

# RFA Handbook 1996-97

(Photo: R. Nagy)  
: Paddy d'Ancona,  
nton, Roger Layton.)

## FIVES BEFORE THE WAR

*Geoffrey Rimmer, a member of the first RFA Committee in 1927 and founder of the RFA Club in 1947, has submitted an article for our 1997 handbook. Geoffrey, who is 92, suffered a stroke in 1996 and recently lost his dear wife Kathleen, but he has made a courageous recovery from these blows and is determined to attend the RFA Celebration Dinner in September 1997.*

As I am probably the oldest living Fives player, I thought you might be interested in some of my early recollections of the game and of the great Dr Cyriax.

I played my first game of Fives at Dulwich College in 1917 in one of the six small Fives courts. Later, I was permitted by the Head Master of the school to use the courts on Sunday mornings with a few Fives friends who had been at school with

me. One of these friends was Willy Schlund, who was a gymnast like me and whom I had first met in a gymnastic competition against the Clove Club. I was asked to take a Fives team to Hackney Downs, so I took a team of friends, and we played in the open Old Courts; at one stage I managed to lob a ball onto the railway line!

The famous Dr Cyriax always partnered a Mr Marsden, and I remember them wearing white flannels for a match in 1922, when I was asked to bring an Old Alleynian IV to University College School in Hampstead. Dr Cyriax, who had not been beaten at Fives for over twenty years, was very anxious to form a Rugby Fives Association, which he did in 1927. The Doctor was a well-known manipulative surgeon who spoke seven languages and had lived in Sweden. He had cycled three times to the Arctic Circle, and when he came to live in London, he wrote all the instrumental music for an Opera.

I myself was in the surgical instrument business and called on opticians and medical firms in the West End. By an extraordinary chance, I was passing the Doctor's house in Welbeck Street one day when he came out of his front door and insisted on taking me to a Tea Dance at the Savoy Hotel! I felt rather stupid sitting at a tea table with such an old gentleman. However, the orchestra played one of the Doctor's pieces of music, and he rose and bowed to the conductor.

When the Doctor was 75, the RFA, of which I was by now a committee member, invited him to the Savoy Hotel. He arrived there on his bicycle, much to the amazement of the hall porter! He had a lovely house in Welbeck Street, where he often played host to the RFA committee.

After the loss of the Fives Courts at Dulwich in a German bombing raid, I was playing one cold November night with a team at Alleyn's School Courts. Dr Cyriax arrived from the West End on his bicycle, played the match, took a cold shower afterwards, put on his shirt while still wet - he had no use for towels - and cycled back to Welbeck Street. It is perhaps not surprising that he contracted rheumatic fever on three occasions! He certainly was one of the most unusual people I have ever met.

**G.R.Rimmer**