
The Dedanist δ



The Tennis Court at Moreton Morrell, Warwickshire

From The Editors

The front photograph for this edition is of the 'neo-William and Mary' tennis court at Moreton Morrell, built by Joseph Bickley for Charles Tuller Garland (1874-1921) and opened in 1905. Born in New York City, the son of an American millionaire, educated at Eton (and Columbia University), Charles Garland lived the life of an English country gentleman in Warwickshire and became a UK citizen in 1914. The tennis court was built, idiosyncratically, before his elegant Palladian mansion across the road, Moreton Hall, was completed in 1909. Their imposing wrought iron entrance gates face each other.

The tennis court was described in *The Field* in 1913 as being 'ahead of any other in the country in luxury of appointment', and its floor has long had a reputation for being a fast and true playing surface for tennis players (even after the complete replacement in 2021 of Bickley's original floor). The court will be the venue for the 2026 World Doubles Championship, and the (unofficial) world championship of American Squash Tennis [more about which in the 'From other Courts-Home' section].

Regrettably, this edition of 'The Dedanist' - the 10th - will be the last issue from the present editors - time and tide waiteth for no man - indeed, as the medieval poet Charles d'Orleans (the editors' favourite tennis player) wrote in the poem written for his 45th birthday in 1439 '*I have been playing tennis against Age for so long I have now reached 45; and we are playing for high stakes...*'

We trust the newsletter will continue to provide reports on the Academy and matters of more general interest from around the courts, articles with an academic flavour on the history of tennis and other related ball games and, not least, an important final section reserved for less serious matters. We wish 'The Dedanist' well for the future.

Martin Village
Alastair Robson

Wood's Words:

More pearls of wisdom from our Honorary Professional!

Another pearl of wisdom from Nick Wood, our Honorary Professional, about an aspect of racquet technique which is relevant for all of us...

Head Pro Nick Wood on a crucial aspect of everyone's game: the volley.

The volley could be argued as one of the easiest shots in the game - and yet it often ends up as a mis-hit, a wild shot or even a non-attempt at the ball, as you watch it sail into the dedans (mentioning no names).

There are many problems to overcome with the volley; the pace on the ball when being struck hard at the winning openings, the lack of preparation, a desire to whack the volley. To help with these issues, I would like to concentrate on the timing of the volley.

Firstly, to sight the ball is not easy. The ball leaves your opponent's racket some 80 feet away and travels over the net, striking no further surface, and sometimes it travels hard and sometimes slow.

With nothing but the strike of the ball from your opponent's racket to go on, one has very little

information to process to help with the timing of the volley. The lack of information hinders the ability to sight the ball accurately until the very last second. This can lead to a swipe or a lunge at the ball, creating a collision of two moving objects (racket and ball), making good timing even more difficult to achieve.

As the path of the ball gives very little information, you have to remain patient and allow the ball to arrive in your hitting zone, thus creating fractionally more time and allowing you to keep composed. Holding your racket in the hitting zone provides a sturdier racket, giving the ball a strong surface to rebound from.

So, when anticipating a volley, make sure your racket is well prepared by holding in the hitting zone (do not take the racket back), move your feet to position yourself as well as possible and allow the ball to strike the strong racket head. You will be surprised at how easy the volley will feel when timed well.

Good luck. Until our next encounter!

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

16/06/25 Sunday	Seacourt	MM Paul Weaver
29/06/25 Sunday	LRTA (Hardwick)	MM Candida Nicholls
02/07/25 Wednesday	Pro-Am (at Queen's)	MM Josh Farrell
05/07/25 Saturday	Oxford	MM Nick Browne
06/07/25 Sunday	Brigands (at Radley)	MM Nick Browne

If you would like to play in any of these fixtures please contact the Match Manager: MM addresses can be found listed on the website, under the Matches & Fixtures tab.

The first fixture of the 2025/26 season will be Dedanists v Leamington TCC & Moreton Morrell TCC (the 'Warwickshire Weekend') in early September: the fixture list for the new 2025/6 season (on website in due course) will have further details.

From the Academy

Elite Junior Players

Current Squad Members

Cadet Squad

Squad Director: David Blizzard

Alex Boulton (Age 15, h/c 47)

Frankie Binns (Age 15, h/c 47)

Darcie Blaber (Age 15, h/c 50)

Robert Blizzard (Age 15, h/c 31)

Ben Brown (Age 14, h/c 54)

Intermediate Squad

Squad Director: Nick Warner

Max Warner (Age 14, h/c 23)

Laszlo Garson (Age 15, h/c 33)

Performance Squad

Squad Director: Mike Henman

William Flynn (Age 22, h/c 9)

Henry Henman (Age 18, h/c 11)

James Medlow (Age 19, h/c 10)

Bertie Vallat (Age 19, h/c 5)

High Performance Squad

Squad Director: Graham Tomkinson

Levi Gale (Age 28, h/c 2.4)

Lea Van der Zwalmen (Age 29, h/c 16)

Vaughan Hamilton (Age 24, h/c 5.2)



Bertie Vallat continued his rise in the world of Real Tennis with wins in the U21 & U24 Singles Championships held at Middlesex University in December.

THE
AcaDemy
REAL TENNIS EXCELLENCE



Will Flynn, Seacourt Silver Racquet Champion, February 2025

THE BRITISH REAL TENNIS ACADEMY

The British Real Tennis Academy is the UK National coaching program for the best young players in the country. It is run by the Dedanists' Society and funded by the Society and the T&RA. The Academy works in three stages. We discover new talent, nurture them through top class coaching in our Cadet Squad and then, once they have developed as players, support them in their progress in the game.

This season sees the introduction of a new "Intermediate Squad" which aims to bridge the gap between Cadet Squad players (h/c 45/55) and Performance Squad players (h/c 5/11). The initial Intermediate Squad comprises of two of our most promising young players, Max Warner and Laszlo Garson.

Current Season 2024/25

As this season draws to a close, we can reflect on another great year for our Academy members.

Cadet Squad

The Cadet Squad has just completed the last of their 5 group sessions. Ben Brown, Robert Blizzard, and Alex Boulton spent the day with Dan Jones at Wellington on April 4.

Intermediate Squad

It has been a really good season for the Intermediate Squad. In Particular, Max Warner, who started the season by taking the British Junior U16 & U18 titles (at the age of 13!) followed closely by the World U19 Title in Bordeaux.

His handicap has now fallen to 23, and at the recent T&RA Awards Dinner, he was presented with the Greenwood Trophy for the most improved tennis player. At just 14, he is the youngest player ever to receive this prestigious award, which has been presented annually since 1977.

Performance Squad

Bertie Vallat continued his rise in the world of Real Tennis with wins in the U21 & U24 Singles Championships held at Middlesex University in December. Max qualified for the main draw at the British Open, progressing to the 2nd round and reached the 2nd round of the Doubles partnered by Vaughan Hamilton,



a member of our High Performance Squad. Our Performance Squad players are making steady progress into the senior game. Henry Henman, James Medlow, Will Flynn, and Bertie Vallat are all now recognised as potentially the top players of the future. Current professionals are glancing over their shoulders at these new kids on the block.

High Performance Squad

Lea Van der Zwalm continues her quest to close the gap on the World No.1, Claire Fahey. After defeats in the finals of the Australian & US Open Singles, Lea finally notched up her first win over Claire in the final of the US Open Doubles event. Levi Gale has had a very frustrating season having broken his fibia. The long slow process of getting back to his exceptional best is under way. The Dedanists Society has partly funded a physical training programme at the Prested gym to help him in this process.

Vaughan Hamilton continues to go from strength to strength and is now a 5.2 h/c! Vaughan is also benefiting from the physical training programme at Prested and 2025/26 could be a breakthrough season for him.

T&RA Chairman, Richard Compton-Burnett and David Norman presenting the Greenwood Trophy to Vaughan Hamilton at the T&RA Awards Dinner. The Greenwood Trophy is awarded to the most improved Real Tennis player of the year.



