

ANYONE FOR TENNIS

ALMOST UNNOTICED a small "trojan" van appeared at the side of the Wychwoods Club Tennis Courts. On that fateful Monday, the 9th October, things were never going to be quite the same again. By the end of the day the full might of the Courtstall Tennis Court Construction Company had arrived, including J.C.B's (large and small variety), a compressor, miscellaneous hydraulic tools, a cavernous blue container and several purposeful gentlemen who looked as if they meant business, sniffing the air as if ready for the next battle.

Taking a chance, Alice on her own, facing the unthinkable (Gill having fled to Lanzarote), slipped round the corner smartly outflanking the men from Courtstall who turned too late and immediately succumbed to her charms and a cup of coffee. Acting as intermediary I was able to set up lines of communication avoiding the usual fate of messengers. Once able to find common ground i.e. neither party wanting to bring the Hall to a grinding halt, it was easy to set up some operating procedures. For example the workmen were quite reasonably requested to remove their boots when entering the hall before answering calls of nature which would seem to be the antithesis of a variation of the popular slogan that navvies do it in their boots. This somewhat unsavoury picture aside, it would seem that up to now the men from Courtstall have behaved impeccably.

Pat and Simon (son & heir) were quite magnificent. They appeared on Tuesday with two enormous tractors pulling two enormous trailers; even the men from Courtstall were impressed.

They set about the task of removing approximately 14 tons of soil at a time either to the top of the Adventure Playground onto "Jo and Malcolm's Grassy Knoll" or to some even darker plot. Pat muttered something about filling in a quarry; I didn't ask any more questions. On Thursday, or was it Friday? Pat rolled up in his favourite toy, his loader / bulldozer / motorised shovel (take your pick) and proceeded up to "Jo and Malcolm's Knoll" where he set about creating the nearest thing to Mont Blanc in the Cotswolds, without doubt still under the spell of his recent conquering of that summit. We haven't heard from Jo or Malcolm yet so we assume that they have been stunned into silence by the sheer magnitude of the undertaking.

This is the construction story so far which by now you may have realised is the biggest project that the Wychwoods Tennis Club has ever embarked upon; the construction of three new artificial grass courts at a cost of £96,000. Reaching this very satisfying and now relatively near conclusion of the project one tends to forget its many "ups and downs". The project probably started its life as a twinkle in Archie Clark's eye somewhere back in the late eighties and became a possibility once the

Beaconsfield Hall plans were firm, the lease in September 2000! In allowing the courts to be expanded on October 1998 the W.O.D.C. gave three sides to give an extra court. planning permission for the three The admin/paperwork side is never courts which was the last piece of the as exciting as seeing the project jigsaw for a complete submission to actually being implemented but I the Lottery Sports Council. think a relatively brief summary of the tortuous path that we followed might be moderately interesting if not entertaining.

The club committee decided that we should have a project sub-committee and a project leader, a task which fell to me as all the others appeared to have better excuses or had left the country. In February 1998 we employed a specialist consultant to guide the club through the whole project thus avoiding costly mistakes but also complying with the requirements of Sport England for Lottery Grant submissions. After presenting the Business Plan to the West Oxfordshire District Council, they were so impressed that they gave the club a £12,000 Lottery Support Grant. In parallel with preparing a Lottery submission, the club had to negotiate a Lease and a Joint Use Agreement with the Village Hall Management Committee as one of the requirements of the Lottery Grant is security of tenure.

A draft lease was agreed in September 1998 but this had to be confirmed by the Charity Commissioners, an esoteric body not renowned for its speed of response. A draft lease fortunately was adequate for the submission to Sport England, which was just as well as the club only received the Charity Commissioners' eventual approval of

While all these parallel processes were in hand the committee endeavoured to unravel the mysteries of the notorious Lottery Grant Application Form, a form which has been known to strike terror into mature men who think nothing of dashing off their tax forms in half an hour. After many meetings we managed to fill in all 36 pages of the form with such persuasive words that none of us could imagine that the Lottery Board would not be reduced to tears. Before submitting the application we felt that we were now in possession of enough facts to discuss the proposed project sensibly with the membership at an Extraordinary General Meeting.

The meeting duly took place on the 1st December 1998 and was well attended by members. The scene was set by Sir John, while Pat and the rest of us fielded the questions as best we could. After three stirring speeches supporting the proposal from Messrs Huntingford, Findlay and Green, and technical input from Mr K. Smith the resolution was carried virtually unanimously and the day was won.

On the 22nd December 1998 the Lottery Application was submitted and the club entered into the next phase where we spent the next 6 months answering difficult questions.

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Eventually on the 9th June we received grant support in principle but hedged in with further even more difficult conditions, whereupon we threw in the towel and asked Sport England for help. Clearly used to this sort of abject appeal, Regional Sport England at Reading invited us to a clinic where some of the mysteries were revealed. We now felt that we were on the last mile, and our last response was submitted in October 1999 which included the latest draft lease and Joint Use Agreement, a modified Business Plan and various further commitments to coaching, particularly youngsters. On the 10th February 2000, amidst much rejoicing, we received the official letter confirming approval of a grant for £53,464. The rest of this year was spent in the pleasant task of agreeing a contractor for the work and visiting various clubs to decide on the best possible artificial grass surface that we could afford. As mentioned earlier the one fly left in the ointment was the absence of approval for the lease from the Charity Commissioners, without which a spade could not be put into the ground.

After valiant efforts from Frank Ware, who is probably one of the few people on this planet who understands the abstruse mind of the Commissioners, and legal guidance from Liz Watts, we were able to wrest approval from the Commissioners, just in time to save the project from postponement or even cancellation. The rest of the story to date is now visible at the Beaconsfield Hall. Thanking everybody by name who has helped with the project would be almost impossible and probably invidious, so I would like to thank everyone that has assisted in the success of this venture without which it could not have happened, but I must give special thanks to Pat Edginton for his solid practical support, the long suffering members of the sub-committee, my wife for her forbearance and help and special mention to Archie Clark whose wise counsel and support have been of incalculable value to me particularly in moments of despair and generally to the success of the whole project.

Ian Carrington (Club Sec.).

**Come and commiserate!
Bob Forster will soon be..**

50 To mark this doom-laden occasion, he warmly invites you to:

**The New Beaconsfield Hall, Shipton
on Friday, 1st December - 7.30pm.**

There will be a wide range of jewellery, gifts, pottery, musical instruments and Christmas cards at a **TEARCRAFT SALE**. "Tearcraft" is a Christian organization supporting small-sale craft workers in the developing world. Everything sold here goes directly to the producers. Whether you know him or not, you will be welcome for tea, coffee and birthday cake, plus a beautiful array of Christmas gifts. Or visit www.tearfund.org and select *Tearcraft Shop*.