

FIVES IN SCHOOLS

The seventh article in this series is about St. Dunstan's College and is written by David Gardner, National Singles Champion in 1964 and seven times National Doubles Champion between 1960 and 1974. David was Honorary Secretary of the RFA from 1963 to 1968 and President from 1974 to 1976. He has been a member of the RFA Committee (now Board) since 1957 and is looking forward to celebrating his Golden Jubilee in two years' time! He has also run the British Universities' Rugby Fives Championships since their inception in 1960.

7. St. Dunstan's

It seems a good moment in time to commence this review of St. Dunstan's and Old Dunstonian Fives in 2005, exactly fifty years on from the time that it can reasonably be said that we came into prominence as a fives-playing school.

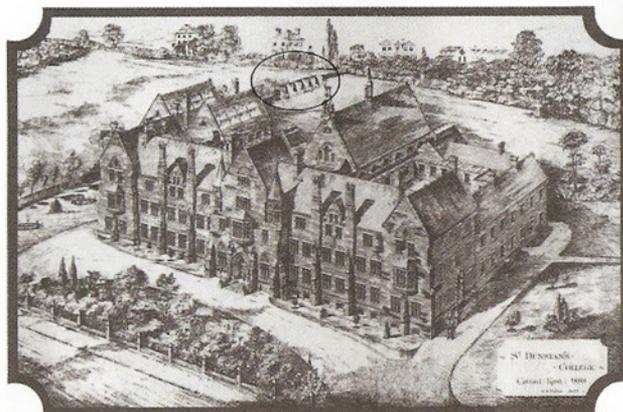
Whilst no titles were won in 1955, two young self-taught players, Gardner and Holt, reached the final of the National Schools' Championships held at Whitgift School. They lost narrowly to the pair playing on their home courts, Anderson and Ewart, 12-10, 4-11, 12-10. The match took over 100 minutes to complete, and the losers had four championship points before finally conceding. In a way it was a half-victory, as the St. Dunstan's pair scored more points than the opposition! It could also be argued that only a severe accidental blow to the nose between the left-handers, which caused an extended break in the final game due to a long-lasting nosebleed, prevented us from winning St. Dunstan's first ever title – but at that time no-one could foresee what was to come in the not too distant future.

Jim Williams was Master i/c at that time and for many years after. Whilst he only played the game a little, he gave enormous support and encouragement to teams and individuals, and his enthusiasm was boundless. Combine this with the efforts of the senior players in giving some coaching to the juniors, plus the general euphoria that came with the results in the National Schools' events (Stan Holt also reached the singles quarter-finals in both 1954 and 1955), and you have the catalyst which paved the way for the development of fives at St. Dunstan's.

Numerous prominent and highly skilled players were to come in future years and dominate in School, National and Regional Championships for many years. Details of this appear elsewhere, but for the present it is sufficient to know that St. Dunstan's rank in the top three schools in the country for National Schools' titles won: Oundle – 21; St. Dunstan's – 20; St. Paul's – 20.

Historically, the school is not an ancient foundation. It takes its name from the parish of St. Dunstan-in-the-East in the heart of the City of London. Over the centuries the parish had acquired a large number of bequests from wealthy residents, to be used chiefly for the relief of the poor and for education. The parish had a long, but intermittent record of involvement in education, but the early schools had no direct link with the present College. With more businesses arriving in Central London, more of the population moved outside the City boundary. The need for the parish charities became less, and therefore in the mid 1800s permission was sought to use parish funds for education outside the City. Plans were put forward to build St. Dunstan's College in Catford. The School finally opened its doors on 1st October 1888, some 900 years after the death of St. Dunstan in 988!

Fives courts were included in the plans right from the start: 'Outside were lavatories; a boot room; a covered playground; fives courts; football and cricket fields. Five doubles fives courts and a gymnasium were also suggested.' In January 1885 the costs of these plans were revealed to the Governors. The cost of the grounds, including the fives courts and the gymnasium, was



The College buildings in 1888.

£4,000! The three-walled roofless courts can clearly be seen in the centre top section of the picture of the College in 1888.

