

The final match for the ladies on Friday saw Olivia Becher also make her Varsity debut. Olivia has previously played at Oxford before, but we are delighted that she has now returned to the team for a DPhil. Olivia was drawn against Ulla Petti, another Lawn Tennis player! It was a nervy first set, with

Ulla able to relax into her shots more quickly and secure a 6/0 lead. However, Olivia dug in deep and started really attacking the ball and although Cambridge ultimately triumphed 6/5, it was a very tight affair indeed!

Saturday morning saw Natalie Barber, our number 1 player take to the court. Natalie has been great all year with the team and helped guide us with her added experience and skill! However she faced a formidable opponent in the form of Emily Arbuthnott who is 25 in the UK for Lawn Tennis. This match was an extraordinary event to witness with such a high level of tennis on display. Ultimately though, it was Cambridge who succeeded and took the match 6/3, 6/4.

This was now a tense time in the Varsity as the team knew they had to win every match left in order to be in with a shot at the playoff! Mary Strevens and Izzy Marshall then partnered up to take on Kureha Yamaguchi and Rosie Taylor in the first doubles match of the weekend. This pairing has played a fair few times together which came in handy, and no doubt helped them towards a relatively comfortable 6/4, 6/3 victory. Let's go Oxford – still everything to play for!

The final match for Oxford saw Natalie Barber and Olivia Becher battle against Emily Arbuthnott and Ulla Petti. This was a marathon of a match, with momentum swinging between the two sides throughout. In particular the second set of 6/5 to Cambridge proved how important pivotal points can be, with neither side wanting to relent anything! Ultimately though, the momentum swung to the light blue pairing, and they won 3/6, 6/5, 6/4.

Although this is not the result we would have wanted the team performed brilliantly and were incredibly supportive of each other throughout. It has been such a fun season and it is exciting to see what progress this relatively inexperienced team will make in the next few years!

However I cannot end this match report without passing comment on how lovely the Varsity dinner was. Held in the Long Room, Pol Roger kindly invited back last year's team and we all dined with the best food, drink, and company one could ask for. What a way to end a fantastic weekend of tennis!

Mary Strevens



Left to right: Izzy Marshall, Izzy Lewis (reserve), Olivia Becher, Natalie Barber and Mary Strevens (Captain)

Varsity 2nds matches

Played this year at Oxford, our teams made full use of home advantage and won both of the second team matches by convincing, and perhaps even overwhelming margins: 6-0 in the Men's and 4-2 in the Women's.



Neil with (left to right) Judy Sayers, Abby Hayton, Lucy Lyons (captain) and Izzy Lewis



Left to right: Neil Mortensen with Isaac Wighton and captain Yakoub Moghal

New Oxford captains, 2022-23

The new Oxford captains are Louis Manson of St Anne's and Izzy Marshall of New College. We wish them every success for the 2023 Varsity Match.

OXFORD WIN THE FIRST WOMEN'S REAL TENNIS VARSITY MATCH (as remembered by Louise Ludekens)

The first women's Real Tennis Varsity match, held in Oxford in 1992 was the culmination of months of training, negotiation and organisation.

Having become a keen player in my second year as an undergraduate, I was disappointed to discover that there was no Varsity match in the calendar for women (the men's match was an established fixture at Leamington RTC at that time). So after some encouragement from Kees Ludekens and Alan Oliver, the Oxford Pros, and the backing of the OUTC committee, I wrote to Cambridge and laid down the challenge. The challenge was accepted and the date set for 22nd February 1992. We named our team the 'Penthouse Pets', ordered our sweatshirts and set about training; we were determined to win this first fixture.

We were well supported by the pros – a young and enthusiastic Kees established a rigorous training regime several times a week and this was complemented by Alan's dive shots and somersaults to keep us on our toes. Between them they managed to instil some technique into our game and helped us to adapt from other racket sports to real tennis.

The big day came with the expected excitement – college friends and parents in the galleries, an

atmosphere of competition and tension. As both teams were new and Cambridge had fewer female players, we designed a format that suited both teams, and could include all our players - two singles and three doubles.

The details of the matches are a bit of a blur after 30 years, but we had some well fought contests and Oxford took the match 5-0. It certainly felt like a huge achievement and a pivotal moment in tennis. We hoped the match would continue in the years to come, and it is wonderful to see that after 30 years it is going from strength to strength.

