



Money follows money

This week has seen a curious little boon to some golfers in South West London, courtesy of the biggest tennis tournament in the world.

The All England Club, home to the great tennis tournament, is eager to expand. As you can imagine, finding a large number of hectares in Wimbledon in which to do so is far from easy. What you may not have known, though, is that Wimbledon Park has a golf club, and the golf club is owned by its members. Now these golf club members essentially like playing golf; they were not looking to do anything else and when the All England Club made their initial proposal to buy them out, they politely declined.

The tennis club, though, *really* wanted that land. Earlier this year, the asking price, reached £65 million, and at this point, it seems it was just too good an offer to refuse: the members have now voted to accept, and they will each receive £85,000 after tax for doing so. Presumably, they will now pop down the A3 to Surbiton, Coombe Wood or Richmond Park golf club to wield their drivers, while they quietly redo their kitchens or buy a house in Normandy with the proceeds.

I do not begrudge them their windfall. It is just one of those quirks that happen in life, and they were at the right place at the right time. It does, though, make me think about the ways of capitalism.

For it may sound boringly Marxist, but the way of

capitalism just seems to make rich people richer and poor people poorer. Just round here, if you were a bit better off thirty years ago, you owned a house; if you were poorer, you rented. Those houses that people bought for £20,000 are now worth £800,000. The owners were a little bit wealthier than the renters before; they are a lot wealthier than the renters now.

It's not that those 1980s homebuyers set out to perpetuate a society of income polarisation. They just bought a house in Berrylands. But in doing so, they became part of a chain that almost inevitably makes rich people richer and poor people poorer.

So too, the Wimbledon Park members will have been spending a four figure sum annually on their hobby, I should think; it was already a club for the relatively wealthy. And now, to them that had, more has been given.

On the one hand, this heads towards a view that emphasises the helpfulness of wealth redistribution through taxation: this is a needed corrective.

But more subtly, it questions the underlying assumption behind a lot of our society, which is that 'anyone can make it if they work hard enough'. It is not that that is impossible, but it the pattern of society militates against the possibility. Most people aren't rich because they worked hard. They just got lucky at some stage.

Oct 2018. Thought for the Train is a short column by the Revd Robert Stanier, the vicar of St Andrew and St Mark, Surbiton, for people to read on the train. You can also read "Thought for the Train" at www.surbitonchurch.org.uk.