In the early years, fives flourished and the courts were in regular use. Many competitions were held but they were all internal events. Indeed, I was interested to read that in 1890 'Ill B started an open competition which was won by Gardner. The winner played very well for his size and age, but must learn to use his left hand.'! Inter-school matches did not appear until the early 1900s. The first Headmaster, Charles Stuart (1888-1922), was a keen player, albeit of the Eton variety. His enthusiasm for the game and encouragement given to pupils did much to help the game develop. It was fitting that, when the time came to replace the original three-walled courts with the modern four-walled variety, they were built as a memorial to him.

There was not always enthusiasm, however, as one correspondent wrote to the school Chronicle in 1895: 'The present state of affairs athletic is not creditable. The chief pastime seems to be roller-skating! This is followed with such ardour that football, fives, lacrosse etc. are almost neglected by the majority.'

It became clear that around the turn of the century general sporting interest was still on the wane. Records are sparse and not over-accurate. Nevertheless, considerable progress was made, which included the first-ever school match versus St. Olave's and further games versus Eltham College and City of London. A masters plus pupils doubles competition and new internal tournaments with prizes were introduced to encourage more players, and these attracted a very large entry – I wonder why! Fives team colours were also introduced in this period 'provided there were enough people playing'.

Scanty records are explained in this extract from the school magazine: 'Last term we played a couple of fives matches – a new feature – as no official record was kept of them there is, naturally, no official record to give, but the Editors, having personally taken part in one of them, know, only too well, their result.' In the immediate pre-war years (1909-13), fives interest turned upwards again with 'more interest than in the annals of the school', and regular matches were now held with Alleen's

and the Masters, who were able to field a team of six players, including the Headmaster. By 1915, the introduction of the House system also gave new impetus to internal events.

Various scoring systems have been noted. Some were a full three games up to 15; on occasions the first game was to 15 and the second to 12; the most interesting was a school internal competition where, at 14-14, five sets of 5 points each were played in order to determine the winner!

During the 1st World War years and after, fives continued to flourish and many new fixtures were arranged, very largely with Eton-playing schools or clubs. At varying times Old Citizens, St. John's Battersea, Whitgift, Emanuel, University College London and St. Mark and St. John's all appeared on the list, and later Haberdashers' at Cricklewood and Borough Road.

In 1923, the school played University College School in the final of the Cyriax Cup. 'It is a pity that this was decided on points as St. Dunstan's lost by 161-167, but won 8-6 on games!' There are no records of earlier rounds and it could be that the 'final' was also the first round. There had been various attempts to run a schools' tournament in earlier years. The first was at Merchant Taylors' in 1881, when five schools entered. The next was in 1922, with the Cyriax Cup 'open to the schools of England'. Finally, in 1930, the present National Schools' Championships were started by the newly formed governing body of the game, the Rugby Fives Association. Apart from the war years, these events have been competed for every year, and it is here that St. Dunstan's have been most successful.

None of the early tournaments really flourished, and there is no further record of the original 'Cyriax Cup'; one wonders if it eventually became the Cyriax Cup for Club Doubles which came into being in 1926, finally becoming the National Doubles trophy in 1934 – an event where Old Dunstonians were to be so successful, with nine winners and ten runners-up in a twenty-year period to 1977.

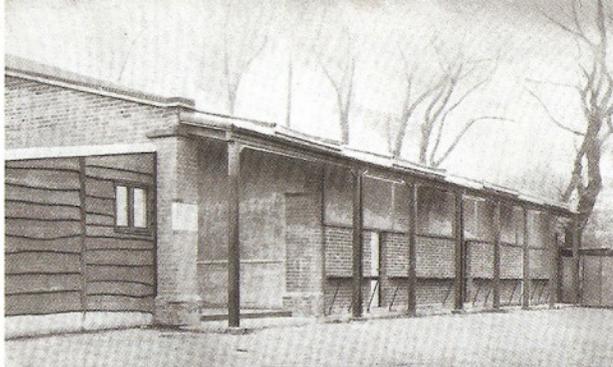
There were, of course, a few problems along the way between the two world wars. The fives courts, after over thirty years of use, were getting rather weather-beaten and were giving some cause for concern with the School Inspectors. In 1921, one inspecting body declared the courts 'unfit and unsafe'. However, play continued and it was to be another thirteen years before they were replaced.