1992 Results (Oxford first)

L. Air bt L. Danby 6/2, 6/2;

J. Sillery bt H. Knight 6/0, 6/2;

A. Hart and L. Faulkner bt

A. Webb and A. Stewardson 6/0, 6/1;

L. Air and K. Yorston bt

G. Hopkinson-Woolley and R. Sandbury 6/3, 6/0;

S. Cooke and A. Youngman bt

L. Danby and H. Knight 6/1, 4/6, 6/1.

More recent players might be interested to know that there were no leather sofas to recline on in a cosy club room after the match, although we did of course have a few drinks and a proper celebration in town.

OUTC was a very different place in 1992 (but equally special). There was no social space downstairs, just a tiny pro shop. If you dared venture up the creaky stairs you would find yourself in the old club room with its wonky floor, wobbly table and the infamous Baby Belling cooker. If you were even more daring, you might proceed through the door into the changing room; there was just one small room for everyone, no lock on the door and one shower with a flimsy curtain. If you chose to use this, you either had to sing loudly or be prepared for company at any moment!

A little different to the plush separate male and female changing rooms on offer today. But it wasn't all about the building, it was the game that drew us there, an opportunity to take on a new challenge and to learn a new sport.

For me and many others, OUTC was also a chance to be part of a unique community beyond your college and the rigours of academic life.

Louise Ludekens (née Air)



1992 OUTC Women's Varsity team

FLM LEAGUE – IT'S GREAT TO BE BACK

Lesley Ronaldson introduces the FLM league

The IRTPA National League – now sponsored by FLM (Financial Lifetime Management...flmltd.com) – re-started in late 2021.

It is the biggest competition in the world of Real Tennis and this year has 46 teams with over 250 participants, over 200 matches and consequently over 600 rubbers have been played with deuces and three full sets if needed.



It is a sign of commitment and enthusiasm that only three matches have been walk-overs but considering the teams include Jesmond Dene, Cambridge and The Hyde in Dorset, three is a good result!

The Premier Division has already been won by Team Ben Taylor Matthews with Bryn Sayer winning the Most Valued player prize.

The teams range from Premier Division (0+) to Division 9 (40-45).

FLM NATIONAL LEAGUE MATCH REPORTS

National League Division 1: Oxford vs Oratory 1, 9 December 2021

Oxford: Roman Krznicaric and Nino Merola
Oratory: Claire Fahey and Levi Gale

It was a damp night and a cool court when Oxford 1 took on the Oratory 1 in the National League on 9 December 2021.

First on court were Roman Krznicaric for Oxford and Claire Fahey, probably the greatest female tennis player of all time. A tough challenge for Roman who (thanks to the pandemic) hadn't played a match for two years. And so it proved alas.

Roman started slowly and Claire was soon ahead 2/0. But the momentum began to shift and Roman pulled back to 2/2 with a lovely volley to the tambour. Three games alternated but Claire pulled ahead to 5/3 with the quality of her retrieving at full stretch forcing the occasional error from Roman who could never quite get back on terms. The first set ended 6/4 to Claire and – unluckily for Oxford – she upped the pressure in the second set. Her reach on the run, her consistent length and her return of serve (particularly in game 6 of the second set) left Roman with too much to do to retrieve the match.

The second match featured Nino Merola of Radley (substituting for a Covid-hit Craig) versus Oratory's Levi Gale. Levi – playing fast and furious tennis – dominated the first set, winning 6/0 with a combination of accuracy and power that tested the netting of the dedans. The second set, however, was much more even. There was great serving from Nino and some lovely winning grilles (particularly towards the end of the set) and a few more errors from Levi. But Levi's power proved just too much for Nino who went down 6/5 at the last gasp.

FLM National League – current standings

Division 1

Roman and Craig (see match reports below).

Division 6

(captain – Ashley Deakin). In the final on Friday 22nd April vs Hatfield (Away).

Division 7 (captain Chris Lintott) currently 5th.

Division 9 (captain Danny Dawson) currently 5th.

In the doubles, Roman and Nino took on Claire and Levi. Oxford started slowly – quickly down 4/1 to a blend of heavy shots from Levi and solid retrieving from Claire. As the match went on so Claire's own accuracy and power came more and more to the fore and despite Roman channelling Camden Riviere in a mid-set fightback (and treating us to some Serbo-Croat oaths when things didn't quite go to plan) Oxford never got closer than a 4/6 deficit. In the final stages Oratory picked up speed again and closed out the set for an 8/4 win.

So 3-0 down overall and a game result of 16/32. Better luck next time, Oxford!

