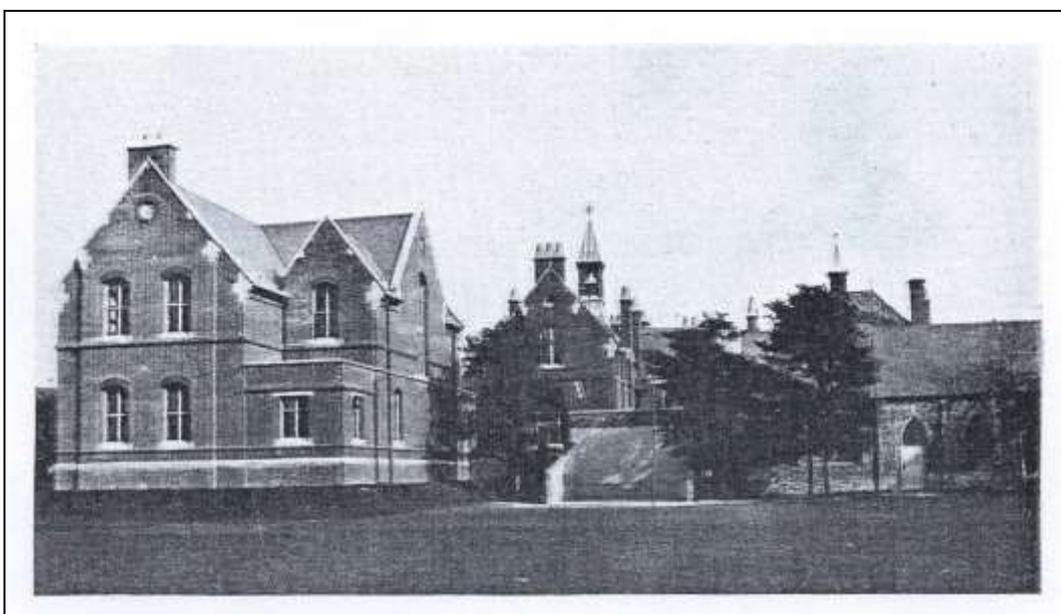


## The History of Rugby Fives at Eastbourne College by David Barnes

(full, illustrated version)

When *The Times* announced in March 1867 that Eastbourne College would open later that year, the main features of the College would be 'Boarding-Houses, with partitioned dormitories and all modern improvements, a Chapel, Gymnasium, Fives Courts, and every appliance for Cricket and other School Sports.' The College duly opened on August 20th 1867 with the Rev. JR Wood as Headmaster, four assistant masters and fifteen boys.

The first fives court, built in 1874, immediately attracted a letter to *The Eastbournian* from 'An Old Hand' about its size ('quite an apology for a court') and the need for cementing the walls, rebuffed brusquely by the Editor: 'We have inserted this letter notwithstanding its blunders', and going on to say the dimensions are equal to a large number of other courts and that cementing was to be done when it had been decided whether the height of the side walls needed to be changed. It took further letters before the walls were eventually rendered – and a back wall was added in 1879, although the court remained unroofed.



The 1874 court seen in 1878

In 1880 two open courts were built south of the Gymnasium, and four in the grounds of Blackwater House. There are no photos of these courts, but one assumes that they were similar to the first one. A notable name won the fives singles competition that year: E.H. Miles, later to become amateur world champion in real tennis and rackets. He went on to Marlborough after Eastbourne, so both schools can claim him!

Early competitions (singles and doubles, open and under 15) are reported intermittently in *The Eastbournian*, and Blackwater House, with courts of its own, had a tournament as well. Support for fives was variable, however, and a letter complaining about the state of the courts appeared in 1886: 'They are a disgrace to the College... It is all very well to say that it is no good having them done up because nobody uses them. On the contrary, nobody uses them because they are not fit to play on.'

The College went through a period of financial difficulty in the 1880s, the roll falling to just 60 boys. Fortunately, this was greatly increased in 1888 by the arrival from Cranbrook School of a new Headmaster, Dr Charles Crowden, who brought 90 boys with him from

that school. Cranbrook had built five courts under Crowden's leadership, so it was no surprise when three new open courts 'without hazards of any kind' were built at Eastbourne in 1890. At first they had no back walls, but these were added a few years later. The old 1874 court, which had acquired a back wall in 1879, came down in 1890.