Another problem was one that we seem to have to the present day. In 1919 it was reported: 'This term, with the exception of the Old Boys, which we won easily, there have been no matches at all. As a matter of fact, the ruinous price of a ball reduced the most affluent of us, after one afternoon's hard play, to a state of utter destitution for the rest of the month.'

Finally there was the problem, as many fives master know to this day, that 'minor' sports frequently have to give way to 'major' sports when teams are being selected or fixtures clash. There are constant reports of Athletics and 'Crosse' (lacrosse) interfering with the organisation of the fives programme. Indeed, a good year for fives was a bad one for lacrosse, when weather made the pitches unplayable – although playing in a wet, open court was not too good for fives either!

With the foundation of the RFA in 1927, it was not long before they produced a format for a standard fives court. The decision to put up new courts as a memorial to the first Headmaster came just at the right time. Thus an appeal went out to pupils, parents and Old Dunstonians to raise the necessary finances for the project. Such was the response, with close on a thousand contributions, that a sum approaching £800 was quickly raised. This, plus a generous donation of £200 from the Governors, enabled the courts to be completed on time. The three Rugby courts, plus one Eton, were duly opened on 17th November 1934.

A team from the RFA, captained by the President, Edgar Cyriax, took on an OD team in a demonstration match and were

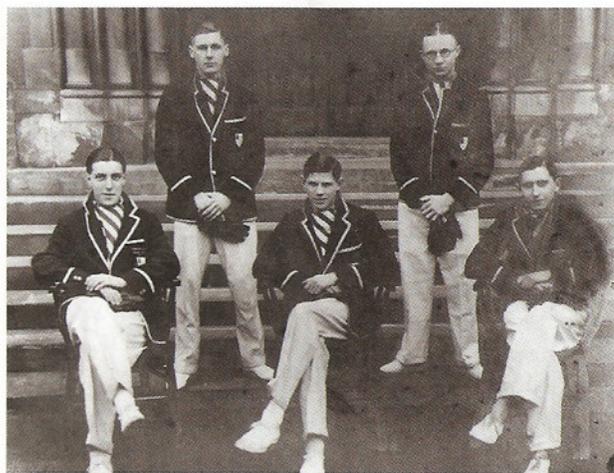


The Stuart Memorial fives courts, 1934.

victorious by 149-117. Two 'Presidents-in-waiting', Harry Beavers and Geoffrey Rimmer, also played. The Dunstonians were represented by MacMillan, Waller, Prout and Lardner – the latter being arguably the best of the pre-war players. It was noted that the teams pronounced the courts as 'perfect'. The Lewisham Chronicle reported: 'Flood lighting enables matches to be played at all times on the courts, of which the walls are lined with special non-sweating compound. A changing room adjoins the courts.' More of the changing room later!

The new courts brought great enthusiasm for the game both amongst pupils and Old Boys. An immediate letter was sent to the OD Association asking them to form a fives club, and more than fifty names were enrolled – far more than we would get today – and many fixtures began to be arranged. Such was the enthusiasm that by the late 1930s some forty-one matches had been made for the season.

John Mockford reports that one of the players in these games was Eric Scading, who won the club singles and doubles competitions in 1936 and is believed to be the only player surviving from that pre-war era. Eric now lives near John in Limpsfield, Surrey. He managed to find a few school magazines for us to go through, but cannot remember any specific details of fives in the 1930s.



*The '1st IV' in 1935
from left, standing: W Sewell, REH Sheridan
seated: EG Cowley, DS Snelgar, PA Coggin
The earliest known photograph of a St. Dunstan's fives team*

The onset of World War II brought an abrupt end to fives and the euphoria which followed the opening of the new courts. Fives courts have been used for many things: weight-lifting, table tennis, judo, general storerooms etc., but I feel that St. Dunstan's is unique. The school was evacuated to Reigate and then Wales, the buildings were commandeered by the Army, and the fives courts, having possibly the thickest walls, were used among other things for ammunition and as a dump for coke!