World Junior Team Championships
at Seacourt
7th - 13th July

2025

UK USA Australia

The top players in the world U26 playing for:-
Van Alen Cup - UK v USA
Clothier Cup - USA v Australia
Limb Cup - UK v Australia

T&RA
Sponsored by
The Dedanists Society
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The Van Alen, Clothier & Limb Trophies (VACL)

The Dedanists Society is proud to jointly sponsor this prestigious event with the T&RA. These trophies are played for bi-annually between the best amateurs in the world, under the age of 26. The UK team includes members of the Academy past and present selected by the UK Team Manager and Academy Director, Paul Weaver. This important event is taking place this summer at Seacourt Tennis Club as follows:-

July 7th/8th UK v Australia - Limb Cup

July 9th/10th Australia v USA - Clothier Cup

July 11th/12th UK v USA - Van Alen Cup

The Van Alen Cup has a very rich history. It has been played between the UK & USA teams for over 70 years and is currently held by the USA.

In particular, our sponsorship includes supplying the team kit for the UK players and funding the Welcome Evening Drinks Reception at Seacourt on 6th July. All members of the Society are cordially invited to attend.



The World's best Under 26 players at a previous VACL event.

From Other Courts

Home

Moreton Morrell Tennis Court Club is hosting the 2026 World Real Tennis Doubles Championship from 22-26 April 2026. The competition will be an invitation event for the four top-ranked doubles pairs in the world.

The format will be two semi-final matches, best of 9 sets, split over the Wednesday & Thursday, followed by a final, again to be played over 9 sets, on the Saturday & Sunday. There will also be a doubles tennis tournament for amateurs and a gala dinner on Saturday 25th.

The event will also include the (unofficial) world championship of American squash tennis.

More about squash tennis

The squash tennis court at Moreton Morrell was purpose-built by Charles Garland within the original tennis court building in 1905. For a number of years recently it was known as the stické court, and games were played on it under similar rules (for the most part) to squash tennis using sawn-off realers racquets and standard lawners balls. There was a vogue at one time for playing with a set of partially decompressed lawners balls, obtained from the Hartham Park stické court - the Dedanists no longer have an annual fixture against Hartham - presumably the novelty just wore off - and those balls eventually vanished: I suspect there are now six happy Warwickshire dogs. In fact, the Moreton court was never a stické court - stické being a completely different enclosed ball game played across a net (1).

Squash tennis was popular in the USA in the 19th century and up until WW2, since which

time it has been superseded by squash and racketball: there is one court still in existence - but not in play - in the USA at Plum Orchard, Georgia; apparently there are many others in a derelict state - ditto Eton fives. The court at Moreton Morrell has recently been fully restored for squash tennis: padel tennis balls and Junior lawn-tennis racquets are used now, creating a fast and complex game. When it isn't being commandeered for the table tennis league, that is...



Court view to front - service boxes similar to lawn tennis



Court view to rear - note 'dedans' & black play-line (and viewing gallery)

Court markings resemble lawn tennis in some ways, and the court (at Moreton Morrell) also preserves a feature from the tennis court, the 'dedans'. The rules regarding this are complex: briefly, if the ball is hit directly into the dedans or above the black play-line on the back wall without bouncing on the floor (see above) - the point is lost; if the ball bounces and then hits the back wall above the black play-line - play on; if the ball bounces into the dedans - the point is a let and must be replayed.

How to play squash tennis - here are MM's rules of play:

The players will determine who serves first by spinning a racquet. When the server loses a point the serve will pass to the opposing player. The player who wins a game shall serve first at the start of the next game. When starting a set of serves the server may choose from which side of the court to serve from first with serves then alternating from side to side with each point.

The serve must hit the front wall first above the service line and without hitting the back wall the ball must land on the opposite side of the court. The ball may hit the side walls after hitting the front wall. In serving to the front quadrant, squash tennis is like lawn tennis and differs from squash where the serve is to the rear quadrant. If a serve is not a valid serve it is a fault and if it is the first fault the server must serve again from the same side. If the server makes two consecutive faults they lose the point.

A serve may only be returned after it has bounced once and before the second bounce. The receiver must return the ball before it bounces for a second time. The ball must directly or indirectly hit the front wall without going out-of-bounds or striking the tin. The players then alternately strike the ball in the same manner except that it may also be volleyed until one player fails to make a fair return. The player failing to make a fair return loses the point.

If the ball strikes the lights or ceiling it is out-of-bounds.

If the ball strikes the back wall above the 4'6" line after it has bounced it is still in play. If the ball having bounced goes into the gallery or hits an obstruction that alters its course a let shall be called.

SCORING

The winner of a game is the first to reach fifteen points except that both players tie at thirteen all or fourteen all.

At thirteen all the first player to thirteen shall choose to play to 18 'set five', 16 'set three' or 15 'no set'.

At fourteen all, providing the game has not been thirteen all, the player first reaching fourteen may choose to play to 17 'set three' or to 15 'no set'.

"Moreton Morrell is proud to have the only court that we know of built outside the USA and the only court in the world still in play. If you would like to play squash tennis please contact the club. We really like keeping the game alive."

The final calendar for the Tennis and American squash tennis tournaments and associated ticketing, social and amateur events are still in preparation: further announcements will be made by the Club in due course. Email: pro@mmtcc.org

*(1) For further information on the history of stické, rules of play, and where it might still be played, please see the book 'Stické Tennis' by Graham Tomkinson (Chase Publications, Beaconsfield: 2004).

Away

The new Sydney tennis court

11-21st April saw the inaugural biennial Easter Bilby Tournament take place on the new tennis court at the Cheltenham Recreation Club, Sydney - the bilby is a long-eared rabbit-like mammal symbolic for Australians at Easter, I'm advised.

A 'Founders Cup' [sic], a 'friendly doubles' and a 'highest & lowest handicap doubles' took place, together with a cocktail party, Grand Opening Celebration dinner and various off-court activities - reportable ones include lawners, croquet, bowls, golf and sailing in the Harbour. A celebratory cable-knit beanie hat is available.



The new tennis court at the Cheltenham Recreation Club, Sydney

A Dedanist participant writes:

The Philby Doubles

“Sidney ? Sidney ? Sydney ?! Going to the Cheltenham races ? Then catch the Metro to Epping Forest ?”

It’s Showtime folks take your cinema seats please the AFL umpires will appear soon with their ice cream and popcorn...

With more twists than a Filby double agent, or do I mean Bilby Baggins ...who will take the gold crowns at Sydney Real Tennis Club’s relaunch ?

A new court but slow to get to 50 ...how many balls did that take? How many batches of 72 hand stitched balls did that take you mean?

A new court with the oldest net post made in 1875 in Hobart - a big forehand cut to Dan yes he can the Ironman

The Seacourt boys come back from 2-7 down to 8-8 40/40 with more twists than a Luna Park ride

The ball stitching scissors have gone walkabout maybe Mr Lehmann switched from left-handed Darren Cricket to right-handed Peter wine making

Is it a caterpillar? Is it a giraffe? Shots as slick as a duck billed platypus.

And whoever thought concrete could be mixed like a damper with eco-friendly green (at least we got our climate change strategy clear) ... ?!

Heard in the Dedan....”those SRTC Bilbies sure are excellent Diggers” ...

Much jabba in the stalls at Karen’s Tassie underarm twist served with a devilish skill.

Fitz’s railroad was as fast as an F1 McLaren Vale.

It was a blue tongue lizard scuttled matchpoint.

The sidewall back wall bounce was sharper than a cockatoo cry.

The SRTC Spread of welcoming events and tucker would have done a New South Wales Premier proud

The gnarly Hobart dudes used Two Hands to pick up the friendly handicap doubles, with much noise in the Crowded Dedan House

At a changeover..."Seems your backhand has Eyvonne Goolagone"

Can we hear that whining as the Ashes approach.... better finish sandpapering the gallery posts for the Boxing Day delight ?!

More drama than a Sydney Opera ! Alice looking through the grille glass ? Go for the Easter Bisque Hunt !

Dashed off court faster than a pair of John Stonehouse swimmers. No Sunshine Deserts for him !

His serves are more dangerous than a funnel webbed spider !

Jeu de paumme ? Chew the pommes ? Why not take a jump in the Padel pool ?

The diggers :

Mike MarkSpitz 7 Years Fitz

James 8-43 Willis

Sav Oxford Landing Blanc

Mini Chris Cooper

Chris Iconic Son of Ronald

Maggie May High Tempo Tew

Coopers v Bradfields like pistols at dawn

When is a lager a bitter ? when it's VB ! And it's xxxx when the ball is "out of court" !

And what about the Tim Tambour layers of angles and bounce as balls spit out like a koala at an Easter Show coconut shy?

