

## **Oporto Cricket and Lawn Tennis Club: 150 years on**

The Oporto Cricket and Lawn Tennis Club (OCLTC) was formed in 1855, initially as the Oporto Cricket Club. To celebrate its 150th anniversary in 2005 the Executive Committee of the Club prepared a special booklet looking back on its history. There follows an edited version of Peter Cobb's introductory paper for the booklet, followed by a timeline of the Club's history compiled by members of the Club.<sup>1</sup>

### **“The Field”**

*By Peter Cobb*

The inaugural meeting of the Oporto Cricket Club took place on the 31<sup>st</sup> March 1855 in Candal, Vila Nova de Gaia. This makes it indisputably the oldest cricket club on mainland Europe. A year later it apparently moved across the Douro to a site close to the present "Field" on ground rented from the Agramonte cemetery. The first few years, however, cannot have been exactly plain sailing. In 1858 the committee was censured for “having allowed the Field to pass away without giving official notice to the members.” The hapless committee thereupon resigned *en bloc* and the Club was temporarily dissolved.

Three years later the Club was back in business, as the Oporto Cricket and Quoits Club. Cricket would start at 3pm on Saturdays with the stem admonition that “order be universally observed on the field of play.” So “sledging” is not the modern Australian invention we thought. In October of the same year the first match between Lisbon and Oporto took place - in Lisbon.

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<sup>1</sup> Thanks are due to Peter Cobb, as well as Doug Rogerson, the present Chair of the Oporto Cricket and Lawn Tennis Club and Terry Weineck, who was the Chair of the Club in 2005, as well as to Andrew Shepherd for summarising the 2005 report.

In 1862 *Punch* published a piece, written by a Portuguese sports journalist, on that Lisbon/Oporto match, then as now the highlight of the Club's sporting calendar.

“The game of cricket match,” he wrote, “is an active, running, driving, jumping game, which can only be played by a person with a good pair of legs. Two posts are placed at a great distance from one another. The player close to one of these posts throws a large ball towards the other party, who awaits the ball to send it far with a small stick with which he is armed. The other players then run to look for the ball and, while this search is going on, the party who struck it with the stick runs incessantly from post to post, marking one for each run.” Luckily the “indispensable accompaniment” to every cricket match was “a sumptuous dinner in the marquee for fifty persons.”

In 1877 three tennis courts were built and the name of the club was changed to the Oporto Cricket and Lawn Tennis Club. Tennis immediately made its impact. In 1953 the *Sunday Times* printed a picture of the Wimbledon Championships in 1880 featuring players in a type of Moorish costume, “adopted by the ladies of the English colony (*sic*) in Oporto.” From 1883, tennis and cricket matches were played against Lisbon over the same weekend.

In the early days cricket matches were confined to “pick up” games between members of the community, with the odd fixture against visiting Royal Navy ships and the annual match against Lisbon. In 1920, A.C. Kendall, a fine all-round sportsman, presented the cup that bears his name and it has been fought for hard, but fairly, ever since. Nothing gets the adrenalin going in quite the same way as when the captain of the home team tosses the coin on the Saturday of the Kendall Cup match. It's the Iberian equivalent of the Ashes!

By the 1930s regular visits from wandering British teams like the Cryptics<sup>2</sup> and the Wine Trade<sup>3</sup> were added to the fixture list, players

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<sup>2</sup> <https://crypticscricket.club/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://wtsc.org.uk/sports/cricket>

enjoying a few leisurely days on the way out on one of the Royal Mail liners, and positively lavish hospitality when they got to Porto. The standard of play was high.



