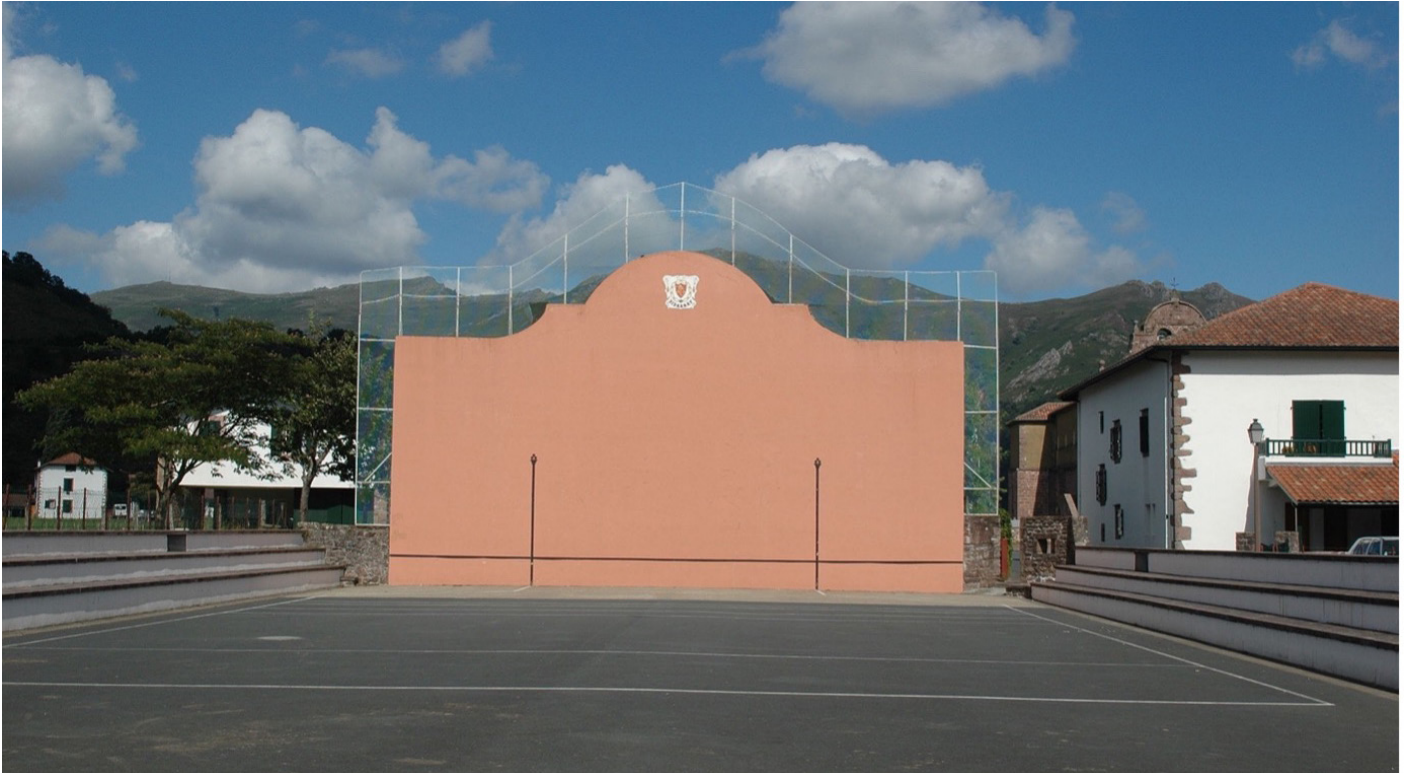


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# The Dedanist $\delta$

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*Fronton court at Bidarray, Nouvelle Aquitaine, France*

## From The Editors

**T**he accompanying illustration for this edition is of the fronton at Bidarray, near Bayonne; whilst perhaps a somewhat bland choice, it is of some relevance, Bidarray's trinquet court being one of the courts played on during the biennial 'Tournois des Trois Tripots' in SW France – and very lovely it is (a photo of the interior can be found in issue 4). A report of how the two teams of Dedanists fared in last October's 'TTT 2024' can be found in the Match Reports section of the website.