More instalments to come :

A Kookaburra's Tale

Robed as King, Fahey Fahey the best

The Wolf Blass in Kids Clothing

The Dedan from Snowy River

Views from my Darlings penthouse

Try not to owe 30 at the casino on the whisky Rocks

"Your's" too late left me right up the Swanny

Raspberries all round for the double fault/layered pavlovas

S.K.Rammegare

(Lost in Trannslation)

[I don't know what's being passed round in the changing room in Sydney, but Castlemaine XXXX never did this for me - Ed.]

Book Reviews

‘Tennis in Scotland – How it all began’ by David Best

Our game is unusual because most of those who play it are not only interested in its current progress - thriving as it is - but also in its fascinating history. David Best has added to our knowledge of that considerably over recent years through his meticulous research and publications, starting with his definitive history of the Royal Tennis Court through to his more recent book, 700 years of Tennis in London. He has now turned his attention to Real Tennis in Scotland, a subject so far ignored by historians.

Most of us will know of the Real Tennis court at Falkland Palace and many of us will have played there - it is the only active court remaining in Scotland. But in his new book, *Tennis in Scotland*, David tells the whole story of Real Tennis in that country from its first mention there in the 13th century. He reveals that in the 16th and 17th centuries Real Tennis was every bit as popular in Scotland as in other European countries. He identifies evidence of the game having been played at more than 50 different locations in the country, stretching from the English border to the Moray Firth, including a staggering eighteen courts in Edinburgh alone.

The book is not, however, simply a description of old courts and their locations. David sets the story of the development of the courts and their use and disuse against the backdrop of the major historical events taking place in Scotland over the centuries. He also provides fascinating details of the role played by Professionals and others in the day-to-day running of the game. The book is a major piece of research into a fascinating topic. It is a good read and could be enjoyed even by non-tennis players who have an interest in history.



John Yarnall

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or kathryn@ronaldsonpublications.co.uk

Pierre's Book' by Pierre Etchebaster – new 2024 Edition

Pierre's Book, first published in 1971 and reprinted in 1991, is a primer on how to play court tennis. It was the first modern instruction manual on court tennis.

Long out of print and hard to find, *Pierre's Book* is being reissued and will be available in hardcover in the fall. Pricing is still to be finalized but shouldn't be more than \$65 (plus shipping and sales tax).

The 2024 Edition reproduces *Pierre's Book* in its entirety. In addition, there is a new, substantial appendix which includes historical news clippings, photographs (some never before published), a selected bibliography on all things Pierre, and updated lists of World Champions, Etchebaster Trophy winners and U.S. court tennis courts.

Whether you are a court tennis novice or an experienced player, *Pierre's Book* has invaluable information, fun anecdotes and lots of new information for the court tennis enthusiast. If you would like to buy a copy of *Pierre's Book* - 2024 Edition, please complete the form below.

Any questions, please contact either Ted Goneos or Adam Inselbuch.

[Click here to preorder](#)

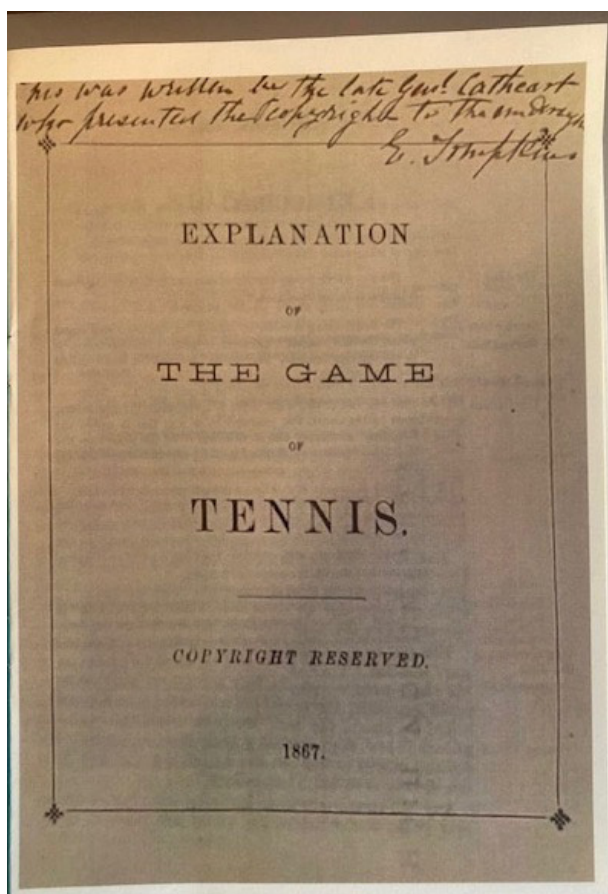
'EXPLANATION OF THE GAME OF TENNIS' (1867)

This booklet was written by General Hon. Sir George Cathcart GCB, son of the 1st Earl Cathcart and one of the first committee members of the Leamington Tennis Court Club. Although published in 1867, it was written at least 13 or more years earlier, because Cathcart was killed in action during the Crimean War, at the battle of Inkerman on 5 November 1854.

Attribution to his authorship is made in a handwritten inscription on the inside cover:

*This was written by Gen'l Cathcart who presented the copyright to the undersigned
E. Tompkins*

This is presumably the hand of Edmund Tompkins, who in 1846 had been appointed manager of the court and marker at Leamington, and who marked the very first match at the club on 29 December 1846. He was the son of Peter Tompkins, the best player in England in the 1830s. Edmund Tompkins stayed at Leamington until 1849, when he moved to the James Street court, Haymarket, London. Tompkins was world champion from 1862 to 1871.



We do not know for sure why there was a more than ten-year delay from the time the booklet was written and its publication, but we can speculate. It might have been privately printed for distribution in the Leamington club: Cathcart and Tompkins would certainly have known each other at Leamington, and they may have also crossed paths in London whilst Cathcart was deputy-lieutenant at the Tower of London, when Tompkins was in charge of the James Street court. This court closed in 1866, prompting Tompkins to take a new position at Oxford as the lessee of the Merton Street court. Tompkins had the booklet printed by the 'Oxford Chronicle Company Limited' in 1867, presumably for circulation to his Oxford players. [A number of contemporaneous playbills printed by this company are in the V&A Museum].

Were there other additional copies printed, and was there an earlier edition? Cathcart's booklet is not recorded in any of the on-line comprehensive library catalogues, and none of the libraries at Wimbledon, the International Tennis Hall of Fame, Newport, the Racquet and Tennis Club of New York nor MCC - the four institutions that have the most complete collections of tennis books - have a copy. A facsimile of this copy has now been made available to the Leamington Tennis Club for their archive and there are plans afoot to present a copy to the Merton Street club in Oxford.

Cathcart's 'Explanation of the Game of Tennis' booklet was discovered among papers of Julian Marshall, now in the Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscripts Collection at Yale University, and which had been donated by John Hay Whitney [of the Greentree tennis court fame] in the 1950s. It is likely that Marshall acquired this copy, which may be the only one in existence, while he was researching and writing his 1878 book 'Annals of Tennis'.

[Courtesy of Adam Inselbuch]

From Behind the Grille

Articles mainly about the history of tennis

Far-flung frontons

Trinquet courts in Argentina

By Catherine Walker

The previous issue of the Dedanist (number 9) highlighted on the front page the terracotta-coloured 'fronton' - a court for playing Basque pelota in its various versions - at Bidarray in the Basque region of south-west France. A group of 10 Dedanists travelled to that region for the Tournoi des Trois Tripots in October 2024 and visited Bidarray, playing matches on the indoor trinquet court next to the fronton. What an inspiring place that region is for lovers of real tennis and its related games. Frontons in every village - some huge and dominant like military parade grounds; some nestled unassumingly in corners between crooked buildings; most enjoying warm sun on their terracotta-coloured walls. They create beautiful backdrops for photographs. Best of all, it's clear to see that the courts play a central role in local life. People use the courts actively; sometimes for competitions, sometimes for fun and keeping fit. A week in the Basque country was a fantastic experience. It inspired our curiosity about the trinquet courts, the games they are used for when not (re-)converted for real tennis, and the influence they have had on ball games around the world.

Many Basque people left their homeland in the 19th and 20th centuries, seeking adventure and opportunities across the Atlantic. Naturally they took their beloved ball games with them. The Basque diaspora reached all corners of the American continent, though by now it seems there are only a handful of frontons and an even smaller number of indoor trinquet courts remaining in North America. It's a different story further south in Argentina, however. There the Basque community put down strong roots, and after several generations there is still a strong sense of Basque heritage, maintained through a network of Basque cultural centres in towns and cities. Lots of the cultural centres have a trinquet alongside a cafe, recreating the delightful experience we had in the Basque Country of entering a cafe and passing through the bar area to find a ball court at the back. Hidden from the street, but attracting customers to the cafe, in Argentina just as in the old country.

