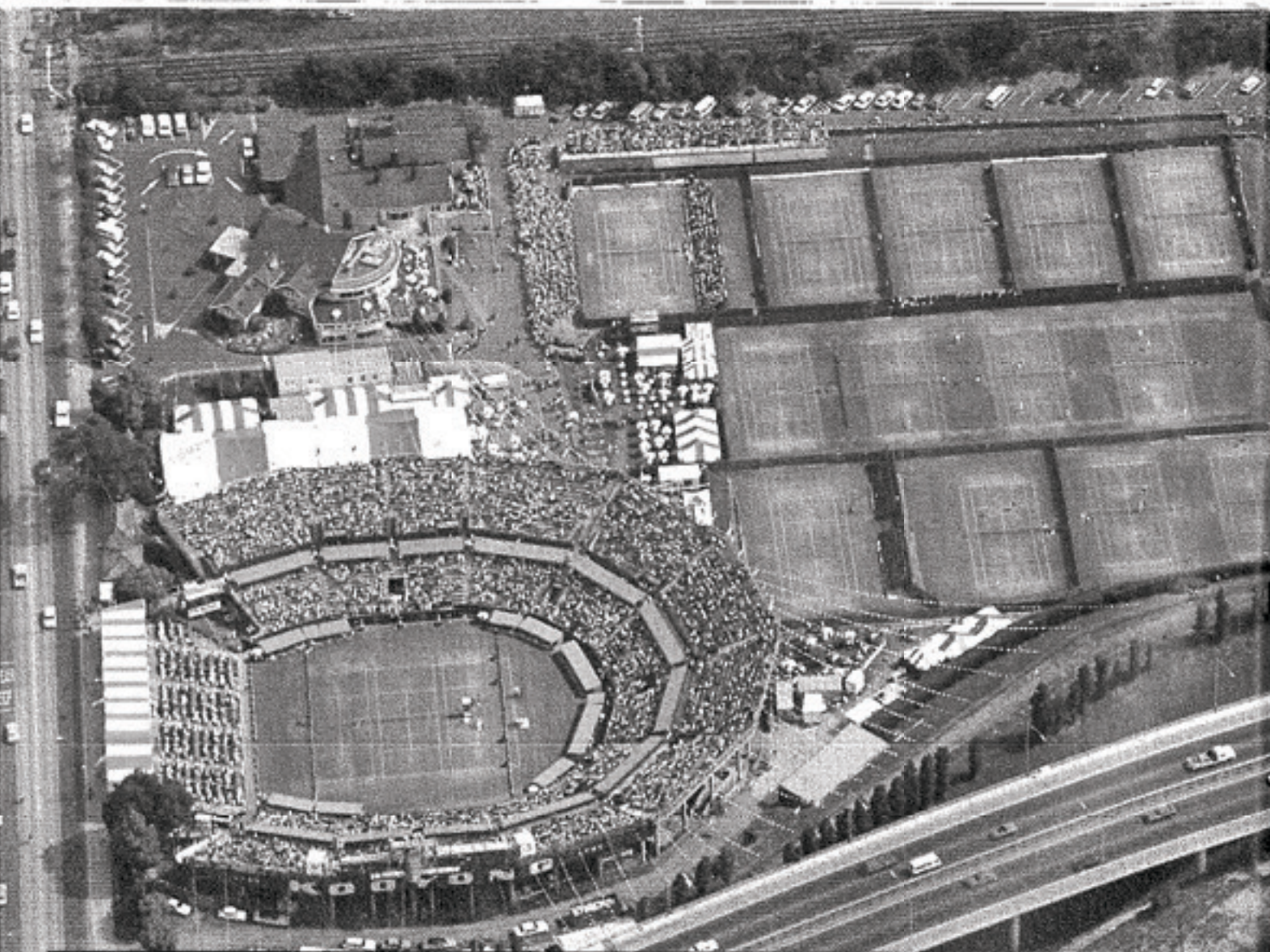




FOR KOOYONG - THE LAST HURRAH

BY ALAN TRENGOVE

SUNDAY, January 25, will be a sad day no matter how exciting the final of the Ford Australian Open may be. It will be the last day on which a national title match will ever be held in the horseshoe-shaped Kooyong stadium.

Already, the last Davis Cup final has been staged there. And though other big-name tournaments may be organised at Kooyong if the hopes of club officials materialise, there can be nothing in future to match the traditions and prestige of the Australian Championships and the Davis Cup.

