

# The Dedanist $\delta$

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*The Etchebaster family bakery in Saint-Jean-de-Luz, photographed in 2018*

## From The Editors

**M**uch of this issue of 'The Dedanist', apart from the usual reportage, concerns itself with early tennis bats and racquets, with some interesting digressions: perhaps this edition should be retitled 'The French Connection' – however, as much of the history of the game, (which, as editors, we have always featured strongly), comes from the Continent - France especially - it's not really that surprising. Be that as it may, we hope our readers find the current issue entertaining. The next edition will appear in June 2023.

Alastair Robson  
Martin Village

## ***Dates for your Diary...***

### **Dedanists' fixtures 2023**

#### **January**

Sat 7th **HARDWICK** MM: John McVittie

Sun 15th **NEWMARKET** MM: John Burnett

#### **February**

Fri 3rd **QUEEN'S** MM: Nick Browne

Sat 4th **MCC (LORD'S)** MM: Carl Snitcher

Sat 18th **ORATORY** MM: Katy Weston

Sat 18th- Sun 19th **PARIS** MM: Carl Snitcher &  
Alastair Robson

Sun 26th **PIGEONS(WELLINGTON)** MM: James  
McDermott

#### **March**

Sat 11th **HATFIELD** MM: Nick Brodie

Sat 18th **HYDE** MM: David Phillips

Sun 19th **CANFORD** MM: David Phillips

Sun 26th **PETWORTH** MM: Robert Muir

#### **May**

Sat 6th-Sun 7th **BORDEAUX** MM: Carl Snitcher &  
Chris Marguerie

Wed 10th **ANNUAL TOURNAMENT & DINNER**  
Josh Farrall

Fri 26th **JESTERS (QUEEN'S)** (4pm) MM: Martin  
Village

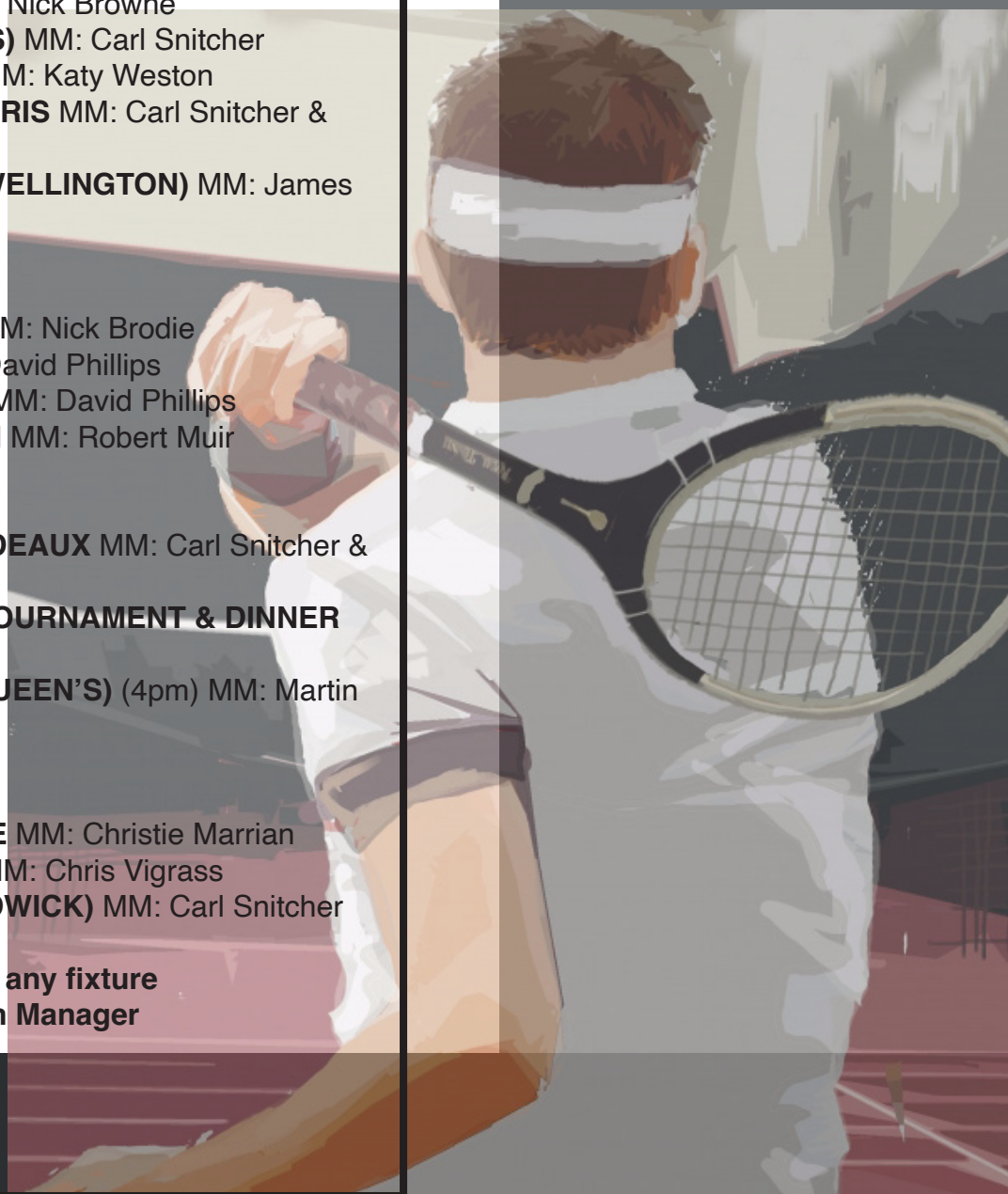
#### **June**

Sat 10th **CAMBRIDGE** MM: Christie Marrian

Sun 11th **PRESTED** MM: Chris Vigrass

Sat 17th **LRTA (HARDWICK)** MM: Carl Snitcher

**If you wish to play in any fixture  
Please contact Match Manager**



## Wood's Words:

*More pearls of wisdom from our Honorary Professional!*

**In this issue Nick Wood discusses shot selection and how to improve your game by using your head - and reminds us that 'a huge majority of points are won on the floor'...**

## The Importance of Shot Selection

This time I am borrowing a premise from former RTC pro, Ben Matthews. By categorising the shots your opponent hits to you as difficult, standard or easy, we can look at the measured responses that would best suit the situation.

Now, whether your opponent hits a good shot, or whether the shot ends up being tricky (a lucky one), the end scenario is the same, you have to deal with a difficult ball.

On the other hand, your opponent could hit a great shot, miss the target by two inches and end up giving an easy shot. Both situations require an appropriately disciplined and executed solution.