Graham Harding

National League Division 1: Oxford vs Manchester, 2 February 2022

Oxford: Craig Greenhalgh and Roman Krznicaric
Manchester: Robert Shenkman and Nino Merola

What an exhilarating display of top-class tennis these guys staged for us last night! In front of a small, but perfectly-formed, audience of tennis and wine connoisseurs, Craig and Roman represented Oxford, taking on the Might of Manchester in the form of Rob Shenkman and Radley's ubiquitous gun-for-hire, Nino Merola.

In all three matches Oxford sprinted to a lead, only to be pegged back by the ruthless Manchester players. This was Craig's first match in a long time, and he played well to match Rob's dogged determination.

There were so many supersonic forces into the dedans from both players that audience and marker alike feared for their lives at numerous points! The ground covered by both players was remarkable, with apparently unachievable 'gets' on both sides. Eventually, however, Rob's match-practice helped him win 6/3, 6/4.

Roman's match against Nino followed a similar pattern, with Oxford's man leading 4/2 and then 5/3 in the first set before Nino stormed through to take the set 6/5. The second set offered many breath-taking rests with both players careering around the court, picking up cut shots in all corners. Eventually Nino prevailed 6/5, 6/4.

The doubles was a dazzling display of high-speed, high-class tennis, involving aggressive volleying and accurate shooting at both grille and winning gallery. Again Oxford took an early lead but were finally overcome by Manchester's powerful game, 8/6. The enthusiastic audience enjoyed the occasion enormously, and were very grateful to Savage Selection Ltd and to Derek Williams for their generous sponsorship of this evening of close and thrilling match tennis.

Jenny Jones

National League Division 1: Oxford vs Petworth, 10 March 2022

Oxford: Craig Greenhalgh and Roman Krznicaric
Jesmond Dene: Zak Eadle and Lewis Williams

This turned out to be rather a harrowing evening for Oxford fans. Our first-string player, Craig, had taken a ball to the face off the tambour only days before, which had splattered his nose. Having had his broken nose re-set, and ignoring the inevitably painful bruising which made him look as though he had gone 10 rounds with Rocky, Craig agreed to play in this match.

In the first encounter, Craig played against Zak Eadle. He could hardly have had a worse draw!

Zak's approach to most games is to batter the opposition into submission, and on this occasion he returned most of Craig's serves with supersonic forces into the dedans. Still suffering from something akin to PTSD, Craig's uncontrollable reaction to these assaults was to duck. Despite this, in the first set, Craig managed to hold Zak to a narrow 6/5 win. In the second set the state of Craig's mindset played a greater part and the final result was a 6/5, 6/2 victory for Zak.

In the second match Lewis Williams showed remarkable agility and dexterity, carving low shots into every corner and giving Roman Krznicaric no chance to hit his stride. As Roman got angry with himself and more desperate to get on terms, Lewis controlled the match admirably with delicate shots to

excellent chases and the tambour. Lewis won 6/2, 6/2.

No one really expected Craig to come back out on court for the doubles after his traumatic experience in the singles. However, there he was, warming up and ready to play. By this time, however, the fears festering in his mind had taken over and he found it even more difficult to defend the dedans. The Jesmond Dene pairing won 8/1.

The next morning Craig very sensibly announced that he would not be back playing matches until his face - and his mind - have fully recovered.

Jenny Jones

National League Division One: Oxford vs Petworth, 24 March 2022

Oxford: Lewis Williams and Roman Krznicaric
Petworth: Lewis Gordon and Tom Durack

The match started with Lewis Williams, playing no 1 for Oxford against Lewis Gordon for Petworth. A storming opening rest with great retrieving on both sides ended with Lewis W winning the first point. And that set the tone for the rest of the match. Lewis W's serve coupled with excellent retrieving of Lewis G's power shots and some remarkable boasts saw him to a 5/0 lead in the first set. Lewis G pulled back a couple of games but Oxford ran out winners 6/2.

The next set was tighter. Lewis G for Petworth was ahead from the start, with some excellent volleying and plenty of power striking. As Craig commented midway through the set, the new balls he'd stitched for the match had already had a week's worth of hard use. Those of us in the dedans knew to sit well back when either player was attempting to counter a tight chase.

Lewis W steadily pulled back the deficit to reach 4/4 and then 5/5 in a series of very tight games where the advantage swayed back and forth in a series of remarkably hard-fought rests, so it went down to the wire. The last game was tense but Lewis W for Oxford was never seriously challenged and won the decider to 30.