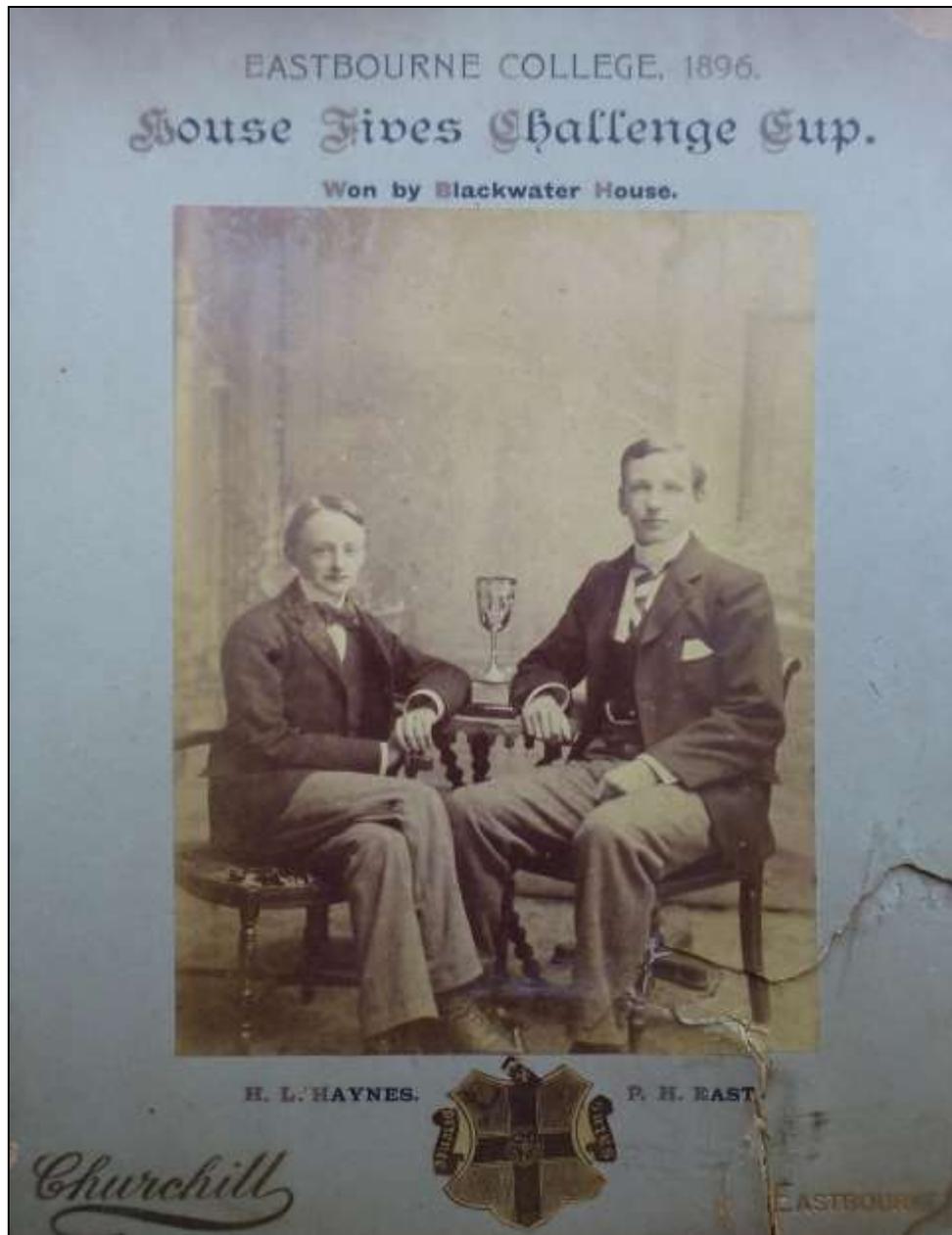
The three 1890 courts

To celebrate the new courts, a captain of fives was elected, an open scratch competition for doubles pairs organised and a set of rules and regulations published. The competition was divided into two classes (over and under 15), and the entrance fee was one shilling for the seniors and sixpence for the juniors. Each match to be the best of three games, except for the final which was best of five, and 'The Rugby rules should be followed as far as possible'. Masters were allowed to enter this event, held in the Michaelmas term, but the Lent term would bring House and Challenge Cup competitions for boys only, with trophies presented by Dr Crowden and Mr RA Kyrke.

LGC Laughton was the winner of the first open singles in 1891. *The Eastbournian* reported his 3-0 win: "Towards the end of the first game Laughton's hands went bad, and compelled him to wear gloves in the second and third games. Though thus handicapped, he won easily.' This bare-handed custom, still practised by a recent master-in-charge, clearly has deep roots at Eastbourne!

Now that the structure of the game had been established, fives moved along well in the 1890s considering the courts were uncovered. Although matches against other schools were not yet played, a letter appeared asking for a fives cap to be awarded 'as a memento of victories', and another wanted fives prizes to be in kind rather than in money. The

captain who failed to organise a competition came under criticism, and 1896 saw 'the closest final for the (House) Cup that has ever been witnessed', Blackwater winning by 4-15, 6-15, 15-5, 15-9, 15-11. That same year the first match was held, against the OEs and entitled 'Past v Present'. This was to become a regular encounter, expanding from one pair to three pairs after the courts were repaired in 1906.



House Fives Challenge Cup 1896

A look at the scores of matches in 1900 shows the usual confusion over the way to end a game. A Junior final shows a 17-14 score in one game (the 'rackets system'), while a Past v Present match has one game going to 20-18 (presumably two points ahead from 14 all). The next year a score of 16-15 (the modern system) was enough to win a game. There was also uncertainty over the way to do a proper draw, with many 'byes' in later rounds which should have been resolved earlier.

A new headmaster arrived in March 1906, and the fives courts were repaired, 'an improvement of which we have long been in need'. In 1907, six players were selected to play the OEs after the OE Sports on Easter Monday. The result was not recorded in *The*

*Eastbournian*. The first match against another school seems to have been a junior fixture against St Andrews, a local prep school where a court still survives to this day. It was lost by 7 games to 5.

An announcement was made that year that a new Big Schoolroom was to be built (costing £3,500) on the site of the present fives courts, and that fresh courts would be erected elsewhere. This scheme failed to materialize, and fives continued on its merry way, the courts even being repaired in 1913 after having been used as a miniature shooting-range – not a use this writer has come across before!

