

# Norfolk

AUGUST 2022 | Issue 280

magazine

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OH I SAY!  
*Hunstanton tennis celebrates centenary*

Amazing sea life and shipwreck off the north Norfolk coast

# Secrets under the sea



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## Hunstanton Tennis

By Jeremy Blackmore

It might not quite be Wimbledon but it is as far as we in Norfolk are concerned. We celebrate 100 years of the Hunstanton Lawn Tennis championship, also known as 'The Glastonbury of Tennis'.



Photo: Matthew Usher

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## The perfect picnic

By Richard Hughes

Chef Richard isn't a massive fan of al fresco. He prefers to eat picnics in the car and finds barbecues annoying but being Richard Hughes, his picnic food is, of course, the tastiest you can imagine...



Photo: The Assembly House

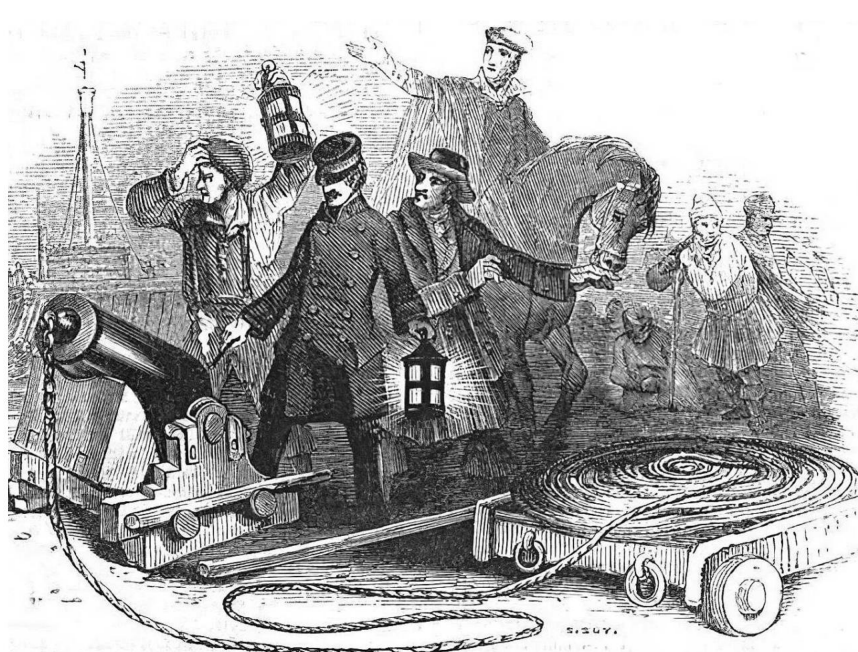


Photo: Johann Jacob Weber/Public Domain

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## The marvellous Manby brothers

By Chris Armstrong

In another Chris Armstrong classic, we learn about two Norfolk brothers who achieved great things but were also tainted by the whiff of scandal. Just how we like it...

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Getting lost
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Not quite the X-Factor

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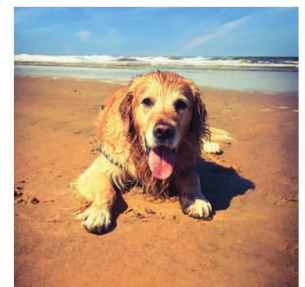


Photo: Erin Moncur/Stockimo/  
Alamy Stock Photo

# Oooooh, I say!

It's been dubbed the Glastonbury of Tennis, has more grass courts than Wimbledon and is 100 years old, Welcome to Hunstanton Lawn Tennis Tournament!

WORDS: Jeremy Blackmore



Photo: Matthew Usher

TV personality Amanda Holden, supporting the Teenage Cancer Trust, was a tournament visitor in 2009

Finally named Wimbledon-on-Sea, Hunstanton Lawn Tennis Tournament, the country's largest tennis event, finally celebrates its centenary this month.

From humble beginnings on the north Norfolk coast in 1920, the tournament quickly became a hugely popular event attracting entrants from Norfolk and much further afield. It is arguably the most popular grass tennis tournament in the world, taking place across 38 grass courts – 10 more than Wimbledon – on the southern edge of the town.

In 2020, the sport's governing body, the LTA (Lawn Tennis Association), awarded Hunstanton the accolade of national Tournament of the Year at its annual presentations, dubbing it the 'Glastonbury of Tennis'. It was testament to the hard work of the committee and the players and spectators who have supported the event over many years.

The pandemic meant celebrations for the tournament's centenary were put on hold in 2020 and again in 2021, so this year's event between Sunday 14 to Saturday 20 August will be a special celebration both of tennis and the event's history.

Secretary Chris Holt has been involved with the event for the past 45 years since his early days teaching at Hunstanton Secondary Modern School, where several members of staff were involved in the tournament.



Photo: Angus Creighton

He explains the history of the event: “From my early times on the committee and talking to those who were involved, it appears that although there was a small tennis club in Hunstanton, it was a local group of dignitaries in the town and surrounding area who thought it would be good for the town to have their own little ‘Wimbledon’.