The standard shot becomes more important the better you become, where a player is unable to play an aggressive shot but simply hits to an effective length and width that doesn't allow any chance to attack. The emphasis of a standard shot is on staying in the rally (not making a mistake) and setting it up to gain the advantage (so you can finish the rally with an easy opportunity).

### Difficult

If you find yourself in a difficult situation, great care and discipline is recommended. Firstly, lower your expectation of the result - be happy to get the ball back and make your opponent play another ball. This often requires just a simple touch to make the ball return over the net. Not an almighty swish! Give the ball as little pace as you can to allow time to recover and so that your opponent has to create a winning shot.

### Easy

On the easy ball it is as simple to fluff a shot as it is to hit a winner, so again be disciplined in your approach. Pick your target and execute your stroke, if you have chosen well, the shot needn't have immense cut or pace. Don't forget, a huge majority of points are won on the floor. The floor represents huge winning opportunities.

### Standard

Whereas difficult and easy tend to choose themselves, the standard shot allows for a variety of solutions, and this is where a clear game plan helps. For example, if your plan is to work your opponent's backhand, your standard shots are pre-determined for the backhand side of the court.

However don't forget to use the cross court! It may well be to your opponent's forehand, but by using the low part of the net and the longer diagonal (rather than the length) of the court you are able to increase the usable size of the floor area, particularly when hitting from the service end.

Hitting a standard shot cross court under the winning gallery is often better than just hoping for a winner at the tambour. You may achieve a winning shot but if your opponent can get it back, their only real option is to return to your forehand, where you'll be waiting, giving you (potentially) an easy shot.



## From the Academy

*Youth development*

### Intensive Coaching from Rob Fahey for The Academy Cadet Squad

This season The Academy is focusing more on the next generation of young players. These youngsters are the top four real tennis players, aged 13 or under, who have been identified from their outstanding performances in the British Junior Open.

On the 26th of October they had an all day coaching session with Rob Fahey at The Oratory, funded by The Dedanists' Society.

***L to R: Caspian, Max, Rob & Laszlo***



***The Academy has a new logo!***

**THE  
Academy**  
REAL TENNIS EXCELLENCE



### Outstanding Performance by Max Warner in the US Junior Championships

Over the weekend of October 7th-9th, eleven year old Max Warner, a member of the British Academy Cadet Squad, took the US Junior Championships by storm.