There were no fives reports in *The Eastbournian* between 1915 and 1922. Obviously the War had something to do with this, but the 1890 courts were still there in 1919, when a proposal was made to build a Memorial Building in honour of Old Eastbournians killed in the hostilities. This involved demolishing various 1890s buildings including the fives courts, but in 1922 three new covered courts were built in the grounds of Blackwater House. Ironically, the foundations of the old House courts dating from 1880 were discovered in the process of construction.



The 1922 courts still standing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

*The Eastbournian* reported in considerable detail on these new courts, which are still standing today. They are described as being 'each 20 ft long, 18 ft wide and 15 ft high, with a roof of quarter-inch plate glass on stout rafters and purlins protected on the underside with wire netting. The inside is well rendered with cement and sand trowelled smooth, and the floor is left rough to give grip to the feet. The centre court has been finished as an Eton Court, the Contractors sending specially to Eton to ensure accuracy of detail.'

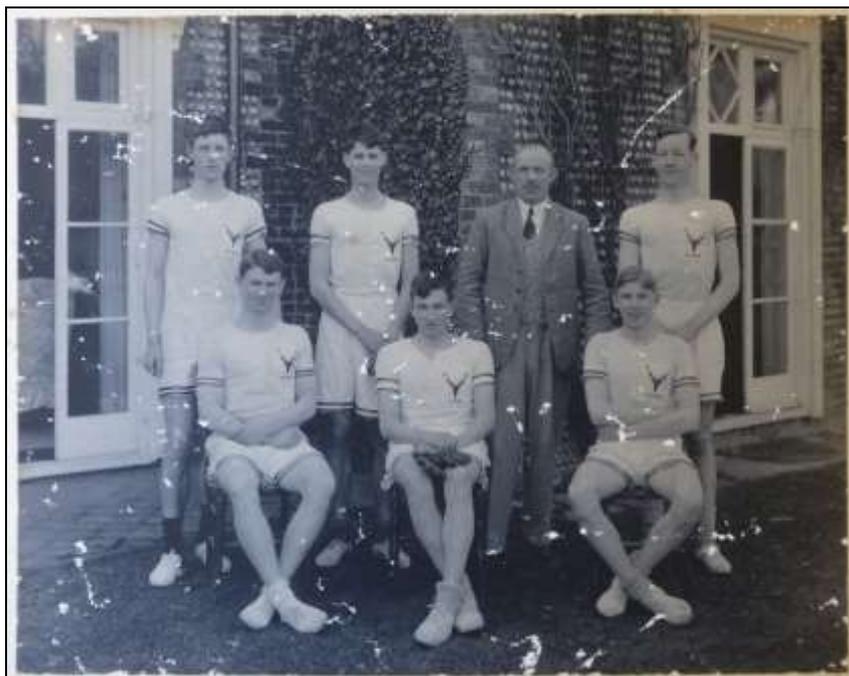
The length of these courts, if accurately stated, was too short for either Rugby (28 ft) or Eton (24 ft) fives, and if it was meant to be a compromise, it was unsuccessful. From 1927, matches were being played against the Old Boys and the Staff with three pairs per side, possibly indicating that the centre court had already been converted to Rugby. The 1961 survey carried out by David Gardner describes three Rugby courts, each with a length of 24 ft, but it is not clear when the lengthening (or conversion) took place.

1928 brings the first mention of coaching by a master. 'We should like to take this opportunity of thanking Mr Morres, who, though there has been no official fives master, has done much to make the game popular as it is today in the School; he has always been ready to offer advice and, better still, example by playing in fours, and for many years has presented the prize for Junior Singles, there being no cup.' Fives colours were awarded for the first time that year, so the game was moving ahead.

An away match at Christ's Hospital in 1930 brought a shock to the team, which lost 'rather badly; their courts being at least twice as long as ours, we were totally unable to settle down.' Despite this reverse, an Eastbourne pair, JM Drower and NW Cundy, played in the inaugural Public Schools' Doubles Competition. They had a tough draw: after defeating Bishop's Stortford in the first round, they were beaten by the St. Paul's pair which eventually won the trophy.

When a Jesters pair arrived to play the College the next season, the match was played on points rather than games won – another first. The standard was improving and the College recorded a narrow win on points against a Masters VI.

1932 saw matches against St Paul's, Christ's Hospital, the RFA and the Jesters, all lost by 30 points or fewer, and the Masters were defeated again. The Jesters IV was a very strong one: R deW Winlaw, JF Burnet, JGW Davies and ST Jagger. Eastbourne were already competing against some of the best players in the country, and the next season brought victories over the RFA and the Jesters. 8 boys represented the College that year, among them a youngster called JDG Craib, destined for stardom.



1933 team: (back) JDG Craib, HEB Pilbrow, SH Foot, Esq., HMF Langley;  
(front) DC Horton, GF Hepburn, CP Bomford

The first win against St Paul's (176-175!) came in 1935, although the Alleyn Old Boys, probably the strongest club in the country, thrashed the boys (without Craib, by now their best player), winning 270-75. 1936 was Craib's year: he won the Public Schools' Singles title, the first and so far the only Eastbournian to do so. He went on to play for Cambridge in 1937, '38 and '39, captaining the team in his final year.

