Vianne Palfrey lifts a trophy at Framlingham last year. Picture: NIGE BROWN

A landmark anniversary for historic tennis event

Britain's second oldest tennis tournament - staged in the heart of Suffolk - celebrates a momentous anniversary this year. Terry Hunt looks ahead.

The Framlingham Tennis Tournament is the second-oldest in the country.

This year is a very special one for the Framlingham Tennis Tournament, which is recognised as the second longest-established in Britain - after Wimbledon, no less!

August 6 will see the beginning of the 125th Framlingham tournament, and organisers are planning some special celebrations to mark the auspicious landmark.

The event has a long, proud history, stretching back to the very first tournament, held in 1883, in the picturesque grounds of Hurts Hall Park, Saxmundham. It moved to Framlingham College in 1914, just weeks before the outbreak of the First World War.

Although it is 135 years since the first tournament, this year's event is the 125th because of gaps during the two world wars.

Over the years, some of Britain's top players have graced the tournament. Among the many Grand Slam stars to have played at Framlingham are Christine Janes (formerly Truman), and "Bunny" Austin, who reached the men's singles final at Wimbledon in 1938. Austin had the distinction of being the last British man to reach the Wimbledon singles final for 75 years, until Andy Murray's first final in 2013.

Christine Janes won the Framlingham under-18 title aged just 12. She went on to win the French Open, and was runner-up at Wimbledon. She now lives in Aldeburgh, is President of the tournament, and her grandchildren have taken part.

Another high-profile competitor at Framlingham has been Robin Drysdale, from Dedham, who memorably reached the quarter-finals of the Australian Open in 1977.

The Framlingham tournament has also featured a host of top-quality local players, competing in the Suffolk championships.

Bury St Edmunds MP Eldon Griffiths was a competitor, as was Ivan Paul, a relative of the Cobbold family, best known for their links with Ipswich Town Football Club. Then there was the Fulcher family, who dominated the Suffolk championships in the 1970s.

Looking through the history of the event, a number of things leap from the page. One is the revelation of what might have been the earliest high-profile on-court dispute. It happened in 1885, during a match between R.T. Brockman and E. Tombe. It ended with committee members being called on to the court to resolve the dispute. Eat your heart out, Mr McEnroe!

One of the stand-out personalities in the early years was Herbert Roper-Barrett, another Wimbledon finalist, who won the Framlingham men's open singles no fewer than 17 times, his last title coming in 1921. Such was his dominance that the press started calling the tournament "Roper-Barrett's annual!"

After all these years, the tournament retains its popularity with players, spectators and sponsors alike. It has kept its reputation for being competitive on the courts, but very friendly away from the action. This year, to mark the staging of the 125th tournament, there will be some special events.

James Lightfoot, tournament chairman, said: "I am honoured to be the chairman of a tournament about to be played for the 125th time and of which Christine Janes MBE is President.

"The tournament has given me enormous pleasure since I was young but I cannot beat Christine's statistic of winning our under-18 singles at the age of 12!

"I am delighted to be heading up the organisation of a special celebratory tea party on finals day, August 11, in the wonderful new sports pavilion at Framlingham College, as a way of thanking past and current supporters of the tournament."

For big servers, there will also be an opportunity to test the speed of your serve! Anyone fancy beating the current world record of 163.4mph set by Sam Groth in 2012? Now's your chance!

The 125th Framlingham Tennis Tournament will take place from August 6th to 11th at Framlingham College.

