

Brian Griffiths (1910-1988)

By the time Brian Rourke Griffiths became the fifth President of the Rugby Fives Association in 1965, he had been a key man in the playing and administration of Rugby Fives for over 30 years. During that period, he had devoted a great deal of time to organising RFA matches and championships, attending more than a hundred RFA Committee meetings and representing the Association in countless matches. He set himself the highest standards, both on and off court. If anyone was 'a safe pair of hands', it was Brian Griffiths.

Brian learnt the game at Merchant Taylors' when the School was still at the Charterhouse in London, and he was in the School IV in 1927 and 1928. After school, he was soon involved in helping to run the OMT Fives Club, which he did with his friend Eric Hanson from 1932 on, acting as Honorary Secretary and Treasurer in alternate years. When the School moved out to Sandy Lodge in 1933, Brian and Eric ensured that the OMT Club still had access to the Charterhouse courts, which were good enough to have played host to the Public Schools' Championships in 1932.

Brian attended the 1934 AGM of the Association as an OMT Club representative and was soon on the RFA Committee and involved in organising matches against a wide variety of opponents. He took over the job of Match Secretary officially from Ken Millage in 1935 and maintained a list of more than 20 school opponents over the next four years. The schools most often played were Alleyn's, Bedford Modern, Christ's Hospital, Dulwich, Haberdashers' Aske's, Haileybury, St Paul's, Tonbridge and UCS, and Brian was match manager for an average of eight matches per season. Knowing him, he will have done his best to play in all of them! Sutton Valence was a favourite weekend, with a match against the School on Saturday and the Masters on Sunday. The RFA also played many club matches both in and out of London in the 1930s.



Brian Griffiths at the 'Duck and Dominoes' 1935

Apart from visits to schools, Brian also organised and participated in inter-club matches for the RFA. He also featured in many a match for the OMTs, who could put out a strong side and were able to challenge the very best such as the Old Alleynians, the Alleyn Old Boys and the Old Blues. The OMTs strongest IV was drawn from JA Hilton, JT Hetherington, DJ Mallagh, EC Hanson and Brian himself. The Club played 22 matches in the 1934/35 season, winning 14 of them. Other clubs Brian played for included the Jesters and the Hampstead Squash and Rugby Fives Club, opened with an exhibition match by a group of elite players including Brian in December 1935.



Brian Griffiths (centre right) at Dr Edgar Cyriax's 75th birthday party at the Savoy in 1949

During the War, when Brian was a flight-lieutenant in the RAF, many London fives courts, including the courts at Charterhouse Square, were damaged beyond repair. After it was all over, fives was slow to recover, but typically Brian was one of four RFA members who met in February 1946 and decided to hold the Public Schools' Championships at Alleyn's in April that year. The next year, he was elected Honorary Championship Secretary, a considerable job which soon needed the assistance of an Alleyn's schoolmaster, GR Charnley, to help run the Schools'. Later, with John Burton organising the Open Championships, Brian was to become responsible for the organisation of the Schools' until 1959. There is a photograph (below) of him at Whitgift School, presenting the trophy to the late John Watkinson from BGS, the singles winner that year.



Sadly, there was no revival of OMT home matches in London after the War, as they had lost their courts. The Times records several matches played at Sandy Lodge in the 1950s, and the last time Brian's name appears in an OMT team is on December 1st 1955 against Oxford University, led by one Alastair Mackenzie. Brian would have been proud of the fact that the Club that he and Eric Hanson ran so effectively in London from 1932 continued to play competitive and sociable fives for many decades afterwards at Sandy Lodge.

Brian was responsible for saving and transcribing a document of importance in the history of Rugby Fives. This was the list of schools which had replied to Dr Cyriax's enquiry into fives-playing schools in 1929 and 1930. It was this

which led to the decision by the RFA on the proper dimensions of a Rugby Fives court. All the relevant dimensions (width, length, height of front wall, height of bar, etc.) were collated and divided by the number of schools replying. This turned out to give a width of 18 ft, a length of 28 ft, a front wall height of 15 ft and a bar height of 2ft 6in. The variations between schools were considerable, but the average was thought to be acceptable. Persuading schools to rebuild their over- or under-sized courts was another matter!

Brian's Presidency of the RFA from 1965 to 1970 was a well-deserved honour. Typically, he continued to take a great interest in all the activities of the Association, offering every support to the Honorary Secretaries of his time, David Gardner and Alan Maltby. One of the last duties he performed as President was to open the Cyriax courts at University College School on March 14th 1970, paying tribute in his speech to Edgar Cyriax's role as founder of the Rugby Fives Association.

Brian died in January 1988, and his daughters gave a fine silver-plate trophy to the RFA in his memory, presented each year from 1993 to the winner of the National Schools Open Singles Plate competition.



David Barnes, April 2020