

Story of the Wellington College Real Tennis Court

September 2016

1. Introduction

The concept of building a real tennis court at Wellington gathered momentum in early 2011. Conditions seemed right:

- Wellington, under its dynamic Master, Sir Anthony Seldon, was prospering
- The College and its Governors were supportive
- a core of enthusiastic OW rackets and real tennis players were willing to support the project
- a perfect site adjacent to the rackets court was available,
- a successful club structure offering the College's sporting facilities to the local community already existed.

A small committee was formed comprising 3 Old Wellingtonians, all former rackets players:

- Peter Mallinson, a Governor and a former T&RA Chairman,
- James Mallinson,
- William Maltby, then Chairman of T&RA

together with members of the Wellington management team including Gerald Burbidge (Estates Bursar), Steve Blossie (Operations Bursar) and Ian Davis (Head of Wellington College Enterprises, responsible for making Wellington's sporting facilities available to the local community).

This committee worked with Chris Ronaldson, Mick Dean and David Anderson from Radley, Nick Jones, Philip Tilbury of architects Herbert J Stribling and the Wellington Foundation. The initial focus was on fundraising and the design/build costs.

2. Fundraising

After drawing up initial designs and following background research in to the costs of building other new courts, notably Radley, we thought we would need to raise approximately £1m.

At the outset, we believed that 60-70% of the fundraising would have to come from a small number of major donors. We were given invaluable advice and enthusiastic support for our endeavour, in particular by Tom Shields who led the fund raising for the 2nd rackets court at Tonbridge School, and by the team at Radley who were very keen for the court to become a reality.

With outline `architects' drawings and plans we launched to major donors in late 2011; this phase of the campaign continued throughout 2012 & 2013. We generally met a very positive and generous response but the campaign was challenging throughout this phase as the estimate of build costs kept rising, largely due to:

- a period of high inflation in the construction industry,
- higher costs of the ground-works to create a level site,
- meeting planning conditions especially ensuring the building was compatible with Wellington's Grade 2 listing status,
- paying full 20% VAT.

In early 2014, we had a game changing moment – Peter Luck-Hille made a major commitment to the fundraising and also agreed to play a leading role in the design and management of the construction project. With extraordinary generosity, Peter increased his donation throughout the campaign and mostly without being asked. He is by far the largest donor.

Following this successful major donor phase, we launched the wider fundraising campaign to the real tennis community as whole in Spring 2014. A further positive development at this stage was HRH The Earl of Wessex agreeing to become President of the Appeal.

In total about £1.7million was raised from nearly 100 donors. In addition, Wellington provided a modest loan to the project. It is intended that this loan will be repaid from the cashflows generated by the club. The aggregate funding covered all costs of building, associated fees, internal fit out including the pro shop and the furniture.

The fundraising can be summarised as follows:

- by size of donor:

Top 7	85%
Next 12	11%
Other 79	4%
98 Donors	100%

- by type of donor:

42 OW rackets and real tennis players	38%
55 Tennis players (unconnected to Wellington)	54%
T&RA	8%
98 Donors	100%

There were no external loans as we did not want to encumber the initial operations of club.

3. The Building and the Site

From the outset we wanted the court to be close to Wellington's other racquet sport facilities, especially rackets, squash and lawn tennis and to operate as part of Wellington's successful club for the local community which already had more than 2,500 members unconnected to the College.

A Construction Committee was created consisting of:

- Peter Luck-Hille
- Nick Jones
- The Wellington Estates Bursar, Gerald Burbidge, and subsequently Malcolm Callender
- The Architects, Philip Tilbury of Herbert J Stribling & Partners
- The Main Contractor, Beards, appointed in late 2013 on a design and build basis.

Beards subsequently organised a competitive tender process for each of the sub contactors.

Our aim was to build a high quality court:

- encouraging floor play
- with sufficient height to enable a variety of serves
- solid back walls to prevent drives from "exploding".

Work on the site commenced in Spring 2015 with HRH The Earl of Wessex formally breaking the ground in June 2015.



Preparing the site - late Autumn 2015



The walls (incorporating a special blue stain but not paint) and floor are made of concrete, an unusual design feature as all other tennis and rackets courts in the UK are made of plaster laid upon bricks or breeze blocks. On a wintery day in January 2016, more than 600 tonnes of concrete – about 50 lorry loads - were poured.





Pouring the concrete floor – Easter 2016



Largely thanks to Peter Luck-Hille's attention to detail, and in many cases funded by his generosity, the court incorporates many high quality features. Of

particular note are the gallery posts, made of high quality iroko wood and the penthouses also made of iroko. The angled ledges of the galleries, the pro shop and Royal Dedans fittings and court lighting are particularly noteworthy.



The court was completed in July 2016.



First play on the court



4. Operation and Business Plan

From the outset, the underlying operating concept was to follow the Radley model by forming a club available to the local community. This would enable the hiring and funding of two full time professionals. So we formed a sub-committee to draw up a business plan comprising:

- Ian Davis - Head of Wellington College Enterprises
- Nick Jones
- William Maltby
- James Mallinson

We received a great deal of very helpful input from Chris Ronaldson in particular.

The court is available to the local community as an open access club. It falls under the umbrella of Wellington College Enterprises, the well-established and successful club, already offering Wellington's tennis, squash badminton, gym, swimming and other facilities to more than 2,500 local members.

The Club and Tennis Court is open 7 days per week, 52 weeks a year from 7am – 10pm (with a few limited exceptions). The College has priority access for 3 hours each weekday afternoon during term time (approximately 33 weeks per year). So approximately 90% of total court time is available to Club members with 10% reserved for College pupils.

In December 2015 we appointed Dan Jones, the former Head Professional at Seacourt as the Head Professional, and Adam Player, also from Seacourt, as Senior Professional. Dan and Adam have operated as a successful and complimentary team for many years with a particularly strong record in attracting and nurturing young tennis players.

5. Wellington Support

Undertaking a long-term project of this nature has required incredible commitment from the team and Governors at Wellington College. The support was unwavering despite the project appearing to be out of reach at several times during the 5-6 years. Peter Mallinson's role as a senior Governor and, towards the latter stages of the project, as Chairman of the Governors was undoubtedly crucial.

A number of the College team deserve particular mention:

- The Bursar, Stephen Crouch,
- The Master for most of the project, Sir Anthony Seldon, who personally wrote to each of the donors,
- The team in the Foundation Office, especially Emma Browne,
- The Estates Bursars, Gerald Burbidge, and on his retirement, Malcolm Callender,
- The Head of Wellington College Enterprises, Ian Davis,
- The Head of Events, Zoe Bishop.