There was a new fixture (won) against King's Canterbury in 1937, but the College lost heavily to St Paul's, the Alleyn Old Boys and the Jesters, who fielded one of the Cyriax Cup winners, VE Oundjian, and won by 180-55 – bravely described in *The Eastbournian* as 'an instructive and enjoyable match'! The modern format (one game of singles and four of doubles) was adopted for the matches against the men.

Measles spoilt the 1938 season and influenza affected the 1939 team; matches against St Paul's, Sutton Valence, Whitgift and the Alleyn Old Boys were lost, and only King's Canterbury beaten. The Colts played Aldro, a local prep school, twice and won both. DM Man and DJ Stinson entered the Public Schools' Competition, beating Felsted but losing to Oundle, the holders.

The War brought disruption, although an OE side came in March 1940 and won a close match. The College was evacuated to Radley on the 20th June that year, where Eastbourne were permitted to use the fives courts three days a week. The buttress meant that they were 'rather lost' to start with, but there were some games against Radley and Malvern in 1942.

Back at Eastbourne in 1947, matches against the Masters started again, and one of them, ACJ Burton, worked hard on getting the courts into a playable condition and coaching the pupils. He even painted one of the courts in the Easter holidays of 1948, 'and made a grand job of it'! It wasn't until 1950 that all three courts were in playing order again, and an exceptional singles player emerged, IJ Lizaso.



The 1949 squad: (back) MJ Partridge, ACJ Burton, Esq., GR Langton; (middle) GC Lucas, PB S-Johnson, AG Fisher (Capt.), IJ Lizaso, JC Robbins; (front) HD Lucas, RV Stone

A regular fixture list established itself during the 1950s, consisting of four schools (St Paul's, Sutton Valence, Christ's Hospital and Whitgift) and visitors such as the Jesters, the RFAC and the OEs. Mr DL Wetherall is thanked in 1951 for his 'invaluable coaching', and Mr GR Langton (OE) in 1952 for the gift of 50 balls and a pair of gloves. 'Ruthless coaching' helped the 1953 team, although the Sutton Valence match was the only victory. 'Multifarious other activities' interfered in 1954, but Christ's Hospital were beaten in 1955 for the first time since the war, and likewise St Paul's in 1956. An 'intolerably exciting' three-hour match against Whitgift in 1957 was lost by one point.



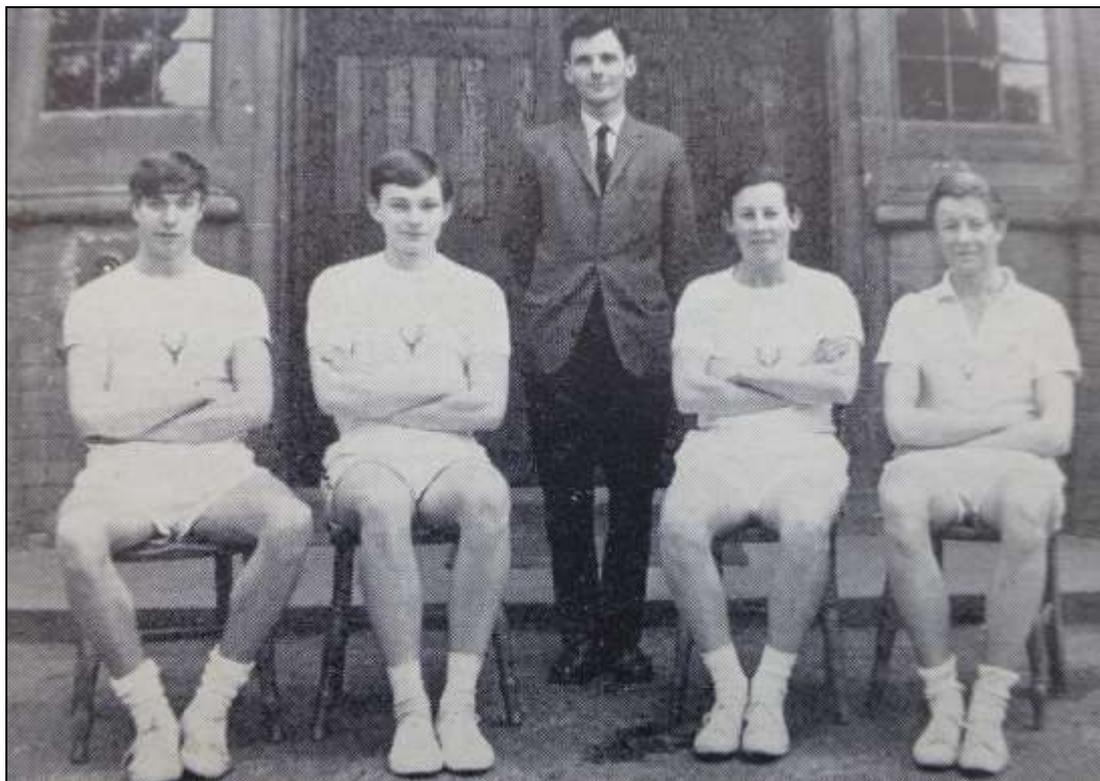
The 1950 squad: (back) R Worsley, JH Wilson, WJ Armstrong, JD Nicholson, KE Norman-Smith, Esq.; (front) RV Stone, MJ Partridge, IJ Lizaso (Capt.), HD Lucas, GR Langton

The picture emerging is one of undimmed enthusiasm in the face of a majority of lost matches. Expert support was on hand in the form of JG Rogers, a former national singles finalist who taught at Eastbourne in the mid-1950s, and PL Pickett, a local Jester who played once a week with the team; but 'we lost matches we should have won' was still the cry in 1960. 'Our courts are small and the ceilings low' lamented the 1962 report, pointing out that it was difficult to learn to lob and vary the pace, making away matches a real test. The advantage this gave the team in home matches seemed somehow less marked.

