

**RECEPTION TO MARK THE SESQUICENTENARY OF THE  
HOBART REAL TENNIS CLUB  
REMARKS BY  
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE BARBARA BAKER AC  
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA  
GOVERNMENT HOUSE, TUESDAY 7 JANUARY 2025**

Good evening, everyone. I warmly welcome you all to Government House for this reception to mark both the sesquicentenary of the Hobart Real Tennis Club and the 2025 Australian Open Real Tennis Tournament.

May I begin by acknowledging the Muwinina people upon whose land we gather. I acknowledge today's Tasmanian Aboriginal Community as ongoing custodians of Country. I recognise their enduring culture and deep connection to land, sea, sky, and waters.

As you all know, the game of Real Tennis started in the Australian colonies with the construction of our Hobart Real Tennis Court in 1875 by Samuel Smith Travers, who bought the land for around 1,000 pounds.<sup>1</sup> It cost him 3,500 pounds to construct.<sup>2</sup> Ten years later, in 1885, he sold it to a group of players for around 2,400 pounds. At the same time, the Court became a club.<sup>3</sup>

Some of Samuel Smith Travers' relatives, with the names Travers and Butler, are still around, including Dr Richard Travers, who is here tonight.

Our Hobart Real Tennis Club Inc. is an active club of some distinction in the real tennis world. It has produced Robert Fahey, who is currently regarded as the greatest player to date in the world (GOAT) and who has received an OBE for his efforts, which include 13 World Championships.

The Club was also first home to Judith Clarke, Australia's first female World Champion in 1985, and many female players have since emerged from our Club.

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<sup>1</sup> *A Chase Down-Under*, Michael P. Garnett, Historical Publications 1999, at page 24.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid* at page 27.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid* at page 33.

Today, the Club boasts over 100 active members, and its junior ranks have produced the entire last Australian Junior side.<sup>4</sup>

Regarding the Tasmanian Governors' association with the Club, the Governor's Cup competition has been held since 1975 when Governor Sir Stanley Burbury donated it. The Cup was held here at the same time as the Australian Open, but this year, the Governor's Cup will be held separately and later in the year. Winners of the Governor's Cup include Chris Ronaldson and Rob Fahey, both here tonight, and Graham Hyland. Barry Toates, also here, has made the final twice. In 1979, Chris Ronaldson beat him, but Barry took revenge and defeated Chris in the Australian Open final.<sup>5</sup>

Real Tennis is one of the oldest and, I am sure you will agree, one of the most interesting ball games, and difficult to learn, with intricate rules. It has a long and fascinating history, starting out as handball. Research revealed that the Greeks and Romans played handball, and there are references in the classics to a game played in a stone court.<sup>6</sup> The Roman legionnaires, moving into Gaul, would likely have brought handball with them. The game soon spread to England, and as it developed from a street game, early courts were attached to inns.<sup>7</sup> As the design became more specific, many courts were built under royal patronage, particularly in France and the British Isles or on the estates of private houses. The first private court is said to be at Dijon from 1250, with a court at Dublin Castle dated 1361.<sup>8</sup> There is evidence of courts in almost every European country from the 13<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>9</sup> "...Between 1550 and 1700, there were no fewer than 250 courts of different shapes and sizes in Paris alone."<sup>10</sup>

It is not surprising that Real Tennis is featured in literature and art, including by Shakespeare in "Henry V" and Samuel Pepys in "The Diary", and in paintings of David in "The Tennis Court Oath Versailles" (1789) and Jan Brueghel the Younger, in "The Vanity of Human Life" (1631).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Email from Graeme Bradfield to David Hughes dated 10/12/2024.

<sup>5</sup> *A Chase Down Under* at page 69.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.tennisandrackets.com/real-tennis/history> accessed 6/01/2025.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.tennisandrackets.com/real-tennis/history/evolution> accessed 6/01/2025.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.tennisandrackets.com/real-tennis/history>, accessed 6/01/2025.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.tennisandrackets.com/real-tennis/history/literature-art>, accessed 6/01/2025.

Real Tennis is a fascinating game that requires great skill and athleticism. It is also very social. I have fond memories of late nights playing pennant and many fun dinners. I am sure you will have a fabulous week of tennis and camaraderie.

I congratulate our Hobart Real Tennis Club Committee and volunteers for hosting this event. I congratulate all involved. I also add my personal congratulations as a former player of this wonderful game. Finally, congratulations on marking your sesquicentenary. Very few clubs achieve this longevity. Doing so is a testament to the enduring friendships fostered by those who play this ancient and challenging game.

May I conclude by welcoming all our competitors to this Australian Open Real Tennis tournament, Australia's premier event under the auspices of ARTA (Australian Real Tennis Association).

Please enjoy your reception and please take time to look around our State Rooms.

Thankyou.