Despite this, the courts survived the war, as did the adjacent changing room, being more of a strong lean-to shed (on the left of the new courts photo). Spartan would be a complimentary description, as many opponents would agree! Showers and baths were also included, although my memory from the mid-fifties is of one bath and one shower. There was an Ascot-type

water heater that took 1d (one old penny) in a slot and dispensed an indifferent amount of hot water. A fives ball cost 6d in those days, and an expensive addition to the facilities was made by purchasing a ball-dispensing machine.

In 1964 the demise of the Ascot was reported after a long period of service, and in 1969 permission was given to redecorate 'The Shed', with a donation made from the school towards the DIY costs. However, this improvement was short-lived as the club received notice of the impending demolition of our changing room in the early 1970s to make way for the new Prep School building. Thus the Eton court, the memorial plaque and 'The Shed' made way for progress. The three Rugby courts survived, and players were most disappointed to be moved to the comparative luxury of the Gymnasium changing rooms!

John Mockford recalls joining the OD Club in 1953: 'Almost immediately, I fell over an opponent during a game and broke my arm. I then continued being either captain or secretary of the Club for the next thirty years.' John was a National Doubles semi-finalist in 1965, when the ODs fielded three out of the last four pairs in the event.

There was a long 'golden period' for the ODs in the 1960s and '70s, when the Club travelled far around the UK with tours, and when many trophies were brought back home. It continues today with Paddy d'Ancona, Phil Bishop and Mike Hajjalexandrou, all currently in the top ten of the National singles rankings. If my addition is correct, a total of some 145 adult National and Regional titles have come back to Catford since the war. The winners, in alphabetical order, read as follows: Phil Bishop 1, Paddy d'Ancona 17, Dave Gardner 62, Peter Grender 3, Stan Holt 18, John Howe 28, Eric Marsh 16. I doubt very much if any other club will match this for a while!

Jubilee Dinners were held by the Club to celebrate the Silver Anniversary in 1959 and the Golden Anniversary in 1984. The 1959 event was also notable for founder member Teddy Goddard, who completed 25 years as Treasurer. Together with Geoff Wise, he gave great help to the school in the recovery period after the war, providing coaching and equipment. Maybe we should look to a 75th celebration in 2009?



Silver Jubilee Dinner of the OD Fives Club, 16th April 1959
from left: Stan Holt, David Gardner, Eric Marsh, David Clift

In the 1980s there was a lull in OD fives activities, although in recent years there has been a bit of a revival. In the Owers Trophy for Old Boys' teams, we were runners-up last year and winners in this current season. There has been a steady flow of Oxbridge 'Blues', with Dave Sharman, Nick Roberson, Alastair Higgins, David Trew, Chris Denny, Paddy and Michael d'Ancona and Tim Stock. In 1960 a rare Bristol 'Red' was awarded to Eric Marsh, when he won the National Singles whilst still a student.

The OD Club, like the School, was the top team in the country for many years, even though more members were always required

to give greater depth. In the late 1950s, it is recorded that even the Army helped this appeal by allowing certain National Servicemen to get plenty of leave to play. 'We are very grateful to the War Office, as, no doubt, are the persons concerned, for posting both Gardner and Grender to Whitehall, thus giving us the nucleus of a very strong team next season. Is it too much to hope that other fives players will receive similar postings?'

ODs were not just players, either. They were prepared to put something back into the game as well. By 1965, three key posts on the RFA were held by Club members. Apart from myself as Secretary, Eric Marsh was Championship Organiser and Peter Setchell-Smith was Treasurer. This situation has continued, with Paddy d'Ancona playing an important role on the Board in recent years.

Behind any successful school sport there is invariably a good Master-in-charge, and St. Dunstan's is no exception. In recent years a considerable number have given of their time and expertise in order to maintain the high standards to which the school was becoming accustomed. Such names as Messrs Johnston, Morgan, Kitchingham, Reuben and O'Shaughnessy come to mind, although there were many other helpers, particularly with the junior teams.