The photo conveniently leads to the topic of the ancient game of 'handball', which preceded tennis, and is discussed in this edition's 'Behind the Grille' section. Popular in Ireland since the 1600s until the 1960s, after which time it was almost completely abandoned as a recreational sport. Until its recent renaissance this century, that is; the increasing popularity of the modern 'one-wall' version of the game has come about almost exclusively through the endeavours of the Gaelic Athletic Association, which promotes 'indigenous Gaelic games and pastimes' – in part funded by the EU – much at the expense of non-indigenous games. Which just may, in part, explain the protracted amount of time it is taking to restore Dublin's 1885 tennis court [see 'The Dedanist', issues 2, 3, 5 and 8]?

**The next edition of 'The Dedanist' will appear in June 2025.**

*Alastair Robson & Martin Village*

## Wood's Words:

*More pearls of wisdom from our Honorary Professional!*

**Basic courtcraft advice from our honorary professional, Nick Wood. In this edition he addresses the free points many of us give away...**

Matches often come down to a point or two to decide the victor. When working at improving your tennis, nearly all your time is spent on improving point conversion and reducing the error rate. But what about the points we gift our opponents?

### **The most obvious gift: the double fault**

A double fault is totally unnecessary. At the time it may just seem like a lost point, but that lost point may lead to the loss of a game which could lose you the match.

### **Not so obvious (but oh so common): not leaving shots that would lose a chase**

How many times during a game would you strike a ball when in fact by leaving it the point would be

yours? Believe me, watching the last ten minutes of members' games we see this happening a lot. Over the course of an hour, I would dare to suggest that members gift 5-10 points to their opponents – that is potentially two games' worth! On some occasions balls would have lost the chase by yards and yet the ball is still struck. Yes, you might still win the point but why take the risk?

Improve your judgement of chases – improve your ability to play the game.

**NB** Real tennis is a friendly game of fairness, traditions and etiquette. If you are uncertain of the whereabouts of a chase, always be fair and if in doubt, consult your opponent.

## DATES FOR YOUR **DIARY**

Sat 4 Jan Hardwick House MM Candida Nicholls

Sat 11 Jan Prested MM Chris Vigrass

Sat 25 Jan MCC MM Carl Snitcher

Sat 31 Jan Queen's MM Nick Browne

8-9 Feb Paris MM Chris Marguerie/  
Carl Snitcher

Sun 9 Feb Oratory MM Pam Tomalin

Sun 22 Feb Hurlingham Pigeons

(@Wellington) MM James McDermott

Sun 8 Mar Hatfield MM Nick Brodie

22-23 Mar Hyde & Canford MM David Phillips

Sun 30 Mar Petworth [TBC] MM Robert Muir

5-6 Apr Bordeaux MM Chris Marguerie

Sun 13 Apr Seacourt MM Paul Weaver

3-4 May Cambridge & MM Christie Marrian

Newmarket MM John Burnett

Thur 8 May Annual Doubles MM Carl  
Snitcher/& Dinner (Queen's) Josh Farrall

10-11 May Manchester w/end MM Guy  
Egerton-Smith

17-18 May Jesmond Dene w/end MM Fiona  
Harrison

Fri 23 May Jesters (@Queen's) MM Martin  
Village

**Please contact the Match Manager for any of the above fixtures if you would like to play MM email addresses can be found listed on the website**



## Letters to The Editor

The ‘Corrigendum’ column has been renamed; it seems that Fate might well decide to dish out to the Editors an electronic knuckle-rapping from a reader regularly, so there may prove to be a long-running column in the making here.

Whilst the Editors were delighted to find an email (their first!) in the Editorial in-tray (albeit merely a reprimand for a slovenly quotation of Lucretius’ Latin in issue 7, rather than an article of polished prose de novo, being submitted for consideration of publication), they were further discombobulated to receive a second electronic rap on the knuckles; on this occasion it was from a committee member of the P.G. Wodehouse Society (UK) – and Dedanist – for a slovenly attribution of the P.G. Wodehouse quotation cited in issue 8 (in what was thought a witty Editorial response to the first reprimand, even perhaps worthy of The Master himself) ...

‘Forgive the pedantry, but as your readership is mostly British, I think that the source of your quotation would be better known as Joy in the Morning. The title you have given [Jeeves in the Morning] was used only in later American paperback editions. The original “Rem acu tetigisti” comes from Plautus’ [so there]. [comments in square brackets are editorial].