How disbelieving would have been Norman Brookes, Australia's first international tennis star, had he been informed that one day Australian tennis would desert the green expanse of Kooyong for a National Tennis Centre, composed of synthetic courts, much closer to the central business district of Melbourne.

It was Brookes, newly appointed president of the Lawn Tennis Association of Australia, who presided over the first Australian Championships held at Kooyong exactly 60 years ago, the stadium (much smaller than the present edifice) having been created the previous year.

The men's final that year was a cracker, and, fittingly, it was contested by two Victorians. Gerald Patterson, a former Wimbledon champion, beat Jack Hawkes 3-6, 6-4, 3-6, 18-16, 6-3. The women's trophy went to Esne Boyd over Mrs Sylvia Harper by the score of 5-7, 6-1, 6-2.

Since then, Kooyong has been the setting for many great matches. Up to 1972, the Australian Championships were rotated between Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide, with Brisbane the venue only four times — between 1956 and 1969.

In 1972, Kooyong became the permanent home of the Australian Open.

Towards the end of the 1970s, however, the rumblings began which finally led to a split in Victorian tennis, with the affiliated clubs and associations being ousted by the Kooyong club members, and subsequently forming a new governing body, the Victorian Tennis Association, to take over the administration of tennis in Victoria from the Kooyong-based Lawn Tennis Association of Victoria.

Soon after, the LTAA announced ambitious plans to build a new centre to supersede Kooyong as the home of the Open. Kooyong was perceived as too cramped and antiquated to remain the headquarters of Australian tennis — unless millions of dollars were spent on a drastic revamp. And without control of the grounds, the LTAA decided that was not an option.

In all, there have been 27 Australian Championships held at Kooyong. Of the men's finals, perhaps the best were Jack

Crawford's 2-6, 6-4, 6-4, 6-4 defeat of Fred Perry in 1935; Roy Emerson's 1-6, 6-3, 7-5, 6-4 win over Rod Laver in 1961; and John Newcombe's 7-5, 3-6, 6-4, 7-6 victory over Jimmy Connors in 1975.

Among the women, Daphne Akhurst won her fifth Australian title in 1930 by beating Sylvia Harper 10-8, 2-6, 7-5. She was to die three years later at the age of 29. In 1974-75, Evonne Goolagong won back-to-back titles by brilliantly beating Chris Evert and Martina Navratilova respectively. And then there was that marvellous 1982 final when Evert Lloyd topped Navratilova, the top seed, 6-3, 2-6, 6-3.

Apart from the Australian Championships and Davis Cup matches, Kooyong also housed the 1965 and 1978 Federation Cup contests. Australia, represented by Margaret Smith and Lesley Turner, beat the USA's Billie Jean Moffitt and Carol Graebner in the 1965

final, while in 1978 Kerry Reid and Wendy Turnbull went down in the final to the USA's Chris Evert, Tracy Austin and Billie Jean.

Over the years, other notable international competitions have been held at Glenferrie Road, making Kooyong a household name among tennis fans around the world. The Victorian Championships, which are older than the Australian titles, once attracted big crowds to Kooyong, especially when they were a lead-up to the Davis Cup challenge round.

Interstate matches also once created great interest, while many leading players have happy memories of Linton and Wilson Cup matches played at the grounds. Country Week and Metropolitan Week were always popular as social, as well as competitive, events in Kooyong's heyday.