The pelota community in Argentina developed their own version of the game in the early 1900s, when Gabriel Martirén, an immigrant dairy farmer from the French Basque country, had the novel idea of using the shoulder blade of a cow to strike the ball. Later he replaced cattle bones with wooden paddles made from dismantled crates, and over time he and other players standardised both the tools and the rules of the game. The implements still go by the name 'paleta', though they are now reinforced with carbon. The most popular variation of the game in Argentina today is still called 'pelota paleta'.

The popularity of pelota in Argentina was at its height in the 19th and early 20th century when, according to one online history, "there was not a single town in the interior that didn't have one or more courts. Even some roadside "boliches" (watering-holes?) had a pelota court, where high-stakes bets were placed. Even ranches often had a pelota court against the wall of a shed". At that time there was an enormous fronton in central Buenos Aires with capacity for 2500 seated spectators. The jeopardy and the atmosphere that comes with the chance of a big-money win would have drawn the crowds in their thousands, just as they did in the days when betting spectators packed out the hundreds of real tennis courts in London and Paris.

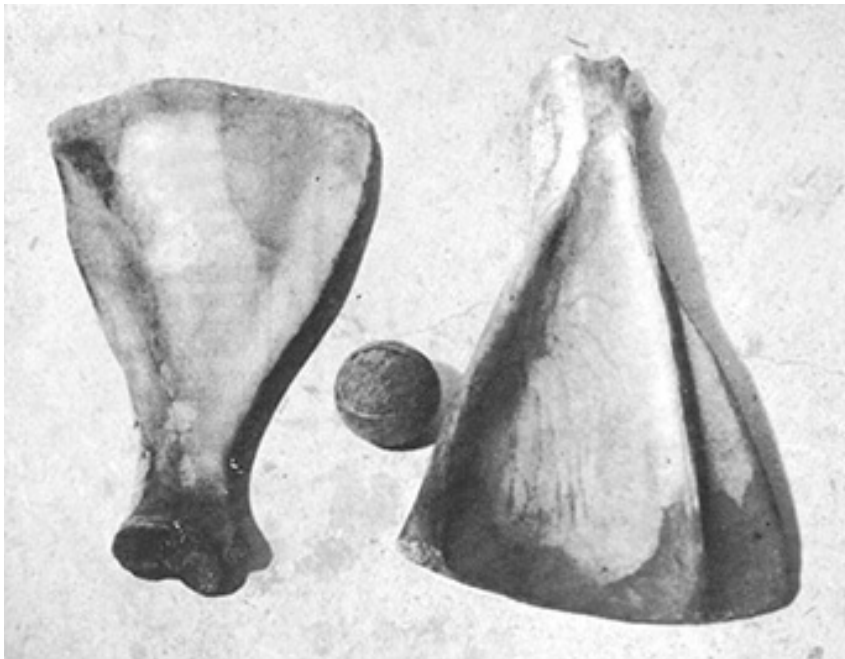
That glorious heyday may be over, but pelota in Argentina still has devoted players and followers. Despite the high costs of maintaining a trinquet, there are still over 150 in Buenos Aires city and province, and more nationwide. These courts support at least 5000 players, hosting competitive leagues with players at different levels: men, women and juniors.

Dedicated pelota paleta evangelists are promoting the game on social media. They are maintaining pelota paleta as an iconic part of Basque cultural identity, while reaching beyond the Basque community to wider Argentine society. Judging by their Instagram feeds they are doing similar work to the Dedanists - supporting coaches, engaging young players and securing the future of their game.

Back in south-west France, the trinquet courts that host the Trois Tripots tournament were converted from real tennis courts, probably in the 18th and 19th centuries, before Basque people left for the New World in large numbers. A fanciful alternative history could have seen the people of the Basque diaspora building a network of real tennis courts instead of trinquets in Argentine port cities and pampas towns. What amazing opportunities for tours and tournaments we could have had! While that wasn't to be, the Argentine network of trinquet courts is an impressive thing and a wonderful treasure for wall/ball sports enthusiasts.

If any readers make the journey to Argentina, please seek out opportunities to find out more about these games, watch some matches and perhaps have a go at playing yourselves. Have fun and please tell us all about it in a future issue of the Dedanist magazine.

Thanks to Christian Armas, founder and curator of the online museum “Pasión por la paleta” for answering my questions about the sport.



Bovine shoulder blades like the ones Gabriel Martirén would have used. Credit to the online museum “Pasión por la paleta”, archive of Aarón Sehter.



Modern paletas



*The fronton in downtown Buenos Aires, capacity 2500, around the turn of the 20th century.
Credit to the online museum “Pasión por la paleta”.*



A contemporary game in a trinquet

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From Behind the Grille

Articles mainly about the history of tennis

Hot News from the Middle Ages

By Martin Village

Readers of this column will know that the editors have tried to present as best they can evidence of the origins of real tennis and its connections with other sports in the European family of ball games. Some of this has been informed conjecture (as in the second issue of the Newsletter where the various origins of the scoring system are discussed (1) but we aren't above noteworthy coincidences either and, while researching the separate history of real tennis in Scotland, one of these has just cropped up.

It might be said that the game of *Caitch* (as tennis was known in Scotland) is as old as the Franco-Scottish alliance. This could be said to have started formally in 1239 when Alexander II, King of Alba (Scotland) (1198-1249) married Marie de Coucy, the beautiful, rich daughter of Enguerrand III de Coucy (essentially the lord of Picardy - 1182-1242). Marie (2) brought along in her retinue a number of tennis-playing knights and we can reasonably infer that the Scots word for tennis - *caitch* - was derived from the Picardy dialect word for it - *cachier*. In due course Marie's son, Alexander III (1241-1286), apparently became a player and the next Scottish monarch known to have been an enthusiast, James I (1394-1437), is recorded definitively as having played on at least one Scottish court (Perth) (3).

In 1406, as an eleven year old boy, James I of Scotland was attempting to reach the safety of exile in France when his boat was intercepted by English sailors. As David Best notes, during the next 18 years of his captivity in England, James 'seems to have honed his tennis skills' and he is recorded in the Chronicles of Scotland (1858) as having played in the presence of Henry IV, not later than 1413, dressed 'without a hood or hat' and 'with young men in addition' which Best reckons may be a reference to doubles being played.

In 1415 a high value French prisoner was found alive in his armour under a heap of bodies on the battlefield of Agincourt (Azencourt). This was Charles d'Orleans (1394-1465), the late mediaeval romantic poet (also the nephew of Charles VI, cousin of the Dauphin and eventually the father of Louis XII) who made the first reference in European literary history to tennis ('paume') in a ballade he wrote in 1440 (4) just before a ransom was paid ending his 25 years of imprisonment in England.

Charles d'Orléans was brought up playing tennis on the court at the family château at Blois, and it has been much put about on both sides of the Channel that he was responsible for bringing tennis to England between 1415 and 1440, possibly when he spent time as a 'guest' at Wingfield Castle in Suffolk. This from an article in the French magazine *Le Point* in 2015:

'C'est le duc Charles d'Orléans, emprisonné par Henri V au début du XVe siècle pendant la guerre de cent ans, qui aurait importé le jeu de paume en Angleterre, en l'enseignant à ses geôliers'.(5)

Conclusion

- Charles d'Orléans couldn't have introduced tennis to England because, before his imprisonment in 1415, James I of Scotland is recorded as playing here in 1413 (or earlier).
- Because facilities must already have existed for James to 'hone' his game, we can infer that some form of *longue paume*, if not *courte paume*, would have been played in England in at least the late 14th century.
- The etymological link between the Scots word for tennis (*caitch*) and the Picardy dialect word (*cachier*), together with the clear link through marriage between the Scots royal house and that of Picardy, must raise the possibility that *jeu de paume* or its close country relative *longue paume*, was played in Scotland in the mid-13th century by Alexander III (1239-1286), certainly pre-dating any mention of either form of the game in England.

Notes:

(1) We come down on the side of the numbers 15 - 30 - 40/45 *being a measurement of steps taken* towards the cord after winning a point in *Longue Paume* (in which *gagne terrain* is taken literally).