Turning to the Oxford Dictionary of Quotations for help with finding another witty retort, all we can fall back on is this (although I have no idea what she means):

‘Be bold. If you’re going to make an error make a doozy and don’t be afraid to hit the ball’. [Billie Jean King]



*Billie Jean King, April 2, 1977. Playing in The Family Circle Magazine Cup at Hilton Head. Photo: Kathy Willens/Associated Press*

## From the Academy

Elite Junior Players

### Current Squad Members

#### Cadet Squad

**Squad Director: David Blizzard**

Alex Boulton (Age 14, h/c 48)

Frankie Binns (Age 14, h/c 47)

Darcie Blaber (Age 15, h/c 50)

Robert Blizzard (Age 15, h/c 37)

Ben Brown (Age 13, h/c 59)

#### Intermediate Squad

**Squad Director: Nick Warner**

Max Warner (Age 13, h/c 25)

Laszlo Garson (Age 15, h/c 30)

#### Performance Squad

**Squad Director: Mike Henman**

William Flynn (Age 21, h/c 7.4)

Henry Henman (Age 18, h/c 12)

James Medlow (Age 19, h/c 9.4)

Bertie Vallat (Age 19, h/c 7.2)

#### High Performance Squad

**Squad Director: Graham Tomkinson**

Levi Gale (Age 27, h/c 2.7)

Lea Van der Zwalmen (Age 28, h/c 15.4)

Vaughan Hamilton (Age 24, h/c 6.9)

THE  
**AcaDemy**  
REAL TENNIS EXCELLENCE



*Max Warner, both the U16 & U18 British Champion 2024*

### 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 25/30). The initial intermediate Squad comprises of our two most promising young players, Max Warner age 13 (h/c 26) and Laszlo Garson age 15 (h/c 30).

*Max Warner, World Junior Champion & Laszlo Garson, finalist. They are both members of our Academy Intermediate Squad. The Junior World Championship was held in Bordeaux in August.*





## Current Season 2024/25

Although this season has only just got under way we have already had some early successes.

### Cadet Squad

The Cadet Squad started their season with a full days coaching at Queens with Ben Ronaldson. An excellent day resulting in an in-depth report on each of the squad members from the Queens Head Professional.

### Intermediate Squad

In August the British Junior Singles tournament was dominated by Academy players. Max Warner defeating Laszlo Garson in both the U16 and U18 finals. A week later Max and Laszlo moved on to the World U19 Championships in Bordeaux and once again Max defeated Laszlo in the final. To become the World U19 Champion at just 13 years of age is an amazing feat which may never be achieved again.

### Performance Squad

Early season success already for Performance Squad members with Will Flynn & James Medlow (representing Havant College) defeating Jamie Giddins & Rory Giddins (Eton) to win the Henry Leaf Trophy. Will Flynn then went on to win the Tambour Tour event at Petworth. The Tambour Tour is an exciting new tournament for players of any age with handicaps between 0-15.



## High Performance Squad

### Lea van der Zwalmen

French closed Tournament defeated Nicolas Victoire and C Blanchot in 4 sets

French Open Doubles Final : with Jess Garside lost to Claire Fahey , Saskia Bollerman in 3 close sets , having won the first set.

French Open Singles Final lost to Claire Fahey but did not drop a set to any amateur lady in the process of reaching the final.

Training : off to States on Nov 8th for familiarization court re 2025 Ladies World Champs .

### Levi Gale

French Open : lost to No 2 seed Nicky Howell in five very close sets.

### Vaughan Hamilton

French Open : debut in French Open : playing with new Doubles partner , John Woods Casey, reached the semi final of Doubles before losing to Nickey Howell and Leon Smart.

## British Open Update

Our young Academy players made solid progress into the senior game with excellent performances at the British Open at Queens (Nov 17th- 26th).

In the singles, Henry Henman, James Medlow, and Will Flynn made it through the qualifying tournament and were then defeated by seasoned professionals in the 1st round of the main event.

Bertie Vallat and Vaughan Hamilton went one better and progressed into the 2nd round of the main event only to be defeated by top-seeded pros (Camden Riviere & Ben Taylor Matthews).

All of the Academy players performed well in the singles and the doubles and learned a great deal from coming up against professionals in open competition. Lack of stamina in 5 set matches was noted as a weakness and will be addressed.