Tonbridge were added to the fixture list in 1965, and more Colts and Junior Colts matches were introduced. A Novices Cup had been introduced in 1964, and not surprisingly this led to a general improvement in play. Four intrepid souls entered the 1965 Schools' Championships at Whitgift. They got no further than the third round but appreciated playing on larger courts against better players. 1966 was a good season – seven out of eight matches won! – but the IV had disappointing results in the Schools' Championships. Although the courts were 'redecorated' in 1967, the old pattern of losses outweighing victories returned, and by 1970 the 1st IV were glad to win a match and there were no junior teams or competitions.

Part of this decline was because of a lack of interest in fives among the younger members of staff. The 1970 report reads: 'It seems that fives, one of the College's oldest-established sports (started in 1874) must become a thing of the past.' There seemed to be no obvious

successor to KE Norman-Smith, 'who will be remembered by generations of fives players for his encouragement and coaching. It will be disappointing if ... his Common Room colleagues fail to provide him with a successor.'



1966 DG Smith, WJ Hastie, K.E.Norman-Smith, Esq., DR Bryant, RAD Perkins

In 1974, that successor was found in the person of DJ Bowles. His long report speaks of a small revival, with matches for 1st IV, 2nd pair, Colts' and Under 15s, all but one lost – but the show was on the road again! Fixtures doubled in 1975: South London schools such as Alleyn's, St Dunstan's and Rutlish were played, and a Colts pair entered the inaugural U16 Nationals at Whitgift. 'Although we are still not getting the results, the game is in a healthy state' wrote Duncan Bowles in 1976, despite all the courts leaking like a sieve.

The business of producing winning teams was given a boost by the arrival in the Common Room of NL Wheeler, an Eton fives player who revelled in the opportunities to volley the ball in the small Eastbourne courts. Before long the 1st IV were beating Tonbridge, Sutton Valence, Rutlish, Whitgift, touring to Bedford and Felsted and entering tournaments with a will. Of course there were reverses because of illness, injury, wet courts and cancelled matches, but the spirit was good, with 'impromptu games between boys of all Houses and ages'. Eastbournians tended to be better at singles than doubles, noted Duncan Bowles in 1981, adding 'our awful courts have something to do with this!'

The reports throughout the 1980s show a rich pattern of matches at all levels. The occasional tour and plenty of away fixtures, including entries to the West of England Schools and the Nationals, enabled experience to be gained on bigger courts, and the arrival in the Common Room of SJ Beal, who had learnt his fives at Alleyn's, enhanced still further the quality of the coaching in singles and doubles. 'Mr Wheeler and Mr Beal make a good team!' concluded the 1985 report.

'Amid flickering lights and with plaster falling all around, playing fives becomes more like operating in a battle ground every year' lamented the 1987 report. But when conditions

allowed, plenty of fives was played, with an autumn league, more than twenty matches in the Lent term, six entries to the West of England and five to the Nationals.

AB Pringle, a member of the 1986 Eastbourne team, played for Cambridge in the 1989 Varsity Match, the first Old Eastbournian to play in the annual encounter since JDG Craib in 1939. Since Andy Pringle's selection, eleven more OEs have made a total of 41 appearances in the Varsity Match, a remarkable achievement and great tribute to the coaching and organisation of fives at the College. Duncan Bowles, master-in-charge for two decades, who with vital assistance from Nigel Wheeler and latterly Spencer Beal, had fought so hard for the status of fives at Eastbourne, retired from the fray in 1991.



1986 1<sup>st</sup> IV Fred Westlake, James Nicholson, Seb Fisher, Andy Pringle

The 1990s put Eastbourne fives firmly on the map. The 1st IV won all eight school matches in 1992, and there was strength at every level. TD and CW Caroe won all their doubles matches and were to go on to represent Cambridge nine times between them – Tim from 1993-97 and Chris from 1995-98. While at school, they each won the West of England singles plate in successive years (1992 and 1993). An Eastbournian of this period who made a considerable contribution to fives was the whole-hearted Ollie Stone-Lee, captain at Eastbourne in 1994. He went on to play for Durham University and joined the RFA Board from 2003 to 2008, organising the National Singles from 2002 to 2006.

Things were going so well by 1994 that the report read: 'We are hoping to expand the sport once the courts at Memorial become operational. Cosmetic improvements to the main courts have also helped.' Sadly, the two Memorial Ground courts proved impossible to resurrect, but the three 1922 courts have soldiered on to this day and look like making it to their centenary in five years' time! Their physical condition has been a running sore, and their tendency to sweat up in damp weather has been perennially frustrating. Low roofs remove the valuable defensive tactic of the lob, but their very smallness is not always a disadvantage: it makes a game of doubles an object lesson in getting out of the way; while a game of singles, especially with a fast ball, tests one's reactions to the limit and encourages the volley. Like all non-standard courts, they are an advantage to the home team; but by the same token they remove the opportunity to prepare for away matches and tournaments on bigger courts.