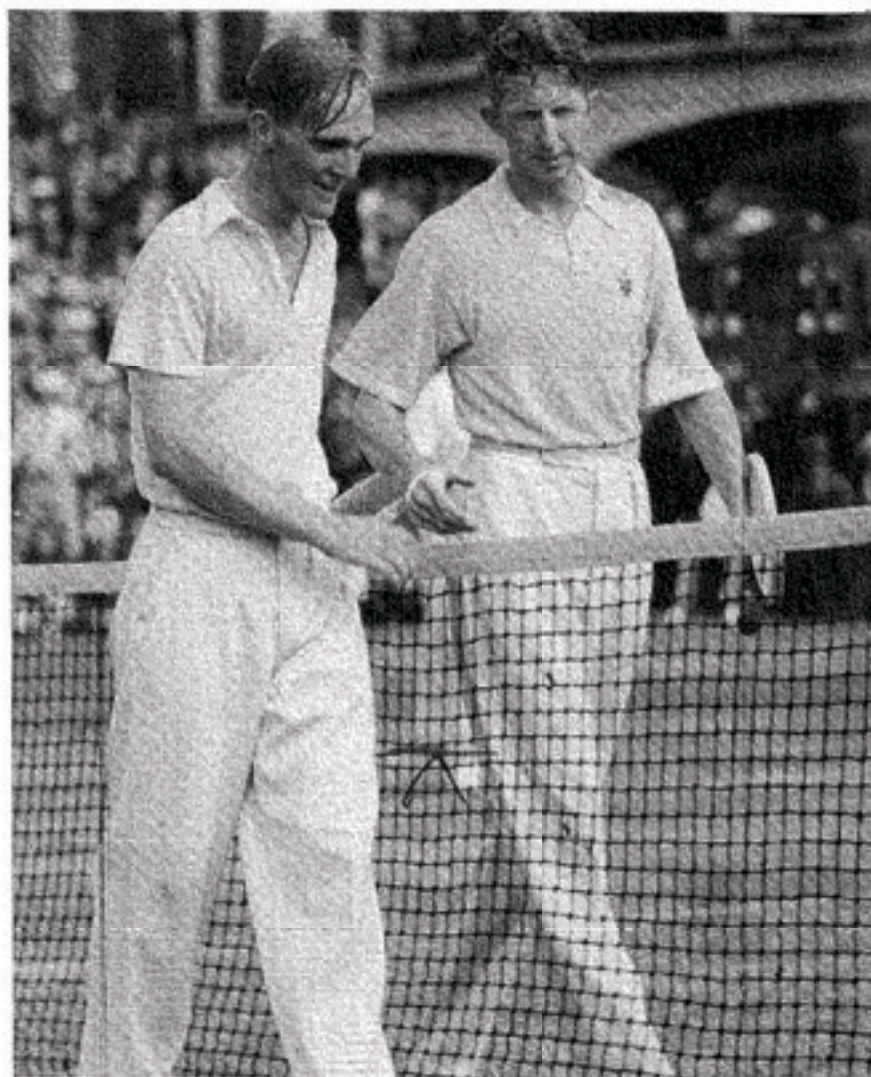
In 1954, Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip visited the stadium during an international match between Australian and South Africa — the only time a reigning monarch has watched big tennis in Australia.

The Kooyong stands, made of reinforced concrete, have changed radically since 1927. At first, the southern stand — financed by the sale of seats for the life of the stand — accommodated 3,823 people. A northern stand, with seating capacity of 1,633, was added in 1934 in time for the Victorian Centenary Championships.

In 1953, four upper sections were put on the southern stand, providing a further 1762 seats, and the eastern bank was upgraded to accommodate 2,247. Three years later, the western stand was built, adding another 2,202 seats and bringing the stadium's total capacity to 11,657.

Temporary tubular steel stands increased the capacity to 17,500 for the 1953 challenge round, and to 20,800 for the 1957 challenge round.

The National Tennis Centre, scheduled to be completed this year, will have a main stadium (with a retractable roof) that seats 15,000 and two smaller stadiums seating 6,000 and 3,500 respectively. All the "field" courts will also have some seating.



John Bromwich (left) lost the 1938 Australian title at Kooyong to Don Budge.

IT STARTED AS A CATTLE STATION

THE Kooyong grounds of the Lawn Tennis Association of Victoria are linked to the earliest years of what was once known as the Port Phillip settlement. In 1836, they were part of a cattle station run by John Gardiner, first of the overlanders to arrive from New South Wales.

Gardiner, who had emigrated to Australia in 1822, was worried by the effects of drought on his property near Yass when he decided to drive a herd of 400 cattle south across the Murray River and down to the embryonic community on the seaboard, a total distance of some 400 miles.

His partners in the venture were another squatter named Joseph Hawdon and a sea-captain named John Hepburn with whom he shared ownership of a steamer. Hepburn was so ill-suited to be an overlander that he had to be taught



left: Lew Hoad during his famous match with Tony Trabert in the 1953 Davis Cup Challenge round.



below: America regained the Davis Cup at Kooyong in 1946 (left to right) Sir Norman Brookes, Frank Parker, Jack Kramer, US Ambassador Robert Butler, Bill Talbert, Ted Schröder, Walter Pate.

how to ride a horse.