*Will Flynn & James Medlow, (far left & left) both members of our Academy Performance Squad, won The Henry Leaf Trophy in October.*

# From Other Courts

## Home

As far as court development in the UK is concerned, there is very little more, if anything, to be added to the report in the T&RA 2024 Annual Report, so readers are merely referred to Simon Talbot-Willams' admirable article therein (see pp 8-9).

## Away

Cheltenham will soon have its own tennis court; Cheltenham, Sydney, that is, as work progresses apace on building Sydney's new tennis court which has an anticipated completion date of 'the end of 2024 or early 2025'. Here is a photo of the site earlier in the summer...I do hope they are right!



The Sydney Real Tennis Club's inaugural Easter tournament ('The Bilby' – no, I don't know either) plus Gala Dinner will be held from 11–21st April 2025. To this end, Chris Ronaldson, with his extensive experience of establishing new courts around the world and resurrecting clubs in financial difficulties as viable financial propositions, is advising on the launch of Australia's newest court.





Come enjoy

# 'THE BILBY'

Inaugural 2025 Sydney EASTER tournament

**SINGLES & DOUBLES & HANDICAP EVENTS.**

**SAVE THE DATE 11-21 APRIL 2025**

**Social program including Gala Dinner on Easter Saturday 19 April**

The Easter tournament will incorporate the Official Opening of a new court in Sydney, after a 20-year hiatus.  
Construction at Cheltenham is underway with completion due in November 2024.



Register your interest by 30 September 2024 to  
[bilby@sydneyrealtennis.com.au](mailto:bilby@sydneyrealtennis.com.au)

BILBY = Australian marsupial; adopted downunder as the Oz Easter bunny.

# From Behind the Grille

Articles mainly about the history of tennis

## Jeu de balle au tambourin

In the last issue, Galen's treatise 'Exercise with the Small Ball' was discussed with reference to the c.4th century AD mosaic depicting women at sport, discovered in a Roman Villa in Sicily – an early depiction of ball games played, some using implements other than the hand (see below):



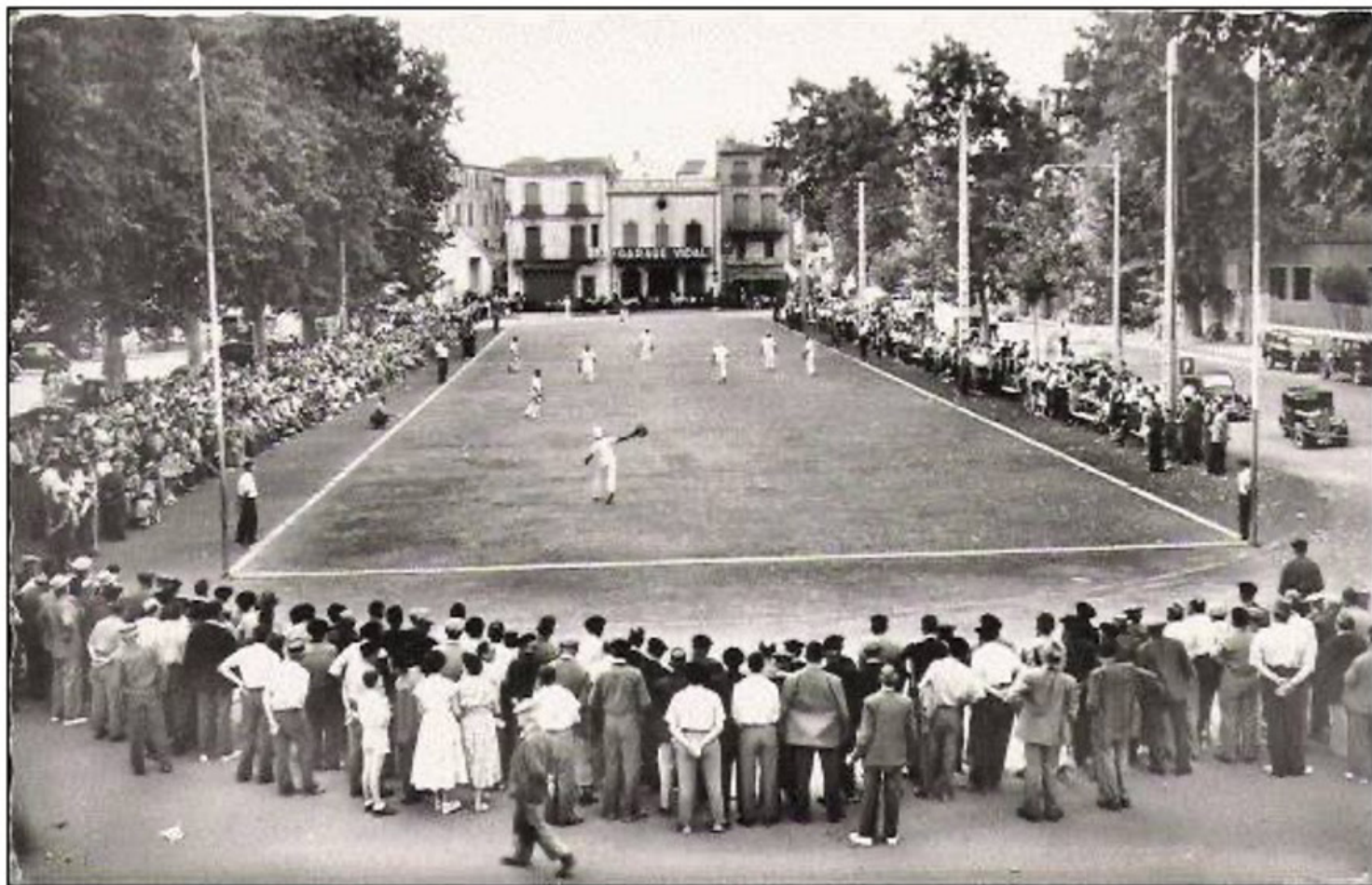
In this issue we turn our attention to the mosaic of a woman with what appears to be a tambourine (upper level, next to the blonde holding what looks suspiciously like dumbbells – perhaps the earliest depiction of a gym-rat, (if that is not too inelegant a description?). Is she playing another game with a small ball? Strong evidence can be found in support.