See: https://www.dedanists.org/files/ugd/2d4458_0093af45751c435d8a6b4552b302ef21.pdf

(2) Marie was the great, great grand-daughter of Louis VI of France (1081-1137), known as Louis le Gros, who fought Henry I of England over possession of Normandy.

(3) While staying in the royal apartments of the Blackfriars Monastery in Perth in February 1437 James was stabbed to death by assailants (among them the Duke of Atholl, a pretender to the throne) who discovered him hiding in a drain that led from his bedchamber to the tennis court below. Ironically, only a few days earlier he'd had the drain – his escape route – blocked because it ran out onto the court and he'd kept losing balls down it. His queen, Joan, rallied the people of Perth who rounded up the assassins, who were then tortured, and executed. Note that one of James' titles was Duke of Coucy – a direct link with Marie de Coucy, his 13th century ancestor from Picardy.

(4) See Dedanists' Newsletter No. 1 September 2021 for the original poem and translation.

(5) Translation: Charles d'Orléans, imprisoned by Henry V at the beginning of the 15th century during the 100 Years War, would have introduced tennis to England by teaching his jailers.

https://www.lepoint.fr/sport/le-jeu-de-paume-le-sport-des-rois-qui-traverse-le-temps-17-04-2015-1922314_26.php#11

From Behind the Grille

Articles mainly about the history of tennis

Handball in England, Wales & Scotland - with a postscript about handball in the USA By Alastair Robson

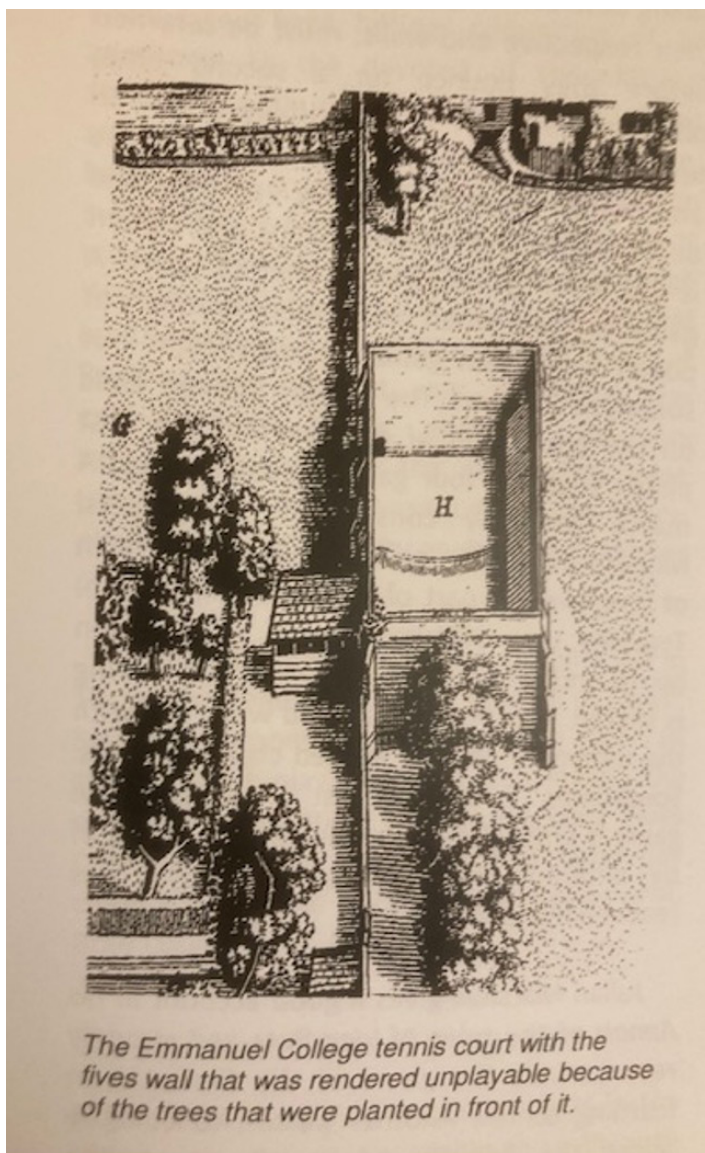
But the game of fives is what no one despises who has ever played at it; it is the finest exercise for the body and the best relaxation for the mind.

Wm. Hazlitt 1817

In last December's 'The Dedanist,' handball's decline in Ireland during the 20th century, and then resurgence in the 21st as '1-wall handball' was discussed. The history of handball in the UK is more complicated: the terminology used for the many ball games played in the distant past is confusing. Handball was usually referred to as 'handball' or 'fives', occasionally as 'hand-fives' or 'bat-fives' (more about which later), 'tally' or 'pêl-law' (in Wales); whereas 'hand-tennis', 'tenis', 'tenys', 'tennis' or (in Scotland) 'caitche', and (in France) 'jeu de paume' might refer to any current ball game. The national interest in fives in Scotland had diminished greatly by 1600, the 'jeu direct' game of tennis being preferred: in addition, in Scotland 'football' meant any ball game played on foot (rather than on horseback), and finally, areas in old maps and architectural drawings labelled 'ball courts' may have been used for any ball game... And then of course, writers may have been writing about various ball games of which they had little or no knowledge.

Handball or 'fives' was initially played outdoors against any convenient wall; the gable ends or side walls of churches proved both convenient and ubiquitous. However, such a practice attracted opprobrium from the clergy: as early as 1395, the Bishop of London denounced the playing of 'hand-tennis within or without St Paul's Cathedral' (which seems fair enough to my mind: walking down the nave wondering if it would take spin is one thing; actually turning one's arm over to test it is quite another...).

Yet, for the most part, the clergy appeared to tolerate ball games, if played outside the church that is, and some even showed willing by joining in (some still do - see the photograph of the cleric in his soutane playing Basque pelota in 'The Clergy & sport' in Issue 7). But eventually, fearing for the fabric of their buildings, the clergy cunningly discouraged such activities by interring deceased incumbents beneath the floors of courts and erecting hefty memorials thereon (very effective), or by planting trees down the centre of the court (also very effective, if requiring some patience).



The Emmanuel College tennis court with the fives wall that was rendered unplayable because of the trees that were planted in front of it.

‘La France profonde’ has a reputation for harbouring arcane ancient ball games - ‘jeu de balle au tambourin’ for example (see issue 9) - and the village of Artignosc-sur-Verdon, [pop. 301 in 2018], near Aix-en-Provence, is such a one: here, ‘paume Artignoscaise’, as it is known, has been played against the church wall in the village since no-one can remember when.



Artignosc-sur-Verdon, Provence

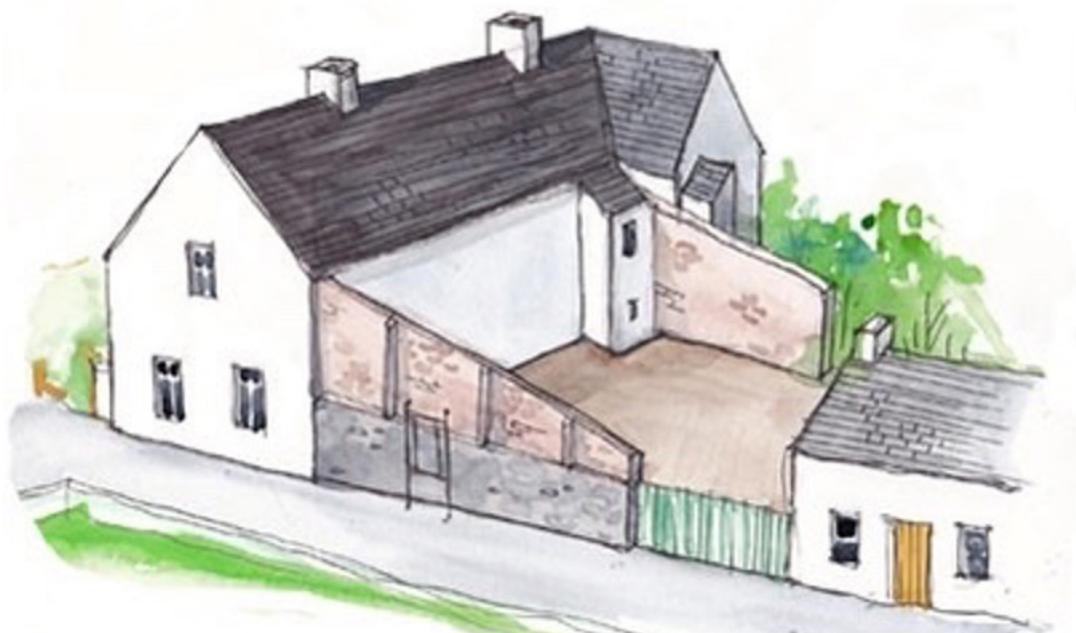
‘Paume Artignoscaise’ probably hasn’t altered much over the years: two opposing pairs of players hit a ball using either hand, gloved or not, onto the gable end of the church. There is a playline 1m. from the ground, and like Eton fives, there are various hazards - here a central doorway with ancient wooden door, a recessed window towards the apex of the gable, a drainpipe, and some uneven areas of wall [suspiciously suggestive of earlier ball damage, from the video], all of which can cause unpredictable ball deflections. The village square is the court, the sides of which are marked out in tape, but the back is defined merely by the natural obstacles of trees, benches, spectators and (these days) parked cars. In the spirit of ‘liberté; égalité; fraternité’ players decide if a ball is up or down, in or out. No umpires. Games are scored to 15.