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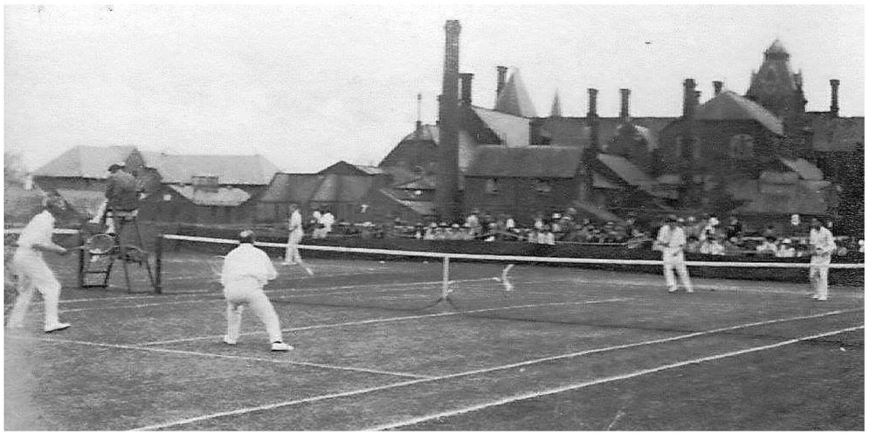
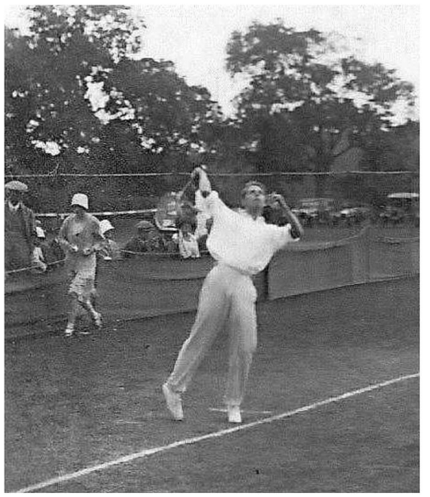
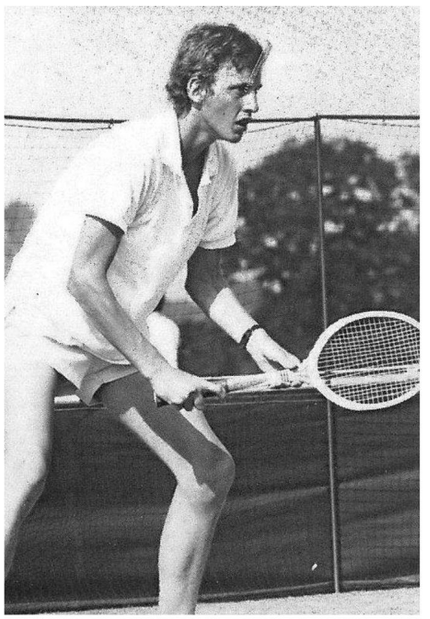
Picture: GREGG BROWN



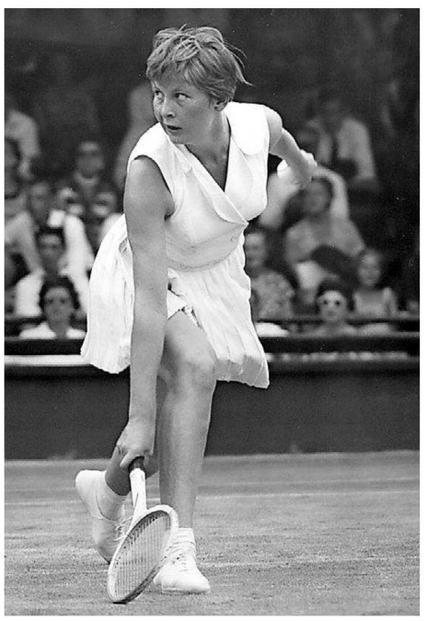
Action at the Framlingham Tennis Tournament many decades ago. Picture: CONTRIBUTED



Bunny Austin, the last Brit to reach a Men's Wimbledon tennis final before Andy Murray, serves during a match at Framlingham. Picture: CONTRIBUTED



Robin Drysdale prepares to return serve at Framlingham. Picture: CONTRIBUTED



Christine Janes in action. Picture: CONTRIBUTED

sport

Tennis

Kyle Edmund suffered a surprise defeat in the second round of the Miami Open, going down in three sets to American youngster Frances Tiafoe.

World number 26 Edmund dropped the first set to 20-year-old Tiafoe, the winner of the recent Delray Beach Open, in a tie-break.

But the 23-year-old, who replaced injured Andy Murray as British number one earlier this month, secured an early break to take the second.

The Australian Open semi-finalist broke again in the fifth game of the decider, but was broken back as he served for the match.

Tiafoe, ranked 63 in the world, then powered ahead in the tie-break and although Edmund saved five match points he eventually bowed out 7-6 (7/4) 4-6 7-6 (7/5).

Roger Federer will lose his world number one spot after defeat at the Miami Open - and has announced he will miss the clay court season, including the French Open.

The 36-year-old, who suffered a shock 3-6 6-3 7-6 (7-4) loss to world number 175 Thanasi Kokkinakis in Miami, did not play on clay last season either.

The Swiss will be replaced by Rafael Nadal at the top of the new rankings.

Tennis

Johanna Konta continued her timely return to form with a 75-minute rout of Elise Mertens to reach the fourth round of the Miami Open.

The defending champion, whose triumph last year paved the way for a march into the world top 10, faces a slide down the rankings if she fails to repeat the feat.

And Konta has risen impressively to the challenge, building on her first-round win over Kirsten Flipkens with an emphatic 6-2 6-1 win to see off the 22nd seed.

Konta had been pegged back after an early break against Mertens before reeling off four successive games to take the first set in style.

And despite giving up a break herself in the second set, Konta proved clinical in exposing Bertens' problems on serve to seal the match in convincing fashion.

Konta's consistency in Miami will come as a confidence boost for the Briton who has broadly struggled since losing her Wimbledon semi-final to Venus Williams last year.