**Martin Clodd celebrates Oporto's 1921 Kendall Cup victory**

The clubhouse used to be on the Campo Alegre. It had a colonial air about it, with verandas and a sloping roof. The men's changing room was up the stairs on the right, the women's facilities on the left. The place ran under the eagle eye of João and his wife, Amalia. When building a shower was suggested for the ladies, João said, "Why bother? They don't even use one cake of soap a year." So, the decision was postponed. This is an example of the somewhat conservative attitude of bygone committees. In 1907 the owner offered to sell the Field to the Club for 7 contos (£1,500), but this was rejected as being "outrageously expensive." The land was finally purchased in 1923, after a certain amount of negotiation, for the still-not-unreasonable sum of £4,000. In 1931, the President, my grandfather William Cobb, purchased and donated a piece of ground to the Club. This included a 60-metre frontage on the Campo Alegre. For years nothing much happened on it other than João growing his cabbages and potatoes. But in the 1960s it was sold, thus enabling the OCLTC to join forces with the Oporto

British Club (OBC). The proceeds of the sale of the Campo Alegre frontage also involved an exchange of land on which the present clubhouse is built, together with sufficient funds for its construction. Plans for the clubhouse were approved by March 1964, and the bulldozers moved in a year later.

The British Ambassador officially opened the new Club in August 1968. To celebrate the occasion the Cryptics, the Wine Trade and Lisbon cricket teams were invited to take part in a round-robin competition. As a member of the Wine Trade team, the extreme generosity of the hospitality meant that my recollections of the week are at best hazy. I do remember that one of our team was seen walking across the Dom Luis bridge in his dinner jacket against the rush hour combination of bullock carts and charabancs. The so-called “wandering” teams, such as the Cryptics and the Wine Trade have contributed so much to the Club’s success. The ambience they find when they arrive, together with the beautiful setting of the Field, make a cricket tour to Porto an unforgettable experience. It is not surprising that, during its distinguished history, the Club has played host to no fewer than seven England captains, and countless test (including one South African) and first-class cricketers.

The amalgamation brought a further dimension to the Club. The social side of its life was so successful that a major expansion programme had to be undertaken in 1987. More bedrooms were added to the Club House, the dining room was moved and a new bar built, as were a terrace and veranda. One casualty was the bowling green, which had to make way for the relocated swimming pool. Membership expanded to include 180 Portuguese associate-member families and 35 families from other nationalities. Special Club dinners, such as that celebrating St. Andrew's Night, are highlights of the British community’s year. Not the least of the Club’s charm lies in its occasional quirkiness. In 1922 it adopted its own logo, a lion rampant, “borrowed” from the Christmas Assortment tin of a well-known biscuit manufacturer. The original members would have liked that.

## Some of the more important dates in the Club's history

- 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1855** Inaugural meeting of the Oporto Cricket Club, situated in Candal. Amongst the original eleven Rules, one imposed a fine of 240 Reis on those who failed to appear on "field days", i.e., holidays named by the President, Secretary and Committee.
- 31<sup>st</sup> May, 1855** Second Meeting, at which it was resolved that subscribers would be allowed to join on paying two new crowns, 960 Reis, a month.
- 7<sup>th</sup> November, 1855** The club decided to "choose another field on this side of the river, if possible, for next season".
- 7<sup>th</sup> January, 1856** The accounts for first nine months, showed a profit of Reis 57\$700. The field was rented on an annual basis. The accounts showed the cost of bridge tolls and cartage of a roller, so it would appear that the club moved from Candal to Oporto in early 1856, to a site slightly to the north of its present premises.
- 11<sup>th</sup> May, 1858** There was a vote of censure on the Committee for "having allowed the field to pass away without giving official notice to the members" and for not having called a meeting of members "to announce the arrangement of the field and that they did not lay the financial affairs of the club before the members". The Committee resigned. There was a proposal that the club be "dissolved forthwith" with a positive balance of Reis 46\$605.
- 12<sup>th</sup> February, 1861** The Oporto Cricket and Quoits Club was founded, with a transfer of the balance from the previous club. Saturdays were made "Club Days" when the "wickets will be pitched at 3 pm".