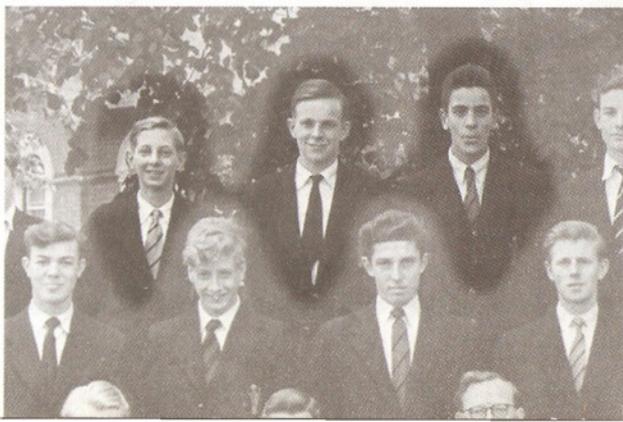
An enthusiastic Headmaster was also a definite help, and Brian Dance spent much time supporting and encouraging the players – indeed, his son David (Bedford School) was a very fine player, so Brian had a considerable first-hand knowledge of the game. For many years he kindly hosted the annual representative match between the RFA and the British Universities, which often had many of his former pupils participating. The School also hosted the British University Championships in 1977.

One interesting feature of the post-war years was the preponderance of former pupils who returned from University to teach at the School, took over the running of fives and thus paved the way for the future. Jack Harris got the game re-started in 1946 and in particular had to cope with things like a shortage of gloves and balls, and courts damaged by the Army during the 'occupation'. Stan Holt came straight back to school from Loughborough and obviously had a good impact on the game over many years. Then came Colin Matten, Tim Brand and Ken Knight, all of whom set high standards and developed a very thriving fives club. The 1956 photo of the School Fives Club is remarkable in that it shows all three standing together, as pupils, in the back row. Who at that time would have forecast that they would all return to teach and take over the fives?

Currently in pole position is Director of Sport Rick Bodenham. He acknowledges that fives at senior level is not at quite the standard that he would like but says that there are very promising juniors, particularly at U14 level. Chris Murray and Doug Butt went out early in the U14 National Doubles, but only by 16-15 to the eventual winners from Alleyn's. With greater experience and more coaching, they are capable of doing well in the next few years, and they are not the only ones – watch this space!

Back in 1947, play had come to a standstill due to a fuel crisis which meant no lights. One court was also often out of action due to water seeping through the roof, and the final

Future masters-in-charge in 1956: Colin Matten, Tim Brand, Ken Knight.



problem was an acute shortage of balls. The following year it was noted that: 'We have been fortunate with the weather this term, with no icy floors or pools to contend with. Repairs were carried out in the building so all courts have good roofs and lights, although the centre court is still suffering from the effects of coke dumped there in the war.'

There were only a dozen pairs of gloves in the whole school, and the supply of balls was so limited that each House was allocated a supply of just three, to last the whole term! Fortunately, as well as the ODs, the RFA came to the rescue.

By 1950, play had improved dramatically and nine out of ten matches were won, and standards continued to improve. However, some Captains are never satisfied, as a couple of critiques enlighten us from the school Chronicle: 'He spoils the effect of his neat shot and strong left hand by carelessness, putting the easiest shot down and often missing the ball entirely!' Or: 'He often lapsed into mere acrobatics with shots that were ostentatious but ineffective.' The players concerned shall remain nameless, but from memory the comments were fairly accurate!

In 1956, all four entrants reached the 3rd round of the Schools' Championships, with Marsh attaining the 4th, and then at last came the red-letter day, when, in the following year, Marsh reached the semi-final and went on to win the Doubles partnered by Dave Clift. In 1958 they managed to retain their title, and Marsh won the Singles. At last, St. Dunstan's had arrived!

It is interesting to note that Marsh went on to win both Singles and Doubles at the inaugural Universities Championships in 1960 and then won four consecutive National Singles titles between 1960-63. He was only narrowly prevented from winning a fifth title by Gardner, who beat him in the semi-final and went on to beat Holt in the final. Quite an OD take-over that year! Marsh then won a National Doubles title in 1965 (partnered by Gardner). This gave Marsh the distinction of being the first, and still the only person to achieve the 'Grand Slam' – Singles and Doubles for National Schools, British Universities and National Championships – the three major fives events. A fine achievement by any standards!

Following this outstanding period, when school teams had actually gone four successive years without defeat, there was a lull in the success rate. However, the school was certainly not short of high-quality players with John Howe around. Semi-finalists in 1961, 1963 and again in 1970 meant that the boys from Catford were ever present.