Played since the 16th century in France, and which may well have come to France with the Romans if the above holds true, 'Jeu de balle au tambourin' remains a popular sport in the Langue d'Oc region.

Once a very popular spectator sport (in an era lacking television), it fell away in the 20th century, only to undergo a certain renaissance, with modifications, for the present age.



## Jeu de balle au tambourin



Grosliion

[www.delcampe.net](http://www.delcampe.net)

Much like longue paume – a game discussed at length in issue 4 – it is played by two opposing teams on an outside court 80m x 18m, originally using a ‘tambourin’ made from pig or goat skin stretched over a circular wooden frame 26cm in diameter. With five players on each side, it is played using a small rubber ball, as in squash and racketball, which is allowed to bounce on the ground once.

Here is a modern tambourin, made from a synthetic skin, stretched over a plastic frame, and emblazoned with the logo of the recently-formed Fédération Française de Jeu de Balle au Tambourin – the FFJBT.



## Jeu de balle au tambourin

Because of the length of the original outside playing area and the susceptibility of the original tambourin skin to stretching from humidity, it was necessary for the server to launch the ball with a 'battoir', a tambourin with a small 18cm diameter head attached to a long flexible shaft of 80-100cm, in appearance much like a modern rackets racquet, thereby generating sufficient speed to the ball to allow momentum for exchanges. Note the server on the extreme left in the illustration below, with his ordinary tambourin on the ground beside him, about to give the ball the grand mal effort.



The speed of the ball that can be generated by the robustness of synthetic modern materials means that the 'battoir' has been lost from the modern game. Matches are usually 13-game sets, and scoring is the usual 15-30-45-game with one deuce allowed. An explanation of the rules would take at least another page...



## Jeu de balle au tambourin

Although still very popular mainly in the Montpellier region, it has dispersed throughout France and beyond, despite various setbacks over the years: in the era of Napoleon III many courts were lost as open air spaces were given over to pleasure gardens and parks; the 'guerre mondiale' didn't help, and latterly the encroachment on many outdoor playing areas for 'le parking' for the ubiquitous motor car has threatened the game, but it has adapted: originally a men only game, the introduction of smaller courts for women players, and even smaller courts for schoolchildren, and a retreat indoors to multi-functional gymnasias (less likely to lose a playing area), and also concocting a variant of the game for the beach, (where much volleying is required) has increased numbers playing the game markedly.



Can there be a more satisfying game than this, each hit making a resounding >BOOM<? Even more so, perhaps, when it sounds a satisfying Gallic >BOUM<, and a glass of Pernod awaits, following match point....



