

# ▲ Is it tennis? Is it badminton? No it's pickleball

SOME of these people might not look like your average athletes, but today they're heading off to Amsterdam to represent the UK.

They are part of Oxfordshire Pickleball Club, which plays an obscure racquet sport originally from the US.

As far as its members know, the club is the only one in England that plays.

Abingdon resident Gill Smith, 77, is one of the 13-member team going to the Netherlands.

The great-grandmother of two said: "I am terrified but absolutely excited.

"I have loved my sport and played a lot of them but this is the first time I have represented my country at anything.

"We became involved because we happened to be playing badminton, and we were asked to play pickleball. We gave it a go and we got hooked more or less immediately because it is such a good game."

Mrs Smith, who used to be a teacher in Nottinghamshire, said: "My family thinks it is absolutely wonderful and they are very pleased I am keeping active."

She said there would be teams representing countries such as Spain, France and Canada at the two-day international pickleball competition, which is being held in Europe for the first time.

Club co-founder Maureen Wilson, 63, said: "There are groups in Abingdon, Kidlington and Witney, and they are the only groups we know of in England, though there is one in Scotland.

"People cannot believe how it has taken off. It is a milder game than tennis



**SPORTING CHANCE:** Gill Smith and Brian Hook, front, who are off to Amsterdam to represent the UK in the international pickleball competition. They are pictured with fellow pickleball players, from left, Pauline Foskett, Jacky Jordan, Ashley Chapman, Liz Evans and Mary Hancock, at the White Horse Tennis and Leisure Centre in Abingdon

Picture: 0X67153 Damlan Halliwell

so it's easier to play. Over in Florida most of the players are 50 or over."

She said the sport was introduced with the help of Oxfordshire Sports Partnership's Go Active team because the racquets are not sold in the UK.

Go Active coordinator for Cherwell, Christina Higgs, said: "It is an adaptation of tennis which makes it easier to play and more accessible.

"We have a newsletter

which goes out and we promote it on there."

People can attend practice sessions at Kidlington and Gosford Leisure Centre on Fridays, between 7.30pm and 9pm, or at the White Horse Leisure Centre in Abingdon, on Tuesdays, between 2pm and 3pm.

Alternatively email [info@pickleballoxon.org.uk](mailto:info@pickleballoxon.org.uk)  
▲ But what is pickleball? Watch this video on our website and find out: [ow.ly/wNMoO](http://ow.ly/wNMoO)

## HISTORY OF GAME

▲ PICKLEBALL is a racquet sport for two or four players which combines elements of badminton, tennis and table tennis.

Players use solid paddles to hit a plastic ball over a low tennis net on a court the same size as a badminton court.

The sport was invented in 1965 by US state representative Joel Pritchard, who created it after being unable to find a shuttlecock to play badminton.

It was introduced to England in 2011 by Kidlington residents Maureen and Ian Wilson, who fell in love with it in 2009 while in Florida. They are part of the team going to Amsterdam.

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# 'WI must be modern to survive'

**WOMEN'S** Institute members are traditionally seen as enjoying a spot of jam-making and sewing.

But a more modern approach is needed to represent the 21st century member, according to Clare Mackintosh, who is in charge of social media at the WI's Denman College in Marcham near Abingdon.

The college has ditched some of its more obscure courses including *Folk Songs of Britain and Dance Through the Musicals*, to broaden its

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It comes after the National Federation of Women's Institutes (NFWI) said it was forced to bring in independent consultants - Counterculture Partnership - to look at how to make the college more profitable.

Ms Mackintosh, 37, from Chipping Norton, has been a member of the West Oxfordshire branch since 2012.

She said: "The WI is a wonderful organisation, but it

nise the new skills that women want to learn and need to learn.

"It's not about age. We're not replacing the older interests with younger. Most of my students are older ladies."

College chairwoman Anne Harrison said Counterculture Partnership recommended the facility, which has been running since 1948, should close the obscure courses to attract students.

Last year, Denman saw more than 8,200 students attend its 700 courses, and it hopes to increase numbers

times a year rather than annually. She said it would also be advertising to hold weddings at the college.

She said: "Trustees and staff have been working hard to promote the unique educational opportunities at the college wherever possible, and the future is looking up for Denman."

"Residential bookings for this and next year show the college is reaching targets."

According to the NFWI's 2013 annual report, the college's financial standing has improved. Its total income