The numbers of quality players arriving from the juniors in the early 1970s meant that another golden period was almost inevitable, and so it proved to be. In 1976, the school team went unbeaten again, and the Schools' Doubles title went to Handy and Trew; then in 1979 came another Doubles victory, by Carpenter and Lawrence. The excitement had hardly died down when the onslaught really began. A record run of five successive Singles wins from 1982 to 1986 was only briefly halted by Mellor from Sedbergh in 1987; then there were three further titles until

*The 1st IV in 1983/4
from left: Phil Bishop, Andy Hajjalexandrou, Mike Hajjalexandrou,
Neil Mehmet*



*National Schools' Open and U16 winners with their trophies in 1988
from left: Paddy d'Ancona, Peter Newman, Jon Bentley, Irwin Ford*

1990! Eight victories in nine years! In this incredible period, titles were won, in order, by Denny, M. Hajjalexandrou (twice), A. Hajjalexandrou, Riat, Newman, and Ford (twice). The Hajjs are the only pair of brothers to have won the Schools' Singles and, to make their record harder still to emulate, they did it in successive years.

Not to be outdone, the Doubles pairs fought for glory as well, gaining a mere six victories in nine years! The winning pairs were: Denny & M. Haji, Jack & Moar, Riat & Slade, Slade & Tunbridge, Bentley & Newman, and P. d'Ancona & Ford. 1988 was a record 'Grand Slam' year, with Dunstonians winning all four National Schools' titles.

Stock's victory in the Singles in 1995 was the last major Schools' title to be won by a Dunstonian, so perhaps it is time that we made another appearance on the honours board. Watch out for unbeaten school teams: that seems to be where it all starts!

In such a wide-ranging report, space is limited, and so one can only record the main events. However, it should not be forgotten that, even in the lean years, success has never been far below the surface. St. Dunstan's has frequently had an excellent record at both Senior and Junior levels in regional events like the West of England and Manchester, as well as the National Colts. Indeed, in 1977 Callaghan and Keess even ventured as far north as Durham to win the North of England Schools. Achievements such as these have often been lost in the excitement of higher success. Semi-finals, quarter-finals and last sixteen places are still a regular achievement.

Ultimately, success at fives is a matter of attitude and enjoyment as well as skill. Ken Knight summed it up in one of his pithy fives reports of the late 1970s: 'Defeat is not a word common in our reports,' he wrote, 'but this is not the most important aspect of our season. The spirit that exists within the club ensures that there is a regular exchange of experience between levels. We look forward to receiving the new players from the third forms, but we must point out that a sense of humour and an ability to accept teasing without sulking are necessary attributes for any club member.'

St. Dunstan's fives is the story of a dream in the mid-fifties which soon became a reality, but which by the eighties had become a tradition. No-one knows what the future holds, but I see no reason why both School and Old Dunstonians should not return to their traditional role – only time will tell!

David Gardner

Acknowledgments: Mrs Fiona Cordeaux (Head of College); Paul Fletcher (Librarian and School Archivist); John Newton; Stan Holt; Rick Bodenham; John Mockford; Clive Orpen; and Paddy d'Ancona.

Picture credits: The 1888 illustration is taken from the front cover of Nigel Watson's book *St. Dunstan's College: A Centenary History 1888-1988*, published by St. Dunstan's Educational Foundation.

The 1959 photo was supplied by David Gardner. The other photos are reproduced with kind permission of the Governors of St. Dunstan's College.

OBITUARIES

JOHN BLACKSHAW (1936-2004)



Picture supplied by Mary Blackshaw

John Blackshaw arrived to teach Modern Languages at Malvern College in 1967 and soon found himself in charge of Fives, a game he never played as a boy at Sherborne, where he had been three years in the Hockey XI. He was a natural striker of the ball at cricket, too, and as someone was needed to run the Fives at Malvern, he took the game on and ran it for the next twenty years, despite being a busy housemaster for much of that time.

John's enthusiasm ensured that the game survived at Malvern, and although they did not have any schoolboy champions, they were always highly competitive – especially on their own courts – and produced some fine players, the best of whom was Simon Constantine. John made himself into a pretty good player, too, and Simon vividly remembers him getting annoyed on court when things weren't going quite right, throwing his gloves into a corner and playing on bare-handed!

