

Irish Real Tennis Association Newsletter



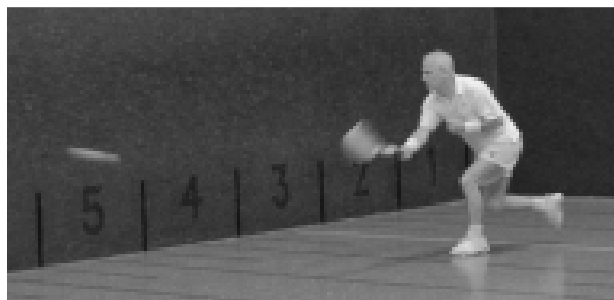
No. 1, November 2003

Welcome to the first issue of the IRTA Newsletter. We are hoping to publish a newsletter three or four times a year. If you have any suggestions for the next issue, or would like to contribute, please contact Ben North (details overleaf). In the mean-time, we hope you enjoy this one....

The First Irish Real Tennis Championships

In May 2003 history was made. The first Irish Real Tennis Championships were held. Not quite the event you would imagine -- since the Dublin court is not currently playable, the championships were held in Bristol -- but it was a fantastic success. Players came to the Bristol & Bath Tennis Club from Ireland, the UK and the USA.

The Irish Championship was won by Mike Bolton (Ireland) in a closely contested match against Clarence McGowan (resident in the USA). The Open Championship was won by Brian Rich (UK), overcoming a severe handicap in the final to beat Jackie Blackwell (UK) two sets to one.



Support of the USCTA and T&RA

At the excellent social evening on the Saturday, many players expressed great excitement at the idea of playing real tennis in Dublin, and we are certain that there would be a steady stream of international visitors to a Dublin court. Clarence McGowan, representing the United States Court Tennis Association, read an enthusiastic letter of support for the Dublin court from the USCTA's chairman. James Wyatt, the Chief Executive of the Tennis and Rackets Association (UK), joined us to watch the semi-finals and final, and give the T&RA's support.

Many thanks to B&BTC

If it had not been for the extraordinary generosity of the B&BTC with their court, hospitality and time, we could not have held such a successful event. We would like to express our grateful thanks to the B&BTC, its committee (in particular Nick Ponsford, Kevin King, and Peter Probyn) and members; to the sponsors, Investor Select Advisers; and to everybody who took part.

History of the Dublin Court

There have been courts for Real Tennis in Ireland since at least 1610. The Dublin court was built by Sir Edward Guinness in 1885 on Earlsfort Terrace in Dublin's City Centre, with the floor and walls being laid in large slabs of deep black limestone from County Galway. Within five years of being built, the court was honoured as the venue for the 1890 World Championship match between Tom Pettitt (Boston) and Charles Saunders (Princes, London), an encounter which is still regarded as one of the epic battles. Pettitt retained his crown 7-5.

Play continued at the Dublin court until 1939. In this year, after earlier approaches by the Irish Government to buy the property, Rupert Guinness, the now 2nd Earl of Iveagh, generously gave by bequest to the State a holding including the Real Tennis Court. Knowing that the Irish Government had wished to develop the site for other purposes, he cautioned in his letter of offer to the Taoiseach, Mr Eamon de Valera, "I am of course loath to think of the Tennis court being destroyed, as it is unique in its way, and might be appreciated by players in Dublin".

Those few who had access to the court as Lord Iveagh's guests were also keen that the facilities be available to a wider player-base, and immediately wrote to Mr de Valera offering to organise an "Irish Tennis Club" to run the court without burden to the State. Sadly they were rebuffed, the court was closed, the galleries dismantled and the use of the building was given to University College Dublin (UCD) who continue to occupy the court as a laboratory today.



Update on the Current Situation

In April 1998, tennis and heritage concerns objected to a plan of the Office of Public Works (OPW) to convert the Dublin court into a recital hall for use by the National Concert Hall (NCH). This led to the formation of the IRTA.

High Court Battle

Planning permission was granted in 1998. The IRTA challenged this planning permission (many times!) and proceedings even went as far as the High Court. Unfortunately the case was finally lost and the developer has until 8th June 2004 to commence work on the project if it wishes. Though the critical issue of whether the State has "legal right to build" is open to further appeal, we believe such a course of action will be unnecessary. It is known from reliable sources that the State has decided to abandon the tennis court conversion.

UCD to move out

There is news of UCD moving its laboratory to the main campus in Belfield, South Dublin. When that moment comes, the IRTA hopes to be in a strong position to show the Irish State why the court should be returned to its intended use.

IRTA to move in?

It seems clear to us that there are many complementary arguments for why the court should be returned to being used for real tennis. Amongst these are

- (1) It would provide an excellent fun and fascinating sporting activity for the people of Dublin and Ireland.
 - (2) It was the wish of the Earl of Iveagh on giving the court to the people of Ireland that it would be used for tennis.
 - (3) The club would be self-supporting and would not be a financial burden to the State.
 - (4) The court would enhance tourism in Ireland.
 - (5) It is an historic building worth preserving for its intended use.
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New Year Real Tennis Weekend Trip to UK

Until the Dublin court is back in play we will have to continue to travel to the UK for our real tennis fixes. There are enthusiastic rumblings about the possibility of travelling to a UK club for a weekend in January or February. If enough people can make the time, a fun weekend will be put together. If you would like to know further details or to express an interest, please contact Bear North (details below).

Contact Details

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Membership

When we approach the Irish State with our plans to have the court put back to play, it will be very important for the IRTA to have a strong membership base. IRTA membership is currently run on a once-off fee basis. This provides you with membership until the court is re-opened. You will also receive, by email or post, each issue of the newsletter. The small sum helps towards printing and administration costs.

Please encourage any family, friends or people you know through your real or lawn tennis club to become members of the IRTA. We have enclosed a membership form which you can photocopy, or if you would like more copies of the form they can be obtained from our website www.irishrealtennis.ie or contact Bear North (details below) if you would like some posted out to you.

We also have a new run of polo-shirts available in sizes from S up to XL. Please get in touch if you would like to order some.



What you can do to help

In addition to building up the membership of the IRTA, there are other ways in which you could help. Amongst these are the following.

Profile of IRTA

The profile of the IRTA needs to be raised in Ireland and over the world. Any publication of articles or letters in magazines, newspapers or on TV would be fantastic. Contact Ted Neville for more ideas.

Lobbying

We need to lobby T.D.s and anyone else who may be able to influence a decision made by the government on the future of the Dublin court. Please contact Ted Neville for advice on the approach and arguments to be taken to T.D.s and other important figures.

Printing, merchandise, stationery....

Since we don't have a source of funding beyond once-off membership fees and some kind donations, the funds of the IRTA are not plentiful. If you would have access to free high quality printing (of these newsletters, headed notepaper, etc) or stationery, it would always be gratefully received. Also, we currently have quite a good deal on our 100% cotton embroidered polo shirts, but if you know of a possibly better deal on polo shirts or any other merchandise, let us know.

Other ways

If there is any other way in which you would like to get involved, we'd love to hear from you.