# From Behind the Grille

Articles mainly about the history of tennis

## Three walls in search of a ball (with apologies to the New York Times)

'Ball and wall' games of every description are universal: In Ireland since the 16th century, a game played with the small ball and the hand was one such. I'm sure Galen would have approved. Played originally against one wall in rudimentary 'ball courts', then later on in three-walled 'ball alleys', such courts came to be found in most towns and villages in rural Ireland.

Much competitive play was generated between towns and villages, and courts were also built at rural crossroads, where they became convenient meeting places for social gatherings (and worse: the 1798 Rebellion of the United Irishmen was plotted, at least in part, in a ball court; convenient spaces indeed, for, of course, some years earlier the tennis court at Versailles similarly became the venue for the 'Serment du Jeu de Paume' [the 'Tennis Court Oath'] of 30th June 1789, which heralded the French Revolution).

The game was simple to play, equipment was rudimentary, and courts were initially easily adapted from the gable ends or side walls of suitable buildings, very often of a religious or military nature.



Here is a photo, taken in the 1930s of a court for the 'one-wall' game created against the wall of a 13th century building (in this case Ferns Castle, Co. Wexford).

It is thought handball's origins in Ireland were in the 1500s: the first written reference to handball comes from Galway's Town Statute of 1527:

*'At no tyme the use ny opupyre the horlinge of the litell ball with hockie sticks or staves, nor use no hande ball to playe without the walles, but only the great footballe.'*

[Be assured, there are no typo errors in the quote above-Eds.]



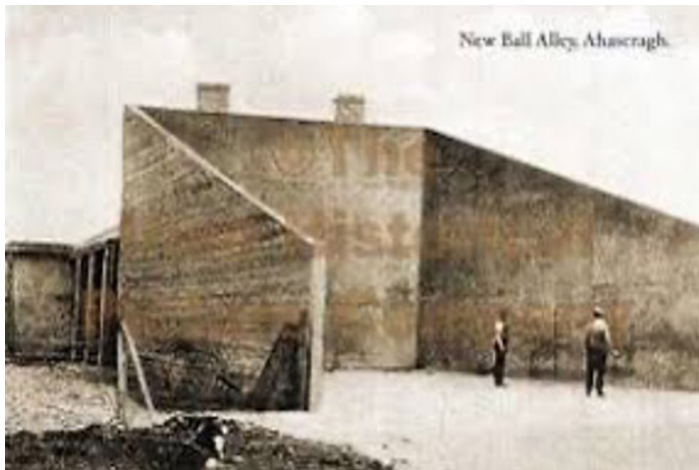
Mercantile trading between Galway and Spain and Aquitaine may have introduced the ubiquitous fronton of the Basque region to Galway and the West of Ireland. In any event, free-standing courts proliferated from the 1700s onwards.

These 'one wall' courts needed short walls on either side of the main wall for stability. With the passage of time, the side walls became longer and more pronounced and the main wall higher and the 'three-wall' game became the most popular.

From this one-wall court (right):

*Tooleague, Co Mayo*

To this – (below) some transformation! The size of the court is surely large enough for it to be mistaken for initial structural support for one of the pyramids...



Teams of two players were the norm, offering singles or doubles games, and the most proficient could have considerable sums wagered on their success; often large crowds would be attracted, with much drinking and side-betting. (So what's new? The 'tripots' attached to the tennis courts of Europe had been doing as much for many years: I doubt there was little difference then compared to a match today between, say, the Dedanists and The Hamsters at Hampton Court, to my mind.)

From the mid-1800s, three wall courts – invariably open air and often multiple – proliferated steadily, and were soon found at most institutions: secondary schools (see right), seminaries, psychiatric hospitals (especially), and military and police barracks.

*Courts at Coláiste Na Rinne - an Irish language college in Waterford, founded in 1903*

Indeed, it was reported in 1872 that:

*"There are few if any of our garrison towns or military quarters throughout the kingdom, to which racquet courts have not been attached for the use of the officers, while fives courts are provided for the use of the men."*

By 'fives' it is presumed any or all handball games are included: Eton fives is an excellent example of a 'wallball' game adapted to the architecture available (a side wall of the College chapel), hence the bizarre configuration of the court. Rugby fives may have a more direct lineage



to the Irish court, for the court dimensions are very similar, the sloping side walls too, with the addition of a fourth back wall. Adding a racquet or two and we have rackets, and even stické (about which excellent histories have already been written by Graham Tomkinson and Nigel A'Brassard – both Dedanists).