That brought on Roman versus Tom Durack for the second singles. Roman's calm control and excellent serving took him to a 3/1 lead but then Tom fought back to lead 4/3. A winning grille for Roman in game 8 brought him back level and he then won a series of great chases to take the set 6/4. 'Keep fighting' was Roman's admonition to himself early in the set and he

steadily pulled away to a 4/1 lead. That fifth game was very hard fought but Roman eventually won it with two straight shots into the dedans. Though Tom pulled back a game he could not make enough impression on Roman's accuracy and grace and the set and the match closed out with Roman a 6/2 winner – his first for some Nat League matches and a well-deserved tribute to focus and consistent precision.

Straight into the closing doubles and the Petworth boys' determination not to be on the wrong end of a

whitewash was clear from the start. Though they lost the first game – thanks to some demon retrieving from Lewis W for Oxford – they were more consistent, more powerful and perhaps fresher. Oxford won some real heart attack rests and made some astonishing returns but they were never seriously in the set which closed out 8/2 to Petworth. So an Oxford win but on the night and those of us lucky enough to be in the dedans enjoyed a feast of high class tennis.

Graham Harding

CLUB EVENTS AND MATCH REPORTS

Strutt & Parker final

Up The Unicorn beat Penthouse Playboys 5-1

It has been an absolute pleasure to captain Up the Unicorn to their second Strutt and Parker victory!

As Chris Lintott, Jean de Portales and I were the only remaining members of the original team, this year called for some new blood to reinvigorate our chances at success. We were joined by Mary Strevens and Owen Darbshire, who soon got used to and excelled at the frantic 20 minutes format of the game.

Every member of the team played their part; Chris with his excellent tactical advice, shouting support from the dedans, and entertaining gallops from one end of the court to the other whilst shouting “How

long left?!?”. Jean with his ever calming presence and grace on the court, Mary with her winning mentality and volleys into the dedans, and Owen's utter enthusiasm for the game whilst producing the most extraordinary boasts. A special thanks also goes to Graham Piddock, who stepped in for the semi-final whilst a couple of our team were enjoying a half-term break. Despite Graham saying to me that he was very rusty, he played so very well and sealed our place in the final, so we could not have done it without him!

Thanks again to the sponsors, opposition and Andrew and Craig for marking such a fun tournament. We look forward to defending our title next year! Up the Unicorn!

Natalie Barber



Up The Unicorn! Left to right: Jean de Pourtales, Nick Owen, Mary Strevens and Natalie Barber (Captain) with sponsor Nick Hextall



*Beard Cup – presented by sponsor Mark Beard (centre)
Natalie Barber beat Henry Henman 9/8*



*Pamela Wallace Trophy
Bruce Morrison (right) beat Tim Goodacre 9/4*



20th November 2021: A1 RAM 40+ handicap doubles – Mary Strevens and Izzy Marshall beat Cameron Bloch and Henry Spelman 6/5



27 November 2021: Over 60's (age) doubles
Winners Graham Harding (left) and Adrian Fort



30 January 2022: Wroth Cup (club doubles championship)
Ben Yorston (left) and Louis Manson beat Alfred Backhouse
and James Kempton 6/1, 6/2



8-9 January 2022: Grant Bates Trophy (club handicap doubles) sponsored by Nuffield Health and with the support of Aldens
Neil Mortensen and Chris Conlon (pictured on the right) beat Mary Joyner and Derek Williams 6/4



*Simms Champagne League 'A' Final
Derek Williams beat Vaughan Roberts 9-0*

Aberdare Cup

Charlie Lane-Fox beat Ewan Smith 9/4

Student Silver Racket (men)

16 November 2021

Ben Yorston beat James Kempton

Silver Goblet (women)

Mary Strevens beat Olivia Becher

Both these events were generously supported by Aldens. Our thanks to them and other sponsors.

Christmas Doubles Tournament

30 December 2021

Winner: Mark Bale

Field Trophy

5 March 2022

Managed by Geoff Baker, Oxford's team beat Radley in the final at Moreton Morrell – see the match report on page 26.

A superb result that puts Oxford back into the premier real tennis team event, the Pol Roger Trophy, next year

Thames Valley League

Oxford recently won the Thames Valley League (FSTVL) for the third year running and without losing a fixture! It was a real team effort with 16 players used across the 30s - 60s handicap Doubles format.