The journey through large tracts of unexplored country proved arduous and dangerous, but after 26 days the three men and Gardiner's manager, George Hitchcock, arrived safely at Port Phillip in December, 1836.

Here, the cattle were in such a weakened condition that 26 were drowned when driven across the Yarra River at Dight's Falls. Gardiner bought out his partners, and became sole owner of a cattle station on the rich flats surrounding the creek that the local Aborigines called Kooyong Koot (Haunt of the Wild Fowl.)

In time, the meandering water course became known as Gardiner's Creek. Much of it is now surmounted by the South Eastern Freeway.

Immediately upon his arrival,

Gardiner began building a cottage of four rooms on the hill that would one day be the site of the imposing Scotch College buildings. His wife and daughter sailed from Sydney in March, 1837, to live with him in the cottage.

Trees were planted, and Gardiner prospered as he provided the growing community at Port Phillip with beef and butter. At the first land sale in the settlement he bought a half-acre block in Elizabeth Street for £22.

For most of the time at Kooyong Koot his family led a very tranquil life, occasionally travelling up the Yarra by boat to attend meetings of the first Temperance Society of which Gardiner was president.

Gradually, however, the Aborigines in the district became more aggressive. An attack was made on Gardiner's station

and shots were exchanged. The pioneer became so alarmed that he decided to move his family to a house in the expanding township, and thereafter he visited the station only to check on his stock.

The later years of the Gardiners were not so idyllic. He gave up the station in the early 1840s, and after being involved in commercial failures returned to England in 1853 without his wife and daughter, remaining there until his death in 1878 (the year, incidentally in which tournament tennis in Victoria was born).

Of the subsequent history of the Kooyong area in the 19th century little of interest has been documented. It seems likely that the land passed into the hands of orchardists and market gardeners, though the risk of flooding on that part of the land now occupied by the LTAV

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By George! Haddon

TELL BORG WE'RE COVERING THE COURT WITH HIS FAVORITE SURFACE!



Guillermo Vilas, a great Kooyong favorite.



Far left: Bjorn Borg, an infrequent visitor, beat John McEnroe in the 1981 Benson & Hedges Gold Challenge, and George Haddon's cartoon commented.



Evonne Cawley, one of the most stylish players to grace the centre court.



Mark Edmondson took Kooyong by storm at the 1976 Open.



A plumpish Chris Evert and evergreen Billie Jean King clinched the 1978 Federation Cup for America.

1983 — and Australia takes the doubles in the Davis Cup final.

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must always have been a hindrance to cultivation. One authority says that Gardiner's Creek was a pleasing waterway through bushlands until woodcutters felled the trees adjoining the stream.

At the end of the First World War the LTAV, which had been formed in 1892, began to seek a new site for its headquarters. Since 1908 it had been able to use part of what was then known as the Warehouseman's Cricket Ground (and is now called the Albert Ground), but this was deemed inadequate to meet future needs.

Various sites in St Kilda, Hawthorn, South Yarra, Camberwell and Toorak were considered before executives of the Association were attracted by a Press notice in 1919 advertising the forthcoming auction of the estate of the late Robert Power, of "Moonga", Toorak

Road, Toorak.

After several special meetings of the Association's Council had been held to discuss the matter, it was resolved to bid for that portion of the estate in Kooyong facing Glenferrie Road and adjoining the railway line — John Gardiner's old domain. The decision was controversial because the land, comprising about 17 acres, looked indeed more suited to wild fowl than tennis players. It had, of course, long since lost its identity as part of a cattle station.

When the auction was duly held on November 15, 1919, the Association's nominee failed to secure the land. But W. L. Baillieu, the successful bidder, had been unaware of the LTAV's interest, and on being approached by the Association he agreed to relinquish the land for the price at which it had been knocked down to him — £3,500.

Many years passed before most members could see much value in the property. An initial appeal to the membership — then totalling 804 — for development funds drew a response from only 41.

Reclamation and development proceeded, however, in spite of apathy and the flooding of the land twice within two years of its purchase. The first clubhouse was completed in June, 1923, at a cost of £7,783, and the first concrete stand, with seating for 3,823 people, was constructed three years later for about £10,000.

By then the picturesque swathe of country that 90 years earlier had supported John Gardiner's cattle was resounding to the thwack of tennis balls. It was destined to become one of the world's most famous venues of lawn tennis.

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