Interestingly, the history of handball in Wales – 'Pêl-law' as it was known in the vernacular – is even more ancient than its history in Ireland: it too proliferated in the 1860s, as Irish labourers emigrated to work in the coal mines and on the railways, bringing the game with them (as they also did to the USA and Australia). [Handball in Wales and the migration of Irish handball farther afield in the 1800s, is a topic for the next edition].

Returning to Ireland, today about 700 ancient courts remain extant: most are now used for only mundane activities such as sheep pens and the like, rubbish bin dépôts (or more correctly 'recycling centres'), or merely areas for car parking. Perhaps today's tambourin players of Langue d'Oc and the Irish handball players should form an 'International Society for the Preservation of Small Ball Games from the Scourge of the Motor Car'.

Since the Millenium, a renaissance in Ireland for the 'one wall' handball game has taken place: courts are now invariably in multi-use gymnasias (protected from the motor car and thus more likely to achieve a degree of permanence), although a few outdoor courts can be found. This resurgence has been entirely due to the influence of the Gaelic Athletic Association, (aided by funding from the EU).

Formed in 1884 'for the promotion of indigenous Gaelic games and pastimes' – e.g. hurling, camogie, Gaelic football, handball – the GAA (until 1971) imposed a ban on GAA members from playing any English game – e.g. football, hockey, rackets and rugby, and not forgetting real tennis of course – all of which were frowned upon mightily. (Could this attitude, albeit more relaxed of late by the GAA, explain the delay in the restoration of the Dublin tennis court, built by Sir Edward Guinness (later Lord Iveagh) adjacent to his town house just off St Stephen's Green, in 1885, on which the world championship of 1890 was played, and bequeathed to the Nation on his death in 1937? EU funding would be welcomed!

Here are some recent photos of existing courts –





And here a couple of less depressing ones:



The GAA are to be praised for their excellent restoration of this old court for their modern 'one-wall' (within the red perimeter) game. (Top Left). I think they have been less successful here in their desire to attract new players to the game with this psychedelic court in the Dublin suburb of Blackrock: it would hardly make youngsters alight from the DART [Dublin Area Rapid Transit railway], urged by its presence to have 'a bit of a hit', I fear. But certainly 'A' for effort.(Top Right).

Finally, to end on a more cultured note: here is a fine painting, now in Dublin's Hugh Lane Gallery, by Jack B. Yeats, (brother of the more famous WB), with its resonances with Sam Beckett's 'Waiting for Godot' or a Giacometti sculpture –



*'The Ball Alley' J.B. Yeats (c.1927)*

A.M.R.

My thanks to the New York Times' article on ball alleys, May 9th 2014; and Áine Ryan's article in History Ireland <https://www.irelandhistory.com/architecture-handball-alleys/>

# Whispers in the Galleries

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



Readers may recall the report, originally from *Private Eye*, in this column (see 'The Dedanist' issue 1) that the President of Moreton Morrell Tennis Court Club had been barred from the 'dining and banqueting facilities' of the House of Lords (together with two other peers) for not completing a compulsory online 2-hour training course. Presumably the task was eventually completed and dining rights were restored.

Now *Private Eye* has recently reported that the first bye-election of the new parliament has been triggered some mere five days after the general election – albeit for a seat in the Upper House, the vacancy therein caused by one of the remaining 92 hereditary peers still sitting in the House of Lords.

After 38 years on the red benches, the President of MMTCC 'has been retired from the Upper House for non-attendance during the last parliamentary term'. I understand from a confidential source that the said peer continues fit and well, but considers 38 years of attendance to be a sufficiency unto the day – and indeed it is; a working lifetime in fact, and one can appreciate his sentiments entirely. We wish him well for the future and a happy and relaxed retirement from the hurly-burly of the upper chamber.

Life in the House of Lords is soon going to alter radically in any event: the new government plans to introduce a mandatory retirement from the upper chamber once a member reaches the age of 80, and also abolish the existing 92 seats which are still reserved for hereditary peers, thereby introducing 'an alternative second chamber that is more representative of the regions and nations'.

A former Leader of the Lords, the hereditary peer Lord Strathclyde, has condemned the move as a 'high-handed, shoddy, political act'.



Wishing you all a very  
Happy Christmas & a Healthy 2025

