

## John's Story

I first set eyes on our tennis courts back in the fifties when I was a little toddler. Yes I am that old! Often on Sunday lunchtimes my dad, who worked for the NAC (Northern Aluminium Company) would take me to either the Easington Hotel where I would sit in the gardens while he went for his beer or to the NAC Social Club (now the bowls club) where I would sit outside on the playing field with my Vimto and crisps. Vimto was the favourite children's drink back then.

After some time I became more adventurous and I would go to the playing field on my own after school. It was extremely convenient because we lived in Easington Road, my school was Harriers Ground which I loved so it was all in very close proximity.

With regards to the tennis courts I never actually saw anyone playing at that time. The block of four were as they are now but they were shale courts which looked like gravel! Court five did exist but that was grass and all the courts were kept under lock and key and under the supervision and maintenance of the groundsman (yes a real groundsman!) called Scotty. Yes you've guessed it he was Scottish and he ruled the courts with a stern Scottish aggressive tone. He would often tell me when I showed interest in the courts, "You're not setting foot on those courts sonny!" which I accepted without a whimper.

But time passed and he softened. I left Harriers Ground School to go to Easington Modern which I hated. This is now Wycombe Park Academy. At this school I made a new good friend called Paul and together, again after school we would go to and play on the playing field with the permission of my now friend Scotty. He no longer growled at me but instead spoke in a friendly manner and eventually said if we liked he would let us play on the shale courts if we could get rackets and balls. We were over the moon about this and my mate Paul blagged two rackets from who knows where as well as old balls and we somehow started playing.

It was in the early 70's when I started my work apprenticeship that we noticed regular new players would arrive at the courts. Some of these players were the new 'A' team players who we regarded as 'gods'. This was the start of Banbury Tennis Club. They came mainly from Alcan (formally NAC) and included Archie Buzzard, Frank Smith, Dave Jesson and I think the legend that was Maurice Reynolds (more about him later!)

The local council acquired the grounds around this time and an arrangement was made for the newly formed tennis club to use the courts for social tennis and matches at weekends.

The first AGM was on 8th October 1972, creating three Oxfordshire

men's teams and two mixed teams. For myself and Paul things began to change. We had gone through the period of being annoying little brats hitting balls every where we shouldn't until certain people began to encourage us, in particular the lovely Archie and Frank (the two people who actually spoke to us).



*Two of the earliest pictures from 1979 Jacquie Mills & friend outside the old clubhouse.*

Gradually, little by little we wormed our way into the membership and lower teams.

League matches were amazing and marathons. Teams comprised of three pairs and all pairs played all the opposite pairs. It was the best of three sets in every rubber. Tea would be taken after the second rubber. The matches could go on until 7 or 8 o'clock with away matches and with the statutory pub stop on the way home it could be 10pm arrival back at the club.

The club house in those days was pretty flimsy like a cross between a shed and a conservatory. I remember it was small and on rain interrupted matches both teams (12 people) along with a few extras would huddle in the club house watching the condensation running down the windows.

In my opinion the late 70's and early 80's were the most successful, best years. The club flourished hugely. Along with our chairman Phil Taylor (longest standing chairman) the club fielded six mens, three ladies and six mixed teams in the Oxfordshire League. The teams were very successful, winning many divisions including the top division.

Through this period teams were chosen by a selection committee of which I was part of for many years.

Wilson

Division ☐ Mixed / ☒ Men's / ☐ Ladies' Doubles

(Home Team) BANBURY B (Away Team) WYCHWOOD

Played at BANBURY on SUN day 9/5 2004

Home Team Score First First Names Must Be Given Please PRINT Clearly	1st Pair Away Team	2nd Pair Away Team	3rd Pair Away Team
1st Pair Home Team <u>PAUL TAYLOR</u> <u>DAVE SUTHER</u>	<u>STEVE PEAR</u> <u>PAUL COULTON</u>	<u>ANDY MIDDLE</u> <u>ALAN SAGE</u>	<u>ALEX GO</u> <u>MIKE D</u>
2nd Pair Home Team <u>PAUL DAVIS</u> <u>JOHN HANSEN</u>	<u>6-2</u> <u>B</u> <u>6-0</u>	<u>6-3</u> <u>B</u> <u>6-2</u>	<u>6-0</u> <u>6-1</u>
3rd Pair Home Team <u>KEVIN LIDDA</u> <u>DARREN SIMPSON</u>	<u>6-1</u> <u>B</u> <u>6-4</u>	<u>7-6</u> <u>B</u> <u>6-0</u>	<u>3-6</u> <u>6-2</u>
	<u>7-5</u> <u>B</u> <u>6-3</u>	<u>6-3</u> <u>2</u> <u>1-6</u>	<u>6-4</u> <u>6-1</u>