Fresh from winning the British U14s singles title at Queen's, Max travelled to Tuxedo Park, NY and won both the U15 & U17 Us singles titles!

An outstanding performance and the best result for someone so young at the US Junior Championships since Camden Riviere first appeared on the scene.

### The Long-Term Success of The British Academy

It's always nice to be able to pat ourselves on the back. Max's achievement in Tuxedo is yet further evidence that the work we are doing with our juniors is paying big dividends. UK juniors now dominate the Real Tennis world, with 16 of the top 18 in the world U19, including the top 4.



## From the Academy

*Youth development*

### The British U15 & U19 Doubles Championships

24th-25th October 2022, Holyport Real Tennis Club

#### U19's

The four finalists in this year's U19 Doubles were all members of the Academy's Performance Squad. All four of the boys are now well under 20 handicap and currently ranked as the top four players, in the world, U19. In a thrilling final the winners were Max Trueman/James Medlow who defeated Bertie Vallat/Henry Henman 6/5 6/2.

#### U15's

In the U15 event, three out of four of the finalists are currently members of the Academy Cadet Squad a very close final ended with Laszlo Garson/Algie Nottingham defeating Max Warner/ Francesco Saviotti 6/3 6/5, to retain the title they won in 2021.



**Top:  
U15  
Finalists  
Left:  
U19  
Winners,  
James &  
Max**

### The World Junior Real Tennis Championships 2022

#### Sponsored by The Dedanists' Society

The bi-annual running of these championships took place at Seacourt over three days on the 22nd-24th August. Once again The Dedanists' Society was proud to be the main sponsor of this prestigious event. The top 16 juniors in the world (under 19) played in the tournament, which included two players from Hobart, Tasmania. The standard of play in the first semi-final between Max Trueman (Seacourt) and Ollie Pridmore (Hobart) was really quite extraordinary. The final was played between Max Trueman and Bertie Vallat (Queen's), both members of the British Academy Performance Squad. A close match ended with a win for Max 6/3 6/5, who was delighted to take the title of World Junior Champion.



**Majority of the competitors on court at Seacourt before attending the Championship dinner**

# From Other Courts Home

**A**s is universally known, Middlesex University, supported by the MU Students' Union, have decided to remove real tennis from the old Hendon Polytechnic campus in February 2026 – the court was a gift from Peter Luck-Hille to the University in 2000 – and convert the building, probably the finest post-Victorian real tennis court in the UK, into a multi-use sports hall.

For 20 years the MURTC has been an integral part of the university's sports community, with a membership embracing Town and Gown, but has suffered falling membership post-Covid and now with its life expectancy of four years.

The students may be losing their court but they continue regularly to send teams to compete in fixtures around the country. They started a crowdfunding scheme this summer with the intention to pay court fees for students and to fund a fixture list against other university teams (including women's teams). As part of this drive, two students recently made a sponsored 100-mile bike ride, playing tennis at four courts on route – Middlesex, Hampton Court, Petworth and Seacourt. I'm sure all donations will be gratefully received: MURTC StudentsCrowdFunder 2022



*Reuben & Austin before the 'off'*



## Away

### 2022 Planning Application affecting Dublin Real Tennis Court

October, 2022



In 2016, Ireland's Office of Public Works submitted [a planning application](#) for a Science Museum to include use of Dublin's historic Real Tennis Court for temporary exhibitions. As a result of the IRTA's engagement with the planning process, and that of the international real tennis community, built heritage conservation organisations, and others, a condition was attached to the resulting permission which provided that "The developer shall submit a detailed proposal to the planning authority for the temporary reinstatement of the penthouse galleries and any other essential features required for playing Real Tennis matches." For various reasons, work did not start on the project, and permission lapsed in late 2021.

The Office of Public Works has now submitted a fresh application for essentially the same project; in the new application it claims to have addressed this condition. The application explicitly states that "The Real Tennis Court building will be refurbished including the restoration of the tennis court (to a playable condition), and to facilitate space for temporary displays and exhibitions". The IRTA has a number of concerns as to the details of how the plans have interpreted "playable condition", but on the whole this proposal gives us hope that Dublin's real tennis court will become playable once more. The issue of access to the court is separate.

The IRTA will be making an observation on this application, emphasising the various structural requirements for the court to be truly restored to "playable condition". The deadline for submissions is the 2nd of November. We will post updates as the planning process unfolds.