Astonishingly, a World Championship has been held annually in the village since 2009; a team of Eton fives players from Summer Fields School, Oxford, have featured regularly, winning the Women’s World Championship in 2022! Here is a link to ‘paume Artignoscaise’ in action:

<https://youtu.be/LwPZGlu-uqE?feature=shared>

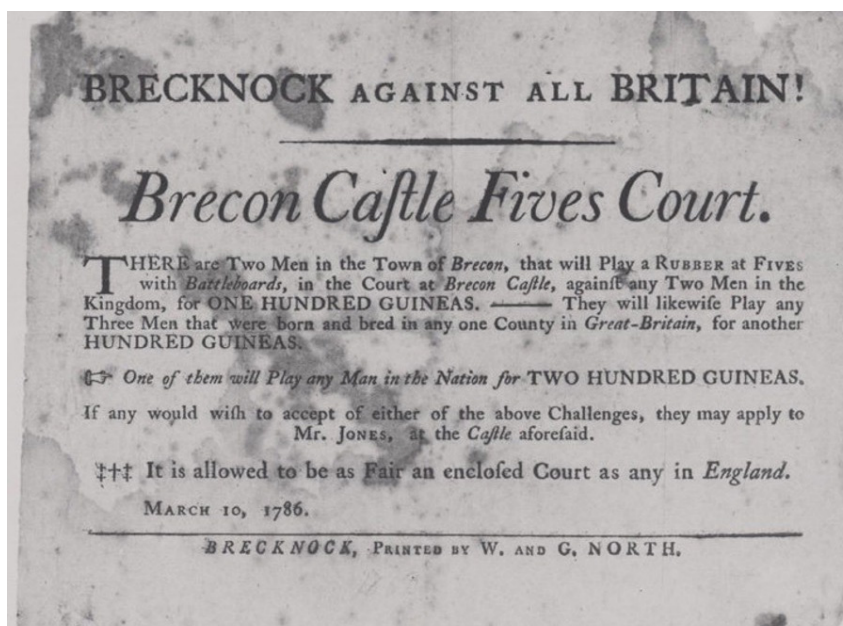
*

In the 18th century players and spectators drifted away from the churches and began to use the gable ends and side walls of pubs instead (usually not far away), to the delight of the publicans, who encouraged trade by building their own courts:

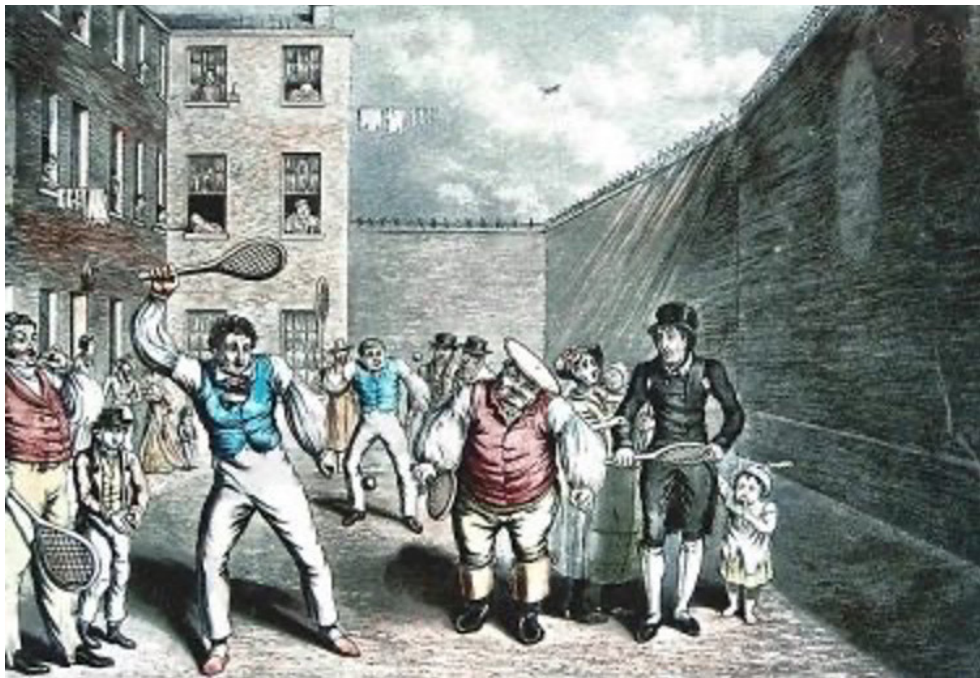


A pub with a fives court; presumably the windows in the 'tambour' would have been boarded up for protection, as church windows were.

Courts proliferated, especially in the west country and Wales, with much associated drinking and gambling; challenge matches became commonplace, and elite players began to make a living from the game. [Space is short, so regrettably, a discussion of personalities involved in fives – such as John Cavanagh, the greatest fives player in Regency London and Robert Mackey, an inmate of the Fleet, who claimed the first 'world' title in 1820 - will have to wait for another occasion.]

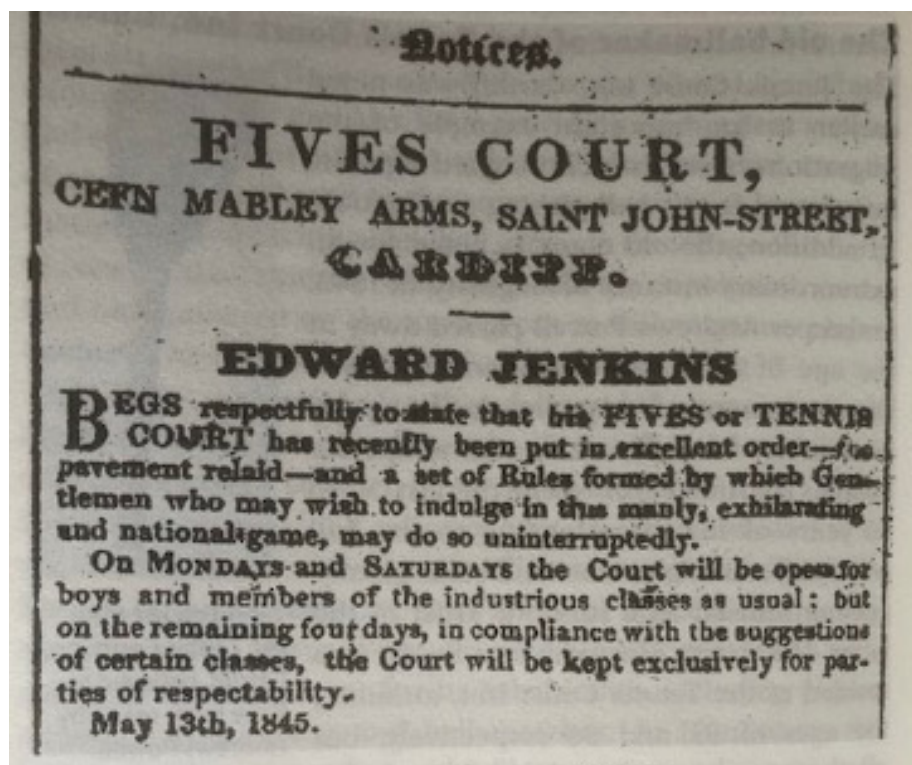


A further complication, as the above newspaper advertisement indicates: fives was also played using racquets instead of just the hand: in one variation - 'bat fives' - wooden bats called 'battleboards' were used, and in another strung racquets. This came about because inmates of the King's Bench and Fleet debtors' prisons, for the most part gentry down on their luck, had also brought in their tennis racquets and passed the time by playing fives against the prison walls with them: this came to be known as 'rackets'.