Thanks should go to Franklins Solicitors for sponsoring this 'social but competitive' league and of course to Mick Dean for organising. Roll on the 2022/3 season.

Danny Dawson



TVL Oxford and Oratory players including Rob Fahey (luckily he was only the Marker!)

Field Trophy

5th March at Moreton Morrell

It was a closely fought match between Oxford and Radley and was a splendid day's tennis, ending 3-2 to Oxford. Unfortunately, a Radley player was absent through sudden illness and, as Oxford won the first two rubbers, the match was decided by lunchtime. Nevertheless, Radley fought hard for their honour and won the two matches after lunch, which would have made for a nail biting finish had Radley not defaulted earlier! Thank you Pol Roger for your continued sponsorship of this event.

Roman Krznicaric bt Mike Henman 6/1 6/0

Geoff Baker & Anthony Clake bt
Paul Kettle & Charles Human 6/3 6/1

Alan & Richard Oliver lost to
Magnus Garson & Stewart Licudi 6/5 5/6 3/6

Rob Walker lost to Henry Henman 4/6 3/6

Radley conceded final match due to sudden illness on the day.



Oxford's winning team. Left to right: Richard Oliver; Alan Oliver; Geoff Baker (Captain) Roman Krznicaric and Rob Walker

1992 REAL TENNIS:

Prince Edward takes RT to TV, Julian Snow and the 'Battle of the Sexes'

Thirty years ago last month, as Louise Ludekens remembers in the piece on page 18, the Oxford women's team beat Cambridge 6-0 in the first women's real tennis match between the two teams. The Times printed the results and a brief note on the match – and the Cambridge women's hope they would have half-blue status within five years.

1992 was a year when Real Tennis made quite a stir in the nation's news. Real tennis even made the front

page of The Sun (almost certainly the first and last such touch of celebrity). The cricketer Allan Lamb had been fined £5000 for exposing a 'cover-up which is shielding cricket cheats'.

The Sun paid the fine but not before commenting on the hearing at Lords in the 'appropriate setting of a committee room tucked between a Real Tennis Court and the Lords Museum'.

Telling its readers that ours was a 'high-class game even older than the Long Room's most ancient inmate', the paper reckoned Henry VIII (a player of

the game) would have been co-opted by Lords' to 'chop off Lamb's head'.

In the real world of Real Tennis, it was Julian Snow's year. Then the world's No 1 amateur, Snow won a host of titles round the world, including the first amateur victory in a British Open for 13 years.

An 'inveterate gambler' (according to Simon Barnes of The Times), Snow made and won several side bets on a Real Tennis 'Battle of the Sexes' beating multiple world champion Penny Lumley 6/0, 6/3 despite a handicap of 30 owe 30.

Lumley, by the way, also partnered one 'Edward Warburton' in a mixed doubles tournament. Turned out that was Prince Edward, who had borrowed his bodyguard's name for the day. They lost but Prince Edward got to star in a TV documentary on the game.

Apparently it was 'invented by French monks who countered the tedium of the meditative life by batting rolled-up socks around the courtyard'.

SEEN UNDER THE PENTHOUSE...

Court fashion way back when

Walking down the penthouse corridor you may have spotted this natty gent.

He's fully kitted out from the 16th century pro shop – jacket, knee length shorts, calf skin shoes and fancy cap. Underneath the cap he's probably got a shaven head since those were the days of full-bottomed wigs. Interestingly, the racket appears to be straight rather than bowed and he's holding it close to the head. Is that a hangover from the days when the game was played with gloved hands?

On the court itself, four people are playing doubles. Less sag to the net and a rather narrower penthouse than we are accustomed to. Not that different then ... however, it might have smelled a little different!

In the 16th century – when the first court went up on the Merton site – the recipe for blacking the inside of the court went like this: 'Take half a hogshead of ox-blood (that would be about 30 gallons), the gall of ten oxen to dissolve the lamp-black, and a bucket of urine to give sheen to the composition, mix it all cold'. Imagine what Derek and his team of court renovators would have made of that recipe.



Prince Edward in action courtesy of the T&RA

At a more Oxonian level, Alan Oliver won the open Over-40s doubles (on the Oxford court) and reached the semis of the Over-40s singles. Word has it that Alan may be back this year in the Over-70s championships at Fontainebleu. Watch this space...

Graham Harding

Talking of urine there was a gutter along the corridor under the penthouse roof which provided the lavatory facilities. Makes our toilet facilities look super luxe...

Graham Harding



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