Home Team:	Rubbers <u>8</u>	Sets <u>16</u>	Games <u>102</u>	Winners <u>BANBURY</u> Draw Score <u>8-1</u>
Away Team:	Rubbers <u>1</u>	Sets <u>2</u>	Games <u>49</u>	

*Example of the Three Pair teams*

The committee would comprise of around five-ish team players and we would pick all the teams so the chance to pick yourself for the team you wanted to play in was obvious (a bit like it is today ha ha). The teams were selected wholly on best players and not pools of players like now, so the teams selected were almost the same for every match with one appointed reserve just in case. To play in a team was completely result driven so that was the incentive. It was serious stuff.

The competitiveness of club players to play matches around this time was massive and on Wednesday evenings, when we met and posted the teams on the clubhouse board, players would often be waiting to see if they had been picked. Sometimes if members were not happy with the selection they would angrily demand to know the reason why they had not been chosen to play. These were heady times because of the amount of really good dedicated players who just wanted to play.

I do remember around this time a procedure known as 'Playing In' was introduced for prospective members to hit with either a team player or committee member in order to assess if they had enough ability to join (something I hear muted now by some who wish it should come back). It worked too, although it may not sound too PC. If you didn't make the grade you were guided to Archie's improvers until the time was right. This system no matter how harsh it may sound did provide quality club nights.

Also at this time the club had a huge social side. On Saturday evenings when teams were arriving back from matches families would be at the club waiting (as though you were returning from war!). There would be drinks and more tennis played by everyone, kids, partners, anyone really. My own family and several others grew up in the club, everyone played. I



remember on Friday nights some wives would bring huge containers of lovely Chilli Con Carne to put with baked potatoes. Yummy.....



### *A Club Finals Day*

In 1978 Colin Lynes joined the club fresh from being County Junior Champion. This was a big bonus as our A-Team got stronger and stronger as you might imagine. Lots of younger players like Mat Hunter and a few others who had been influenced and coached by Peter Billingham, the headteacher of the former Banbury School. Mat Hunter and Colin were in one word pretty formidable, ( that's two.....)

Colin at that time became a personal friend and he and girlfriend Jacquie would baby sit for my two girls Wendy and Cathy. They became such good friends they even holidayed with us like a big family. Of course I got free coaching and Colin was keen to impart his style of play especially his cutting slice back hand. One thing I did benefit from was volleying. Colin always reckoned at the time not much emphasis was given to volleying, so he would spend hours just hitting ball after ball at me at the net. I can say to this day it was worth it.

Through the mid 80's to mid 90's I believe I saw the biggest changes and success in the club. We excelled in the national Silk Cup competition for clubs with Colin and our then strongest lady, Dianne, who took us through to the final in Bournemouth. The teams grew stronger with the Mens A winning the division in 1979. The team comprised of Colin, Robert Sherrington, Phil Taylor and Keith Rhind; the latter two probably the longest standing most successful pair I can remember.

The ladies equalled that success in the same year too with their division. They included Janette Reynolds, Carol Coates, Janet Taylor and Karen Johnson were some the ladies I can remember.

You may have noticed one name popping up a lot and that's the Taylor family. They were major players and an influence on the club then. Their whole family played including their children Paul and soon to be famous

Claire. Phil was Chairman.

In those days we seemed to have a variety of characters in the club and from visiting clubs. One of ours was Jason who was an amazing player with a fully coached style. He was a biggish guy, bear like, who didn't look like an athlete but with his game he didn't have to be.

He was a big draw if he was playing at home. The reason for this was because he had a short fuse and you knew that something would happen to make him snap. Usually when he became angry with himself he would roar the worst language that could be heard up and down Springfield Avenue and his racket regularly imbedded itself in the back netting. As for his play he had everything, especially top spin. I know, on the very rare occasions that I would find myself receiving his service, it was totally impossible to return as it would kick up over my head!

It was a similar situation when we had our big rivals West End visiting. They had a young guy call Stewart on their team. Not only did this guy have a similar temperament to Jason but he would take it further by threatening the opposition.

The visiting teams had their characters too. I remember one visiting Oxford A team having a guy who would turn up and go straight to the bar and take a pint onto the court with him to sup during the match. Amazingly he was good too.