1995: U15s – David Child, Simon Beal, Philip Caroe and Marcus Bate

Taking all this into consideration, the picture of Eastbourne fives in the last 25 years has been impressive. Reading Spencer Beal's reports year by year, one is struck by the cheerful enthusiasm as well as the individual achievement at a time when St Paul's were dominating schools' fives. A feature of many seasons therefore was that Eastbourne travelled far and wide (even to America in 1998), won a great number of inter-school matches at home and away, but frustratingly failed to win West of England or National schools' titles despite reaching a number of finals. There was something outstanding to report most seasons. 'Some marvellous individual performances' (1995); 'Under 16s unbeaten in school matches over three years' (1996); 'Standard at the senior end is very high' (1997); and in 1998: "This has been the best season the Fives Club has enjoyed as far back as memory goes. The 1st IV and U15s won all their matches.'



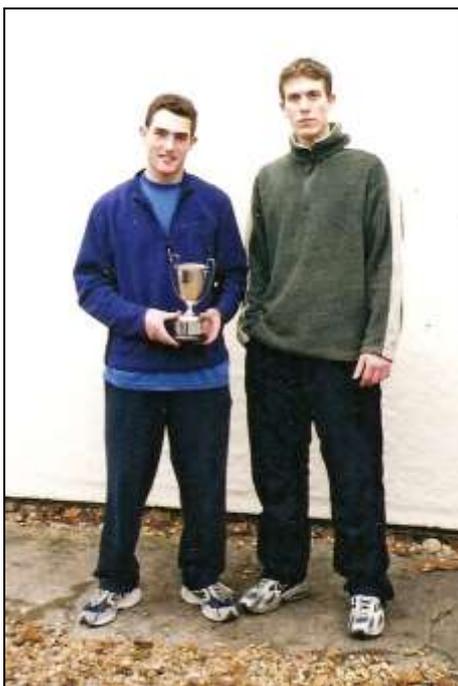
1998 1<sup>st</sup> IV (P Caroe, Richardson, Bate & Beal) and U15 IV (Bain, Hussain, Pigott & Kwon) with coaches Nigel Wheeler and Spencer Beal

Many Eastbournians at school between 1990 and 2010 went on to play in the Varsity Match: apart from the two Caroes already mentioned, EW Brooke (OU 1996-99, 2001-03), PM Shipley (CU 1995), ES Jones (CU 1996-98), JAT Richardson (CU 1999-2000, 2002), MS Bate (OU 1999-2003), PJ Caroe (CU 2000-01), AC Down (OU 2004), SE Beal (CU 2006-7), SJ Adcock (OU 2008-11) and CK Compton (CU 2008-11).



Six of the 1996 Cambridge side, containing Chris Caroe (back left) and Tim Caroe (front centre)

Four of these won British Universities' titles: Ed Brooke (1998 Doubles & 2001 Singles); Simon Beal (1999 Doubles for Durham University); Marcus Bate (2000 & 2002 Doubles); and James Richardson (2001 Doubles). Six U25 titles also came their way between 2001 and 2005. Back at Eastbourne, Spencer Beal's 2001 fives report ended on a wry note: 'As Mr Wheeler observed, it is interesting to see how well the OEs have done now that they are no longer being coached by us.'



James Richardson (right)  
2001 Universities Doubles Champion



Ed Brooke  
2001 Universities Singles Champion

Eastbourne continued to produce good sides after this golden period, and the numbers playing were high. In 2004, the 1st IV won all six school matches and contained a future Cambridge captain in Charles Compton. Michael Sands won the Open plate at the Nationals the next year. 2006 saw the departure of Nigel Wheeler, coach, motivator, tour organiser and morale booster after almost three decades of service to Eastbourne fives.



1<sup>st</sup> IV 2003-04 (Back) Spencer Beal, E Selvadural, J Partridge, Nigel Wheeler;  
(front) Michael Sands, Charles Compton

In 2007, 'a very enjoyable season', Sam Adcock won the West of England Singles plate and Andrew Meek became the first pupil to beat Spencer Beal (11-8, 11-3) in 23 years! Simon Beal came to teach at his old school in 2008, and the Common Room was further strengthened in 2009 by the arrival of Alex Smith. 2009 also saw the first of three consecutive appearances in the Cyriax Cup final of OE Marcus Bate.



1<sup>st</sup> IV 2007; Neil Pickford, Andrew Meek, Sam Adcock, Alex Walsh

It was pride of place to the girls in 2010, as Tessa Mills won the first ever National Girls' Open Singles title. Charlie Dodds won the Under 16 Singles and partnered Tessa to victory in the Senior Doubles. Alex Smith, the organiser of the National Girls' event, and Kathleen Briedenhann ensured that Tessa Mills continued to improve, and she proceeded to win the Girls' Singles for three more years, also partnering Izzy Why to victory in the 2013 Girls' Doubles. Tessa has now risen to the top of the Women's National Rankings, just pipping her former teacher.



The Eastbourne College Girls' squad at the first National Girls' Championships 2011: (back, l-r) Angela Cutler, Ellie Turnbull, Kate Corfield, Charlotte Dodds, Ellie Wicks; (front, l-r) Tilly Page, Laura Scott, Rachael Williams, Abigail East and a young Tessa Mills, who won the U18 Singles and the Doubles with Charlie Dodds



Tessa Mills after her 4<sup>th</sup> victory in the National School girls' U18 Championships in 2013, where she also won the Doubles with Izzy Why

The courts were replastered in 2013, and it was the most successful season for 15 years for the boys, with the 1st IV winning all ten school matches. Chay Kent and Dom Barnes took the prizes at the South-East Regional event and the Senior Doubles Plate at the Nationals.