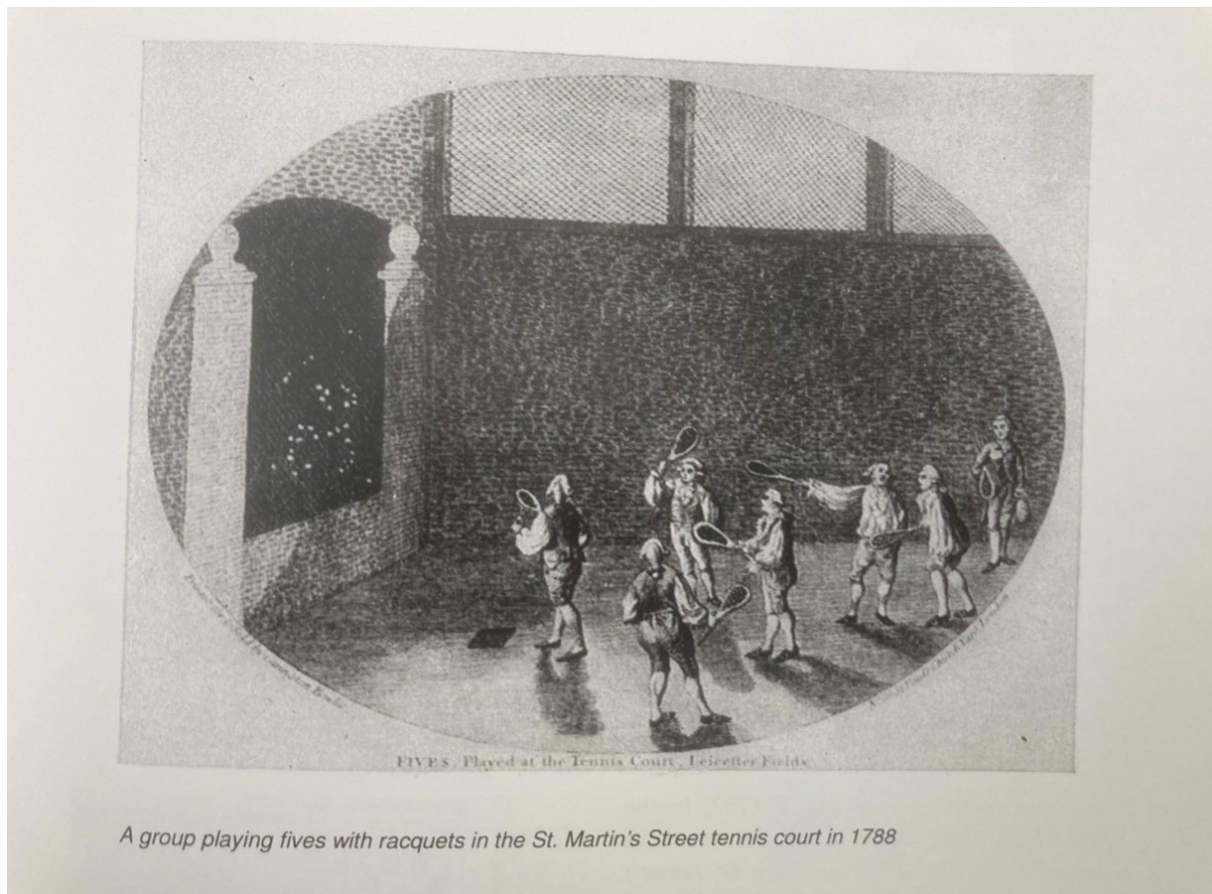
Rackets in the Fleet Prison, c.1825

Demand for court time came from all sections of society:



Both games soon proved very popular, especially with the military; garrison towns at home and abroad invariably included rackets courts, for the use of officers ('parties of respectability'), and fives courts, for the use of the men ('members of the industrious classes').

The illustration below from 1788 depicts fives being played - in a tennis court. The players wear hose and breeches, waistcoats and wigs and are using strung racquets - they are plainly 'parties of respectability', rather than members of the 'industrious classes' - furthermore, the end wall is marked out in a curious manner, for a tennis court. What are they up to?



The tennis court in St Martin's Street was a '*jeu quarré*' court, (having no dedans and no tambour, like Falkland Palace), so it could easily accommodate the game of fives by utilising just one half of the court, as above; fives also adapted to the tennis court as a '*jeu direct*' - known as 'long-fives'. This is a simplified version of tennis in which chases are not involved, and the galleries have no function to speak of. The last gallery line on the service side, and the service line on the receiving side (plus the fault line determining the service area) are the only significant floor lines - to win a point the second bounce of the ball must fall in the area between the last gallery line (or the service line) and the end wall. If the ball fails to do this, or enters a gallery, a let is called, and the point is replayed. A ball flying out of court loses a point. Serving is as in tennis, and a ball entering a winning opening wins the point. A game is to 11 points. Players change ends at the end of each game. Four games make a set, and three sets are a match.

Julian Marshall ('Annals of Tennis' 1873) was enthusiastic and thought it was a good introduction to tennis; but to J. M. Heathcote ('Tennis'; Badminton Library 1903) it revealed its rackets origin by encouraging hard hitting which he deplored, being contrary to the classical 'touch' style of play. (He wasn't to meet the style of play of Wayne Davies et al).

But it sounds quite fun, for, say, a 'hangover doubles' tournament on New Year's Day...

In the mid-1800s, the schoolboys at Eton College adapted fives yet again to suit the architecture of their own makeshift 'court' - a wall of the College's chapel.



The original fives 'court' at Eton College (note drainpipe) - the distinctive buttress is partly masked by one of the boys

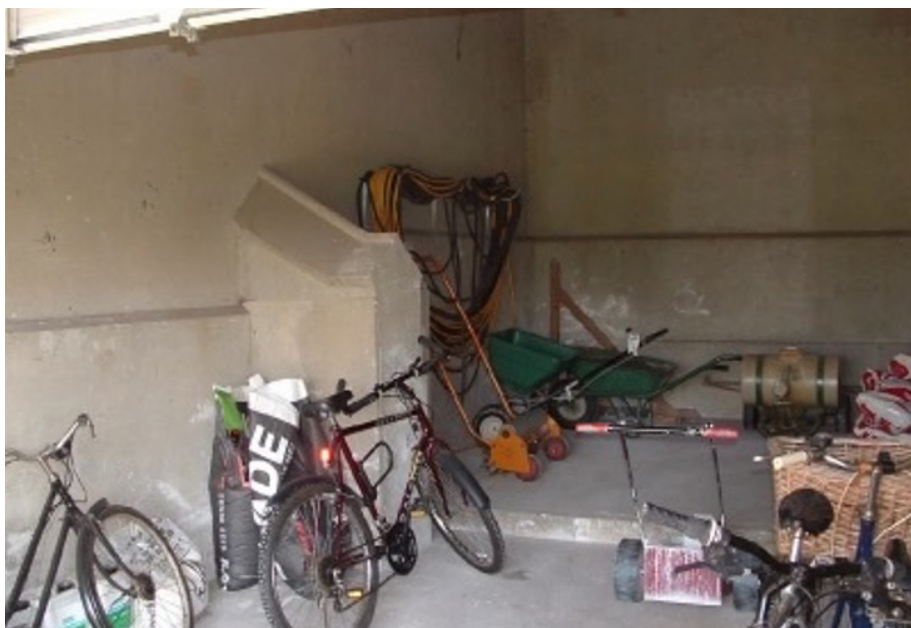
Eton fives proved popular with schoolboys, and similar courts were built at other Victorian public schools, together with a few non-school courts:



An Eton fives court at Mill Hill School - buttress unmasked (and no drainpipe)

Harrow joined Eton in playing Eton fives (they have held an annual fixture since 1885), but Rugby and Winchester modified their fives courts, mainly by doing away with Eton's buttress and the step in the floor; soon most public schools had courts of either the Eton or Rugby variety (a few had both), but Winchester remained idiosyncratically Winchester.