- 26<sup>th</sup> May, 1861** A meeting was convened to consider what answer should be sent to a challenge received from “The Lisbon Cricket Club to play a match on the 30th May on their ground”. A letter was sent declining the proposal “in consequence of the absence of several of our members, without whom it would be impossible to play the match”.
- 14<sup>th</sup> August, 1861** The question of admitting Portuguese members was first raised.
- 17<sup>th</sup> October, 1861** The first Oporto v Lisbon cricket match was played in Lisbon, with the former winning. This is the match that was reported in an unnamed Lisbon newspaper, and later included in *Punch* in 1862.
- 6<sup>th</sup> May, 1867** Ladies were permitted to play croquet on the turf, except on cricket match or practice days.
- 28<sup>th</sup> June, 1867** Lisbon, on being repeatedly pressed by Oporto, agree to play the return cricket match in Oporto. It would seem that they had delayed coming until the railway was completed as far as Vila Nova de Gaia. A two-day match was played.
- 29<sup>th</sup> March, 1869** A one-day match took place versus an XI from the Channel Fleet. A Ball was subsequently held at the Crystal Palace.<sup>4</sup>
- 30<sup>th</sup> May, 1873** Boys who were sons of members were granted membership, paying half subscription.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> June, 1873** There was a two-day match versus officers of HMS Triumph in Lisbon, followed by an Oporto versus Lisbon two-day match.

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<sup>4</sup> A smaller version of London’s Crystal Palace. It was demolished in 1951

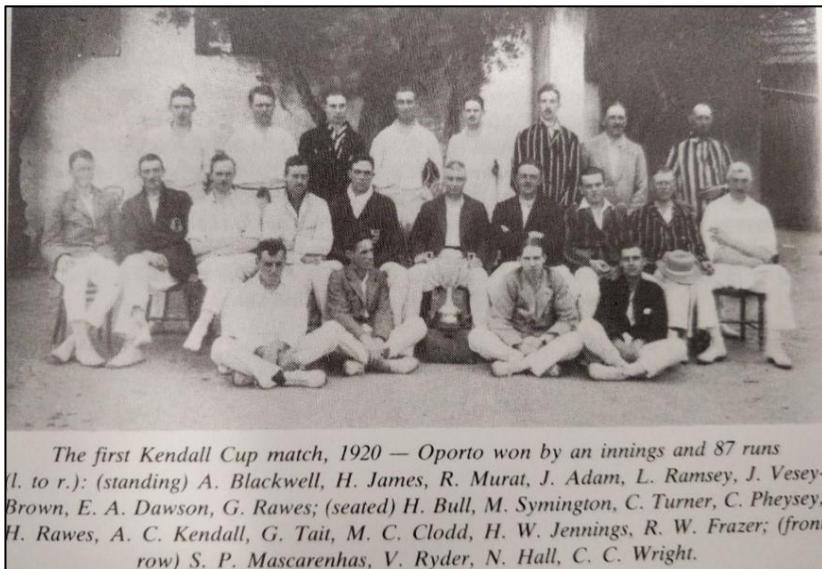
- 13<sup>th</sup> June, 1874** The Lisbon versus Oporto match in Oporto was only a one-day match as Oporto considered themselves too weak to play two days.
- 5<sup>th</sup> March, 1877** Playing of lawn tennis was agreed. In the previous year the idea had been turned down. Three tennis courts were made.
- 12<sup>th</sup> February, 1883** It was decided that 2/3 of the revenue should be spent on cricket, and that 1/3 be spent on tennis.
- 18<sup>th</sup> April, 1883** The first complete set of Club Rules was compiled. No copy is known to remain.
- 7<sup>th</sup> November, 1883** The first tennis team (men's doubles) was sent to Lisbon with the cricket side. There were 99 members (all male) of the club at this time.
- 1898** Visit from the UK of Mr. Tom Westray's Cricket XI.<sup>5</sup>
- 1902** Association football was included as one of the regular games of the club.
- 1904** Levelling of the east side of the cricket field was carried out and drainage was installed for the Municipality. It was suggested that the Challenge Cup for inter-city athletic sports, competed for only once, should be turned into a challenge cup for annual football matches.
- 1907** The owner offered to sell the field to the club for seven contos. This was rejected as the price was considered too high. A subscription was raised to try to purchase the land for five contos.
- 29<sup>th</sup> February, 1912** Non-British membership increased from 17 to 25.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://archive.acscricket.com/cricket/1898/136/>

1913 The municipality expropriated the old clubhouse, paying the owner, Sr. Marinho, Reís. 1,400\$00 as compensation. The landlord was bound under terms of the lease to construct an equally good clubhouse in the garden at the back of the existing building, overlooking the tennis courts.