I can't let this opportunity go without mentioning my good friend Maurice Reynolds. I'm going to say that Maurice was our star member on and off the court. He played quite successfully with the now late and lovely Steve Rogers in the B team (I think). Maurice's style and approach to tennis and all the members was full of humour and light hearted teasing. He still is extremely quick witted with a typical Brummie humour. Goodness help the prima donnas (and there were plenty!) who would cross his path verbally because Maurice would chew them up, spit them out, sending them scuttling away, tails between their legs.

Maurice's words were often imparted on visiting teams which inevitably would affect their play simply because Maurice won the battle of the minds. He was great!

Again I can't remember exactly when our association with Warwick Boat Club started but this was an annual event held late in the season and comprised of four of our players representing our club to visit the famous Warwick Boat Club as a friendly. People were queuing to be picked for this and I believe it was usually down to our then match secretary, Steve Rogers, who would pick the team.

I remember one year myself and Steve were picked as a pair alongside a young player called Scott and someone else who I can't remember.

Warwick Boat Club is a gem; one of the oldest sports clubs so I'm led to believe with its location at the foot of Warwick Castle, right up to the motte itself I think.

Well this one time we played our friendly and then had (as was traditional) tea on the lawn followed by a bevy in the bar. As always the members of the club were very hospitable and they always offered a rowing boat to try out in this idyllic location. Now Scott was a teenager and after a drink took up the offer of the rowing boat. Armed with a few carefully balanced lagers he set off with his partner onto the lake sized moat. Scott was a great guy always fun but a very safe person I would say. However on this occasion he ran into a bit of a challenge as, due to his manoeuvres, he managed to lose the oars. Scott had an infectious giggle and he couldn't stop laughing which was hilarious. He was eventually 'rescued' and all was taken in good spirit but the story was told a few times.

Somewhere around this time the clubhouse got replaced with wait for it.....a holiday chalet I believe. What dizzy heights hey? I think I have rewired it three times since!

Now I have already mentioned the Taylor family; Phil and Janet played in the respective A Teams for years with Paul bolstering the B team and then eventually daughter Claire's fast developing talent would join them.

When Claire was 16 she was taken under the umbrella of the LTA and I guess the intense training that comes with it. This must be the highlight of any club when one of its members gets to walk onto Centre Court at Wimbledon. Well that's what Claire did alongside Martina Navratilova in 1994! What a fantastic moment!

During the 90's my life took a dramatic turn and a different path for a few years. My personal circumstances and a new job took me to Worcestershire. This meant a different life for me but I maintained my membership to the club and returned at weekends to play my matches. I did however miss the social side of things.

In 1998 I returned to Banbury and to all the familiar faces and some new ones of the club. It was like coming back to old friends; it felt so nice.

In October 2000 Phil announced his retirement as Chairman; this was a pivotal moment as Phil had been our longest standing Chairman. Phil, like Archie and Frank, were Banbury Tennis Club and had been its beating heart. Frank was still doing the books. Archie was still coaching the juniors every Saturday mornings when the courts looked like they had been invaded by ants with the amount of enthusiastic children running around on them!

The club was changing and 2007 saw our second longest standing Chairman, Rob Gray, take the helm. With the new challenges coming and especially the possibility of tennis changing shape in this northern part of the county Rob steered us brilliantly.

Along with a changing face of the club, membership struggled slightly but the number of coaches increased. In fact it felt sometimes there were more coaches than members. Heading the coaching was Shola Adebisi, better known as Ade, who was our super coach and was very popular with kids and adults alike.

Ade brought in a different approach to the coaching and became very successful and was recognised for it. This was now becoming the club it is today, slightly less teams but, so I'm told, healthy membership and a new court booking system that seems pretty effective although the floodlights on occasions do their own thing.

In summing up please don't be too critical of my ramblings. Remember they're my fond and personal memories over the years.

I feel I have to add that it is so sad that in latter years we have lost some of our most long-loved members:



*Archie Buzzard was Banbury Tennis Club*



*Frank Smith kept the books and always with a smile*

*Steve Rogers - I miss his humour*

*Dave Sutlieff the kindest man I have ever met.*



Thanks goes to Val Swann who put up with me in the Mixed since the year Dot! Have to say a special thanks also to Rob the chair for putting up with my rants over the years. He's been a great listener and has often been my 'therapist'.

That's it folks, sorry if I didn't mention you, that's down to my diminishing grey matter. You're all great; well nearly all.....

*Bye for now*



## **STOP PRESS**

I have just spent the day attending our recent Finals Day and must say one of the best club turnouts for years. For those that made the effort, especially the new members to come and support the occasion it certainly made a difference.

Thank you Rod Haddrall for organising, is all I can say, and to everyone who contributed and organised the food; it was a bit special.



*Written by John Hamer*