Spencer Beal retired in 2015 after 23 dedicated years as master-in-charge. He has already made his mark in the 2017 Masters Championships, winning the Doubles with Tony Hamilton and no doubt shocking some of his opponents with his glovelessness.



Spencer Beal outside the courts in 2016



Tony Hamilton & Spencer Beal win the Masters (over 65) Doubles in 2017

Spencer's son Simon has taken over the fives at Eastbourne and the 2017 report tells of continuing inter-house contests, school fixtures against Christ's Hospital, Tonbridge, St Paul's, Whitgift and the RFA and entries into the South-East regionals, the West of England and the Nationals. Girls' fives at Eastbourne is also in good hands with Kathleen Briedenhann.



Multiple Ladies National Champion Kathleen Briedenhann in action at Cambridge

David Barnes August 2017

*Special thanks to Eastbourne College Archivist Michael Partridge for his help in preparing this article. Also to Spencer Beal for correcting my errors and to Nigel Wheeler for providing many a photograph!*

**An abridged version of this history appears in the RFA Annual Review 2016-2017**

**A selection of Eastbourne players (Club, Staff and School)**

**Groups**



2005 Owers Trophy: Stone-Lee, Pringle, Bate, Chris Caroe



2010 Owers Trophy: Smith, Pringle, Brooke, Bate, Meek, Compton



2011 Owers Trophy: Bate, Pringle, Adcock, Meek



2012 Owers Trophy: Compton, Bate, Pringle, Simon Beal



2015 Owers Trophy: Pringle, Meek, Bate



2016 Play on the refurbished court at St. Andrew's Prep School  
Kathleen Briedenhann, Andy Pringle, Simon Beal, Tessa Mills

