

Dennis Silk 1931-2019



The RFA is sad to report the death in June of one of the great post-war players of Fives: **Dennis Raoul Whitehall Silk**, National Doubles Champion with his partner, the late John Pretlove, on four consecutive occasions from 1956 to 1959. Dennis and John, whose partnership and life-long friendship dated from their time at Cambridge together, lost in competitive play just the once -- in the 2nd round of the National Doubles in 1960, going for a fifth consecutive title, defeated 5-15, 15-12, 15-10 by Bob Dorey & Pat Badmin. Tongue in cheek, Dennis always maintained "We won on points, and we'd have won on games if I hadn't left my glasses in my MCC cricket bag!"

Dennis Silk was a magnificent all-round sportsman who excelled in all he played as a boy at Christ's Hospital and won blues in Cricket, Rugby and Fives at Cambridge, where he read History at Sidney Sussex College. He played in the Varsity Match four times between 1952 and 1955, captaining the side in 1954 [photo above], unbeaten in Singles and winning 15 of his 16 games of Doubles. He put his later success in the Cyriax Cup with John Pretlove down to having "a pretty decent right hand and playing with the best player in the world!"

After a successful period as an amateur batsman with Somerset County Cricket Club Dennis concentrated on his career as a schoolmaster, first at Marlborough College, then as Warden (Headmaster) at Radley College from 1968-1991. At Radley he gave great support to the game of Fives which benefited from a succession of Cambridge captains like himself running and promoting Fives: Simon Langdale, Brian Wilson, Richard Morgan, Chris Hirst and Bob Dolby. Dennis would happily play against the boys in the Dons (Masters) v. Boys match and amaze the younger players with the power of his service once he had managed to overcome a perplexing case of the yips when throwing up.

Dennis was an indefatigable supporter of the annual Cambridge Fives Match and Dinner, the so-called Past versus Present, and was, of course, a generous contributor to the new Cambridge courts. A man who exercised a huge influence upon generations of schoolboys and colleagues, Dennis invariably sat at the Dinner with the man he credited with being one of the greatest influences on his own life, Jock Burnet, President of Cambridge University Fives Club and a long-serving member of the Radley College Council, the school where Dennis in turn left his greatest mark.

Dennis is the subject of several obituaries in the national and sporting press, which give a full account of his many interests and achievements: writer on cricket and lecturer on literature, friend of Siegfried Sassoon, inadvertent star of television, captain of MCC cricket tours to New Zealand and Canada, President of the MCC, Chair of the TCCB, awarded the CBE for services to cricket and education. Eric Anderson, the former Head of Eton, described Dennis as the best headmaster in England.



Dennis Silk (arms crossed and smiling) at the match between Christ's Hospital and Alleyn's in 1950



1950: Dennis Silk (right) with Micky Stewart, the Alleyn's Nr 1 and later Surrey & England cricketer



At the naming of the courts at Alleyn's in 2002, John Pretlove and Dennis Silk (extreme right) took to the court to play David Hebden and Ian Fuller