[The 2022 planning application can be found here.](#)

The application made in 2016 for developing the Dublin tennis court by including it as part of a new Science Museum lapsed (see The Dedanist issue 2); this has been felt by many with some relief, for the plans included designs which would incorporate temporary penthouses and galleries to be erected when the court was used for play, which assumes infrequently to my mind, as it was intended to use the space primarily for exhibitions and official receptions etc. It did not sound very inspiring at all.

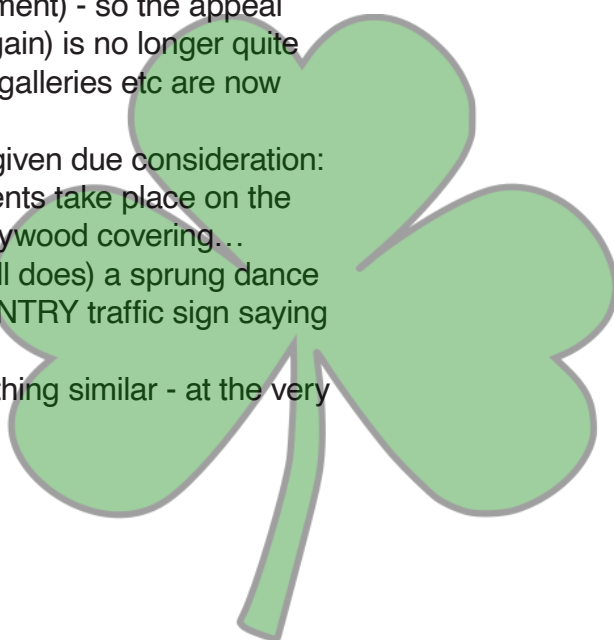
As the above article from the Irish Real Tennis Association's website states, the new submission is more reassuring in that the court will be restored to 'a playable condition' (by the Government) - so the appeal for a private buyer (see The Dedanist issue 2, again) is no longer quite so pressing - and the rollaway battery walls and galleries etc are now scrapped.

I hope care of the floor's playing surface will be given due consideration: here at Leamington, when (infrequent) social events take place on the court, the playing surface is given a protective plywood covering...

The Royal Festival Hall used to have (may be still does) a sprung dance floor, at the entry to which was a large red NO ENTRY traffic sign saying 'NO STILETTOS!'.

If no protective surface is envisaged, then something similar - at the very least - should be essential!

Festina lente.



# From Behind the Grille

*Articles mainly about the history of tennis*

## Of Cordage and Bats

**P**ull up a corner of the carpet, and eventually you'll find yourself rolling it up to see what else is underneath.

In the last issue of the *Dedanist* I focussed on a tiny detail of a piece of evidence from the early fourteenth century on which I unwisely suggested a general conclusion. A certain Margot d'Hainaut - a woman who took on the best players of paume in Paris in 1427 and beat all but the very strongest - was said to have a strong backhand (*derrière main*). Accordingly, although it was possible, we thought it highly unlikely that she hit the ball with the back of her hand (even gloved) and on balance that it was much more likely that she played a backhand with a racquet - that is, what we understand as being a stringed racquet.

And I reached that conclusion despite the complete absence of hard evidence that stringed racquets were used in the 15th century, as well as the graphic and etymological evidence that such use started in the early 16th century (first use of the word *raquette* in print - 1505; continued graphic evidence of *jeu de paume* played with the hand as late as 1510; first graphic illustration of a stringed racquet - 1552 - see below the illustration of a drawing of Charles IX of France aged two.)

So what could Margot have used if not a stringed racquet?

She used a *battoir*.

The oldest French dictionary I have is Laveaux' *Dictionnaire Français* of 1820 from which the following definition (my translation) is taken:

**BATTOIR** s. m. - an instrument made of flat, wide, square wood, more or less thick depending on its use, which is held in the hand by means of a round, short handle. In the games of paume,

there were long handled bats for *longue paume* (*battoirs à long manche*) and short handled bats (*battoirs à court manche*) for *courte paume* (real tennis), all of them, where possible covered with '*parchemin*' (parchment - the untanned skins of sheep, calves and goats).

There were four types of *battoirs* used for paume - the *battoir*, the *demi-battoir*, the *triquet*, and the *demi-triquet* each differing in length and shape (the name *triquet* being linked, it has been suggested, to *triquet*, the handball game practised either side of the Pyrennees and around Valencia on the Mediterranean coast). The use of the *battoir* today persists in the game of *tambourin*, still played in the Languedoc, once also a bastion of *longue paume*. And of course, in the anglosphere, it's bats (*battoirs*) that we use in cricket and baseball.

Turning now to the definition from Laveaux of '*raquette*':

**RAQUETTE** s. f. - instrument used to play paume made of a trellis of strings of catgut, tightly stretched between a wooden head with a handle of medium length.