1920 The first Kendall Cup cricket match was played.



*The first Kendall Cup match, 1920 — Oporto won by an innings and 87 runs  
(l. to r.): (standing) A. Blackwell, H. James, R. Murat, J. Adam, L. Ramsey, J. Vesey-Brown, E. A. Dawson, G. Rawes; (seated) H. Bull, M. Symington, C. Turner, C. Pheysey, H. Rawes, A. C. Kendall, G. Tait, M. C. Clodd, H. W. Jennings, R. W. Frazer; (front row) S. P. Mascarenhas, V. Ryder, N. Hall, C. C. Wright.*

### **The first Kendall Cup match, 1920**

1921 A suggestion that club's name should be changed to 'The Oporto Sports Club' was rejected.

1922 A committee of three members was appointed to negotiate the purchase of the field from Sr. Marinho.

It was decided that the club would only provide tennis balls for tournaments and not for private games.

- 24<sup>th</sup> April, 1923** The clubhouse and property, including the strip of land west of the tennis courts, were formally paid for. The original asking price was £35,000. This was subsequently reduced to £34,000 with the strip of land included. Donations amounted to £33,893. The idea of forming a Company to manage the Club was rejected, since it would involve paying taxes every time a share was sold and, furthermore, would mean much extra work for the treasurer.
- April, 1924** The first visit of the Cryptics team from England took place. They were to make regular visits in April in subsequent years until 1931, when the visit was declined because of the Club's financial position.
- 1936** Rugby Union was recognized as a Club game.
- 1940** Many fixtures were cancelled because of the war.
- 25<sup>th</sup> May, 1947** Membership was divided into the following categories: - playing, non-playing and visiting. Ladies' subscriptions were first introduced and fixed at half that of the men. The possibility of amalgamation with the Oporto British Club was first raised.
- 1950** A Club Tie was introduced. The Committee agreed to a charge being levied by the golf professional to give lessons on the field. Gibraltar CC visited in August.
- 1951** A squash court was completed in February. In August, Porto's Badminton Club, on being wound up, presented Esc. 6,200\$00 to the Club.

- 1961** A cup, to be awarded to the Ladies' Tennis Singles winner, was presented by Mr. Kenneth Graham.
- 1967** The Club amalgamated with the Oporto British Club. To mark the amalgamation, various gifts were received from members. Eric Flower donated the records of the "Vila Nova de Gaia Lawn Tennis and Quoits Club" (1880-1952) and also gave the club "a peculiarly shaped tennis racquet" which was later framed and now hangs in the bar as a reminder of how tennis was played.
- 1980** Two new all-weather tennis courts were constructed on the north side of the "field", supplementing the four clay courts, which had been built in the 1960s.
- 1987** Mr. & Mrs. G. Perkins presented a new cup, to be held by the winners of an Annual Tennis match between the OCLTC and the Lisbon Casuals, to be known as "The Challenge Cup".
- 1989** The swimming pool was relocated to a little used part of the property, which had previously been the bowling green. This enabled a larger pool to be built, while moving the pool away from the clubhouse to reduce disturbance to members and their guests.
- 1998** Installation of a new automatic irrigation system.
- 1999** The "far field", which was used as a second football field, sloped upwards on one side resulting in teams playing "uphill" for one half of the game. The pitch was levelled.

- 1999** The Millennium Banquet on Friday 31st December 1999 saw the New Year and New Millennium in with great ceremony. It was one of the largest indoor functions ever held at the Club.
- 2000** Overhead lighting was installed for the two tennis courts.
- 2001** A bowling machine was purchased for the cricketers. The first artificial wicket was laid on the cricket pitch.
- 2003** The Club introduced a web site.
- 2005** The 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary was celebrated on 16 April. The flag was raised at 12.55, accompanied by the release of 150 balloons.

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*The Cobbs arrived in Porto in the mid-nineteenth century and were actively involved in the Port trade, either in Portugal or the UK (and sometimes both), from 1863 until 1999, without a break. Peter Cobb came to Portugal in 1980 and was a keen member of the Club's cricket team for several years. His grandfather, William, was the Club's President from 1928 to 1935.*