A cutting from the *'Malvern Gazette'* sent to me by Tony Spicer has an article about the 4th Winchester Fives Doubles Championship played at Malvern in 1985, plus a photo (of too poor quality, alas, to reproduce here) of John serving during a match in which he partnered Jonathan Potter against Dick Warner and Terry Cobb. John and Jonathan lost that match but progressed to the later stages of the plate, where they lost to those eternal plate specialists, Tim Lewis and Cedric Clapp. As to whether John threw his gloves into the corner at any stage, history doesn't relate...

John was a man of principle who ran his house and his teams with firmness, fairness and a sense of humour which was never far below the surface. It was always a pleasure to travel to Malvern to play Fives and enjoy the company and hospitality of John and Mary in No 5. When Bradfield opened its two new courts in 1976, John came all the way from Malvern to join the party and play some rousing games with and against other aficionados of Winchester Fives. It was typical of him, although he must have had a hundred and one other things to do back at school.

After coming out of No 5, John became Malvern's Deputy Head (he would have preferred the title 'Second Master') and later, for six years, Secretary of the Malvernian Society, so his contribution to the life of the College was incalculable. His sudden death last September deprives that community, as well as his family and hundreds of friends, of a very special man.

David Barnes

JOHN WATKINSON (1941-2004)

John Watkinson learnt his Fives at Bristol Grammar School and was National Schools' Champion in 1959, the only BGS boy ever to win the title. He went from there to Worcester College, Oxford, where he won three half-blues for Rugby Fives and was on the winning side for two out of his three years. Possessed of a ferocious right hand and a magnificent service, he was very hard to score points against and was a player who liked to dominate.

From 1964 to 1971 John was a schoolmaster at Rugby, and during this period he won the Amateur Singles Championship, as it was then called, three times (in 1965, 1967 and 1970). The 1967 final, against Eric Marsh, was the last match played at the Hampstead Squash and Fives Club and was a magnificent exhibition of Fives at its best. In partnership with Mike Elliott, John had already won the Cyriax Cup three times running (from 1962 to 1964) by the time of his first singles triumph, and he won the trophy again with David Gardner in 1966. He reached the final partnering Ian Clarke (another Old Bristolian) in 1968, but they lost to Stan Holt and John Howe.

John left teaching and went briefly into law before entering politics, which effectively marked the end of his Fives career. He was the Labour MP for Gloucestershire West from 1974-79, when he lost his seat and joined the SDP, but he was unsuccessful in two further elections. Thereafter he worked for the BBC and then set up his own business as a solicitor. He played cricket, rackets and real tennis to a high standard but sadly never came back into serious contention as a fives player.

David Barnes

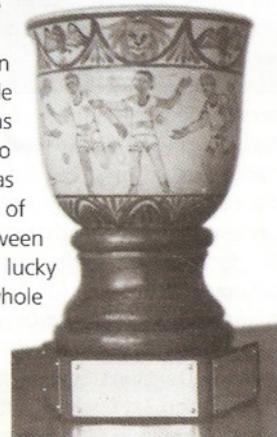
EVE CAREY

We send our condolences, on behalf of the RFA and the fives-playing community in Britain, to John Carey on the death of his wife, Eve. As all those who have been on a fives tour to the USA will know, John and Eve were the kind and generous hosts who welcomed us to St. Mark's School, Southborough, often under a foot of snow and once at two o'clock in the morning; and many who have not been to the USA will remember meeting the Careys and their American touring parties who came over to the UK in the 1980s and '90s at the invitation of Tom and Joan Wood.

Eve was a potter who worked in majolica, and it was she who made the Carey-Wood Cup which was competed for whenever the two nations met at fives. It now stands as a memorial to her and a reminder of much hospitality and goodwill between the USA and the UK to those lucky people who were involved in the whole adventure.

David Barnes

The Carey-Wood International Trophy made by Eve Carey in 1982.



Picture: Joan Wood

BOB HOLLAND (1954-2005)

As we went to press, we received the sad news of the death of Bob Holland. A full tribute will appear in our next issue.