In the early 20th century fives and rackets went into a sharp decline - as tennis had likewise done earlier in France, when Louis XVI had shown no interest in the game, preferring billiards - only now fives was superseded by lawn tennis and squash and various team sports, (see 'The Clergy and sport' again). Many fives courts were either demolished or fell into desuetude. Of those, some are probably restorable to play, others not:



Probably restorable...(Groundsman's shed, Caius College, Cambridge)



probably not... (café, Wellington College)

In Wales, the decline of the game was almost total: from being considered a 'national pursuit' in 1811, it was replaced, almost in toto by rugby and football (and the TV); the open handball court at Nelson, Mid Glamorgan, is currently the only court in Wales still in play - albeit now marked out for 'wallball', the one-wall game.



A handball match at Nelson in the 1930s



The Nelson court in 2023, adapted for the Welsh wallball championships that year

But 'adapt or die' is the name of the game: in Ireland handball transmogrified into '1-wall handball'; in the UK fives became 'wallball' - but in essence it's the same game.

As a game 'wallball' has much to commend itself: it can be played indoors or out, and at any age, the rules are simple and equipment is minimal - a wall and a ball. Schools like it. Free-access outdoor wallball courts have begun to appear in London: no gym or club membership required.



The first free-access wallball court in Southwark, opened in 2021 – catchy mural!

Predominately white clothing? Forget it. Just turn up, obtain a ball from the adjacent vending machine (if you haven't already got one) and away you go...



Two more free-access courts at Canada Wharf, opened in 2023

UK Wallball's CEO is Dr Daniel Grant, (on the left in the photo below), a London NHS doctor keen to prise youngsters, and the rest of us, away from computer screens and is striving for the game to achieve Olympic status...



Building a tennis court from new costs about £1 million (although Roger Pilgrim and the T&RA are working on it), and a racquet costs how much??
The Dedanists' Foundation may well find itself surprised by potential recruits for our game flocking to an inexpensive competitor coming out of left field....

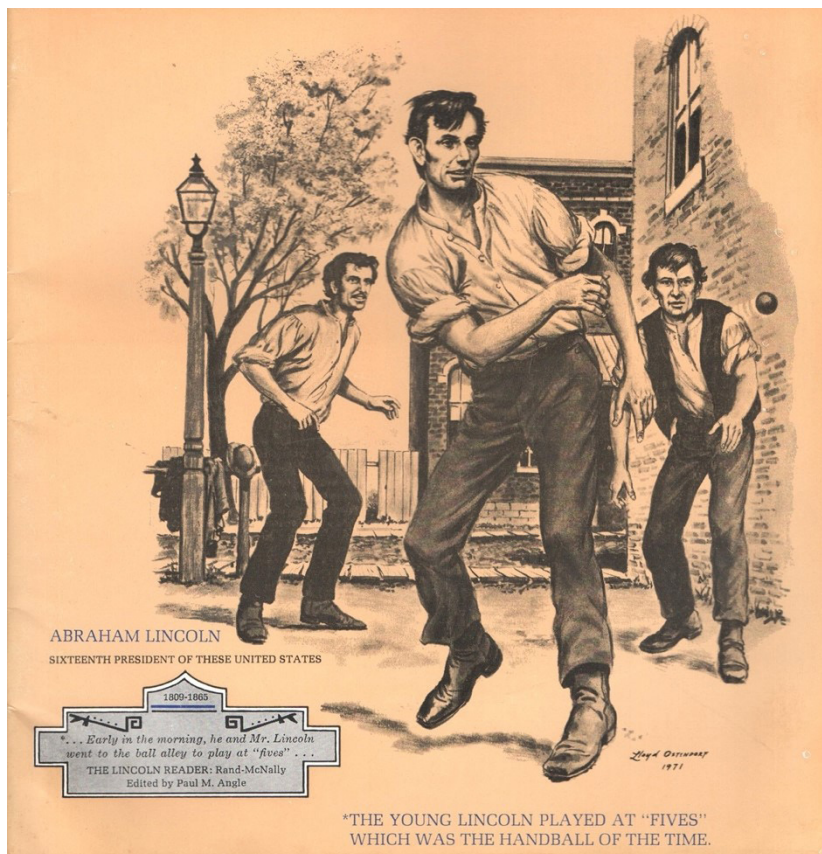
A.M.R.

[with thanks to: Kevin Dicks' 'Handball - the story of Wales' first national sport' (2017); David Best's 'Tennis in Scotland: how it all began' (2024); David Best & Brian Rich's 'Disturb'd with Chases' (2009); and of course, Lord Aberdare's 'J.T. Faber Book of Tennis and Rackets' (2001); and thanks to the Eton Fives Association, Rugby Fives Association, Gaelic Athletic Association and UK Wallball Association websites]

P.S. – handball in the USA

Something should be added - briefly - about handball and its origins in the USA: it was brought to the USA, especially New York originally by Irish immigrants in the early 1800s, and was initially known as 'gaelic handball'. It proved a popular urban pastime and it was also popular in N. American prisons (shades of the Fleet prison) - but let others dwell on sin and guilt, as Jane Austen said.

Hundreds of one-wall courts were built between 1930-1950 in parks and other open spaces in New York City. Now there are over 2500. All open access. There is an enthusiastic US Handball Association.



Here is a picture of the young Abraham Lincoln at play

And here is a photo of Adam Inselbuch's (ambidextrous) grandfather playing handball on a New York court in the 1950s - [Adam is one of the publishers of the new edition of 'Pierre's Book - vide infra].



Samson 'Buck' Inselbuch (1903-1997) in NYC in the 1950s

Whispers in the Galleries

Gossip and tittle-tattle from the world of tennis



We know that Charles d'Orleans wrote his poem Ballade 90 in 1439 for his 45th birthday, and which begins [in Martin Village's translation - see Issue 1]:

*'I've played tennis against Age for so long
I've now reached forty-five; and we're playing
For high stakes, ...'*

Thus inferring scoring - in 1439 anyway - was 0/15/30/45/game.

Readers will probably be aware that the editors favour the origin of tennis's scoring being most likely derived from paces won at the conclusion of each point in *longue paume*, with 15 reduced to 10 at 45, as it was considered the physical gain of court territory by 15 paces brought the player too close to the cord or net [see 'Walking the Quinze'- Issue 2, for further information] about this.

Another suggestion on how the point 45 was reduced to 40 - as it remains today - has come to their attention. It must be admitted that views are just those, and are not set in stone: the editors freely allow that the comment below, from no less an authority on the history of tennis than Lord Aberdare, must be acknowledged -

'Maturin Cordier writing in 1580 explains that in Latin it was somewhat clumsy to call out *quadraginta quinque* and that young players used the abbreviation *quadra*.'*

- *From 'The Royal Game: the origins of tennis' p13; Falkland Palace Real Tennis Club, Stirling (1989)

TWO SIXTEENTH-CENTURY FRENCH POEMS - by 'Anon'

The illustration below constitutes an entire chapter in 'The Royal Game', a compendium of articles on tennis compiled for the 450th anniversary of the Falkland Palace court in 1989 (also referred to in the item above).

It seems logical to us it should appear in that part of 'The Dedanist' reserved for 'gossip and tittle-tattle in the world of tennis': the original poems lack an accompanying English translation – and just as well, perhaps; this is no time for the editors to be making enemies with the authorities regarding the Obscene Publications Act (1959)...

TWO SIXTEENTH-CENTURY FRENCH POEMS

Si vous la baisés, comptés quinze;
Si vous touchés le tetin, trente;
Si vous avez la motte prinse,
Quarante-cinq lors se présente.
Mais si vous mettez en la fente
Ce de quoi la dame mesteir,
– Notés bien ce que je vous chante –
Vous gaigné le jeu tout entier.

[Quoted in Marcel Schwob, *Le Parnasse Satyrique du Quinzième Siècle*, Paris, 1905]

Jeunes espritz, qui ne sçavez comprendre
Comment il faut gagner le jeu d'aymer:
Le jeu de paulme a tous vous peult apprendre
Que l'amour se doibt pour l'esteuf estimer:
Le premier coup, que quinze on veut nommer,
C'est le devys; au baiser, c'est le trente;
Puis au toucher du tetin a la fente,
Quarante-cinq peut conter l'amoureux;
Mais pour gaigner le jeu qui tant contente
Il faut frapper tout droit a l'entredeux.

[Quoted in Ernest Langlois, *Notices et extraits des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque Nationale et autres bibliothèques*, Paris, 1889]