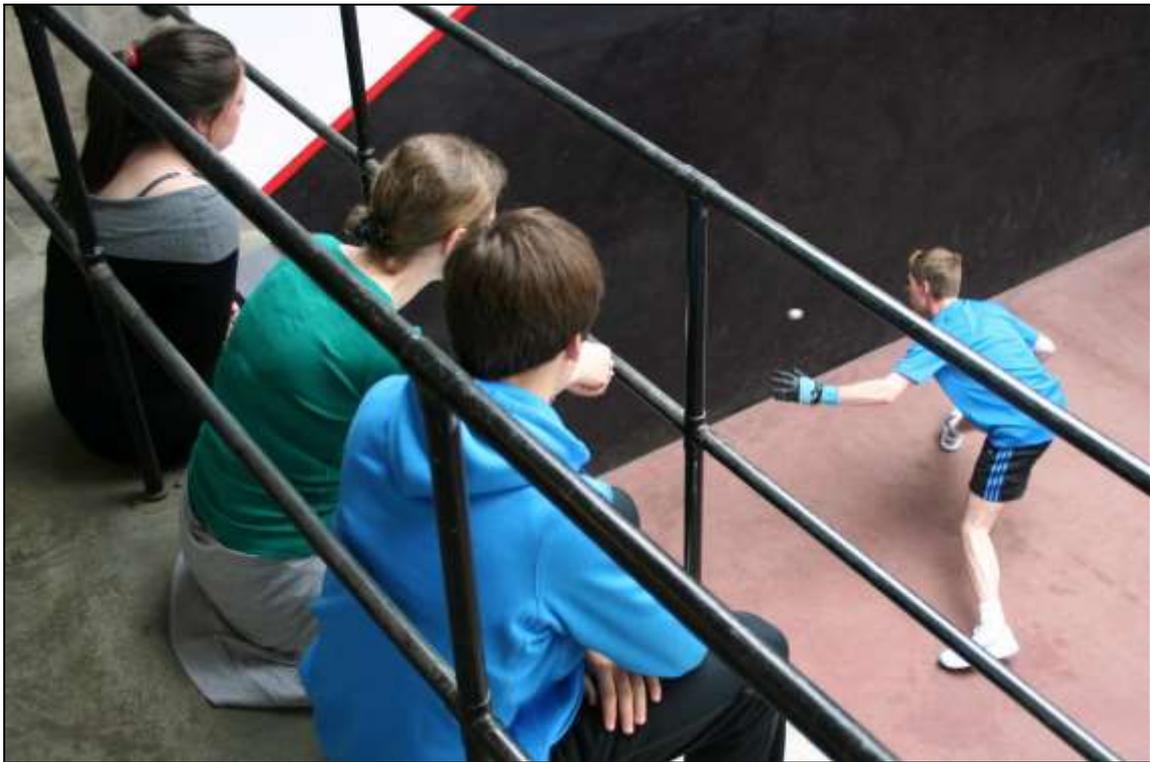
**Individuals**



**Sam Adcock** [holding Plate]



**Marcus Bate** [left] with James Toop - Varsity Match 2010



**Marcus Bate** in action at Merchant Taylors' 2010



**Marcus Bate** (right) at the SW Open 2011



**Simon Beal** [left] with Chris Jones and Ben Lovett at BUSA 1999



**Spencer Beal** in action at Sutton Valence in 2007



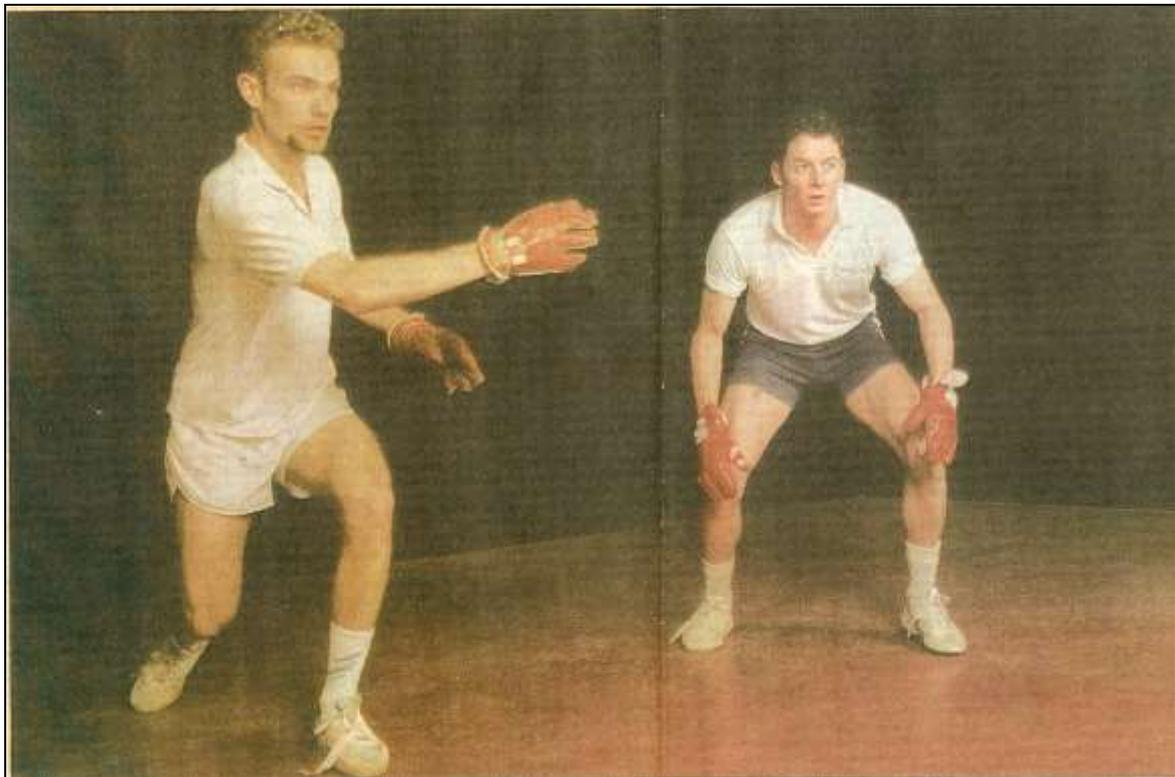
**Kathleen Briedenhann**, Ladies Singles Champ[ion], at St. Paul's 2016



**Ed Brooke** [right], master i/c/ Fives at Radley, with Ed Hatton at St. Paul's 2011



**Chris Caroe:** Owers Trophy 2005



**Tim Caroe** [left] playing for Cambridge in the Varsity Match 1995



**Charles Compton** at St. Paul's 2017



**Tony Hamilton** [with beard] with Stuart Kirby versus Fuller & Hebden at the Vintage 2015



**Tony Hamilton** in action at Cambridge 2015



**Andrew Meek** at the Owers Trophy 2015



**Tessa Mills**, Ladies U23 champion 2016



.... in action at St. Paul's



**Andy Pringle**, Winchester Fives Mixed Doubles Champion with Alexandra Steel 2016



**Andy Pringle**, Veterans Doubles champion with John Minta 2017



**Michael Sands** [end right], Owers Trophy 2005



**Alex Smith**, President's Cup 2007 with Joan Wood



**Ollie Stone-Lee [right] with John Minta at Manchester 2005**



.... at St. Paul's 2005



**Nigel Wheeler 2007**

And finally ...



In October 2016 **David Arnold** (extreme left) collapsed and died while playing Fives with the Eastbourne Club at the College. He is pictured here in February 2015 playing at Cambridge.

## Club Fives



**1984 Scorpions v. Eastbourne:** Robin Skinner, Nigel Wheeler, Charles Warner and Euan Clarke.



**1989 Scorpions v. Eastbourne:** Julian Tebbitt, Euan Clarke, Simon Hill, Robin Skinner, Spencer Beal, Nigel Wheeler, Charles Warner, Michael Beaman and Guy Thwaites.



1989: 'Victorious!' -- Robin Skinner, Euan Clarke, Martin de St Croix, Charles Warner.



**Eastbourne College on tour** February 1998 near St Mark's School  
with Mrs and Miss Umiker: Philip Caroe, Spencer Beal,  
James Richardson, Simon Beal and Marcus Bate



On tour February 1998 in Massachusetts: Marcus Bate, James Richardson, Philip Caroe, Simon Beal and Spencer Beal.



**Spencer Beal's 'Farewell to Fives'** as an Eastbourne CR member: with Nick Morgan, Martin Hole, Marcus Bate, Neil Arnott, Euan Clarke, Andrew Pringle, Tim Alexander, Martin Wilkinson, John Denison, Alex Smith, Simon Beal, Spencer Beal and Ian Jackson. November 2015.