“So, the tournament began. Genteel days with low entries and a lot of socialising and much drinking of G & T’s and not a lot of tennis. But from little acorns, oak trees have grown.”

‘Sunny Hunny’ subsequently became an open event when sanctioned by the Lawn Tennis Association in 1923 and as the years went by, the numbers of participants increased. The event eventually grew beyond the permanent courts off King’s Lynn Road with extra courts on the cricket outfield.

Each year Chris hired a 7.5-ton lorry to drive to equipment maker Slazenger in Croydon to collect the court hardware before returning it the Tuesday after the tournament. With entries averaging at around 1,100 each

year, the tournament now owns all the hardware for a further 28 courts on the neighbouring cricket outfield in addition to the 10 permanent courts which are maintained to a high standard by King’s Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council and which also hosted the LTA Summer County Cup in mid-July this summer. Sponsors and trade stalls along with extra toilet facilities, on site catering and licensed bar have also raised the profile of the tournament.

Hunstanton caters for the most experienced players down to enthusiastic beginners. It covers all ages from the senior veterans down to ‘under twelves’ and if time permits, there is also a ‘round robin’ for even younger players.

It gives the event a real family feel with many using the opportunity both to play tennis and enjoy the beautiful north Norfolk coast and countryside. While many competitors make a return visit every August, others come from as far afield as continental Europe, Australia and the United States.

Says Chris: “It’s a big tournament and there’s the

**ABOVE:** Grass tennis courts as far as the eye can see at Hunstanton



Photo: Hunstanton Lawn Tennis Tournament

**LEFT:** Youngsters with their prizes at the Hunstanton Lawn Tennis Tournament in 2019

chance to meet and play players from all over the country and even from abroad. We have international players some years who come over and play. It's great to get them all involved and it's a chance to play new faces other than those at their local club.

"It's a family atmosphere. They come with the family. They treat it almost as a holiday not only a tennis tournament. So, when they're not playing, they're off doing sailing or golfing or looking at the local amenities and things they can do round here, even go on the beach and have a cup of coffee or an ice cream. It's just a big occasion for them.

"It's a unique tournament. It's their holiday. Tennis is a bonus, and they're here to enjoy the area. They really are. Rather than go abroad for a holiday, they come to Hunstanton. It's just a lovely area to come to, and they just thoroughly enjoy the whole week, not just the tennis but everything else that goes with it. They meet old friends, they have dinners, they go out for meals."

As such, the event brings in significant income for the local economy with visitors using local shops, hotels, restaurants and pubs and other amenities.

In the main draw, the tournament attracts quality county level players and some with higher aspirations. One famous name on the honours board is Ann Haydon, née Jones, who went on to be the Wimbledon Ladies singles Champion in 1969. The nephew of former world number one Ilie



Photo: Matthew Usher

Chris Holt, secretary of Hunstanton Lawn Tennis Tournament, has been involved for 45 years

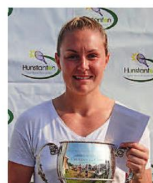


Photo: Hunstanton Lawn Tennis Tournament

**ABOVE:**  
Holly Middleton  
Ladies Singles  
Winner 2019

**BELOW:**  
The presentation  
ceremony at  
Hunstanton

Nstase has also won a title at Hunstanton.

The work to set up the event each year is carried out like almost a military operation. The week before, a team of volunteers starts marking out the 28 courts on the cricket outfield as well as car parking spaces.

The site is at its busiest though the day before the tournament starts. From 7am the venue is a hive of activity as volunteers are joined by staff from the council who set up all the court hardware.

Some 900 metres of netting are put up along with traffic cones, bins, toilet blocks and marquees for the trade stalls which include specialist foods, artisan jewellery, health and massage, handicrafts

and a wide range of clothing.

As part of the centenary celebrations, a new book, *Wimbledon-on-Sea: 100 years of the Hunstanton Lawn Tennis Tournament*, has been researched and written by long-standing committee member and event competitor Ashley Martin.

Detailing how Sunny Hunny started, the 156-page book outlines the tournament's expansion over the years and features anecdotes from newspaper cuttings and memories from players past and present.

It also details the winners of the five open events – men's and ladies' singles, men's and ladies' doubles and mixed doubles – from 1923-2019. The book also identifies the most successful players in the tournament's history in terms of number of open titles won.

Ashley said: "From beginners to future Wimbledon champions, Hunstanton Lawn Tennis Tournament has attracted all-comers over 100 years and remains a unique fixture in Britain's summer sporting calendar. For me researching and writing the book has been a labour of love." ♦

*For details of how to watch the tournament, join the committee or serve as a volunteer and purchase a copy the centenary book, please visit [hunstantonltt.co.uk](http://hunstantonltt.co.uk) or email [info@hunstantonltt.co.uk](mailto:info@hunstantonltt.co.uk)*



Photo: Sportbeat