NOTE: the word *raquette* (or *racquet*) was according to Gil Kressmann possibly of Italian origin (*racchetta*) or from the Flemish '*raketse*', itself taken from the old Picardy dialect word '*rachasser*' which described returning the ball. In any event, the word *raquette* is only ever used to describe an instrument with strings ('*cordes*' or '*cordage*') and there is no evidence of its use before the 16th century.

According to Yves Carlier, conservator at the Musée Nationale du Château de Fontainebleau, the first *raquettes de paume* were produced at the beginning of the 16th century (1505) and for many years were used in *courte paume* alongside the *battoir* and the hand (with or without gloves).  
cont'd...



# From Behind the Grille

Articles mainly about the history of tennis

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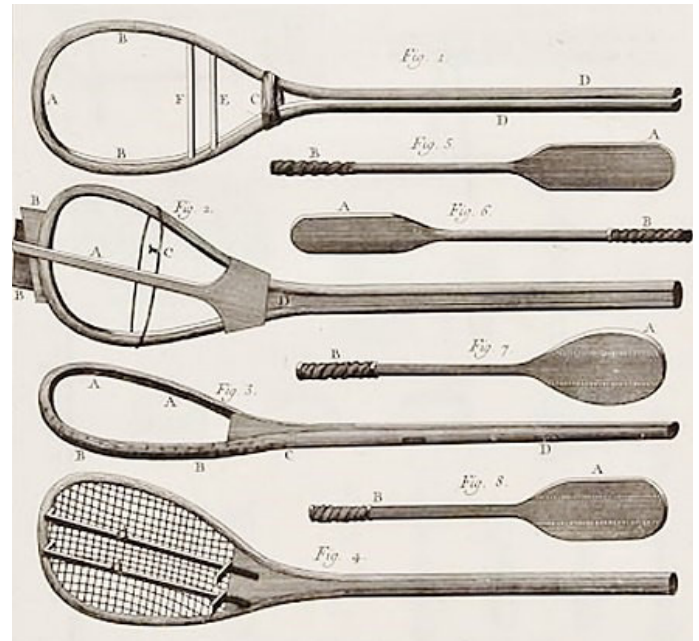
And intriguingly, Kressmann notes that 'for several decades the battoir, before being reserved purely for use in longe paume, was used alongside the raquette, and in competitions that involved handicap, the weaker player used the raquette, while the better player got the battoir.

When in 1427 Margot played against the best that Paris had to offer, both players would have



used a battoir. And it's absolute nonsense to suggest that she used a stringed racquet. Mea culpa maxima.

And here's an illustration from as late as 1772 of raquettes in the course of production and battoirs alongside:



Martin Village • November 2022

And finally...



'earliest archaeological evidence for dating a stringed racquet (1552) - found on a drinking vessel c.1995' [ed. A. R.]

# Whispers in the Galleries

*Gossip and tittle-tattle from the world of tennis*

Since this edition is very much concerned with racquets of one type or another and when they were used (or not used), here are a couple of photos which may be of interest.

The first is a delft tile I found in an antique shop in Oxford after a hit on the Merton St court, which depicts two blokes playing the ancient - and seemingly rather dull - racquet game of battledore, although Pepys considered it a rather aggressive game (see 1 below). Racquets were drum-like with a handle and had taut vellum playing surfaces; if damaged, usual practice was to replace them with any medieval manuscript which was conveniently close at hand. From the style of costumes, the tile is dated c.1630.



The second photo, taken in 1891 at the newly fashionable lawn tennis club on Boulevard Bineau, Neuilly-sur-Seine, Paris, is of Marcel Proust, then aged 20, on his knees acting silly in front of a bunch of girls by playing air guitar with an early gut-strung lawners racket. He was reputedly a rather sickly, morose youth, but here he seems happy enough, showing a 'joie de vivre' and an interest in the female sex, both of which I have been led to believe were uncharacteristic...



PS (I had always thought Joe Cocker's 'With A Little Help from My Friends' at Woodstock was the first ever performance of air guitar...)(see 2 below).

PPS Marcel should have gone the whole hog (see 3 below).

1 David Best 'Tennis at Whitehall: 260 glorious years' (Melbourne 2017)

2 YouTube: Joe Cocker, Woodstock 1969 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rUVEFkjqIEE>

3 You Tube: DIY tennis racket electric guitar <http://www.impactnets.com/index.php/2020/05/20/diy-tennis-racket-electric-guitar/>

