

The President's Cup

Conceived in late 1957 by RFA Club founder and President Geoffrey Rimmer as a 'Club Doubles Competition on a handicap basis', the President's Cup took a few years to shake down into the all-day event we know and enjoy today. For the first ten years of its existence, the competition was played by arrangement over several evenings, the draw for partners having been done by a sub-committee, with a grand final and social evening at the Hampstead Squash and Rugby Fives Club. 26 members entered the first competition, won by Colin Hindson and Peter Snowsill, who beat Adam Horner and Tom Jones 16-15, 12-15, 15-4 on a foggy evening in December 1958. Geoffrey Rimmer donated and presented a fine engraved silver trophy and a pair of 'Crown and Rose' pewter tankards to the winners.

Entries for the competition and attendance at the final varied during the next few years, but the greatest threat to the continuation of the President's Cup came in late 1967, when the Hampstead Club court closed. The competition was transferred to Alleyn's that year and the next, and then committee member Keith Puckle suggested that Merchant Taylors' School might be a good venue for an all-day event, followed by an evening at the OMT Club House. This idea worked in 1969 and, although there was a blank in 1970, Merchant Taylors' became the firm venue from 1971 onwards, with Tom and Joan Wood showing just how to organize and cater for fives players on a Sunday before Christmas.

Over the next two decades the President's Cup became an indispensable feature of the RFA Club's year, along with the AGMs held at Waxchandlers' Hall. A plate competition was introduced from the outset, followed in due course by another two, and trophies for these were donated by the organisers in 1978 (the 'T' Pot and the Mate's Plate) and 1983 (The Love Mug). Every match was best of three games to fifteen, and Joan provided a magnificent spread to sustain everyone through a long and sometimes exhausting day. Then it was off to the Greene Manne, where a buffet had been laid out in a private room and where the various trophies were presented.

When Tom and Joan retired from their labours in 1989, Jolyon Griffiths bravely took on the President's Cup and did a superb job, as his successors Jonathon Bartle, Justin Cawthorne, Bhaswar Baral and Richard and Gareth Price have done. It's a real challenge to organize and cater for an all-day fives tournament for 32 people – let alone play in it as well. We are particularly grateful to Gareth for his efforts over recent years.

For the record, eighty different players have won the President's Cup, the most useful partner being Jeremy Schroeter, with eight victories. Over the years, only five players have won all four trophies – the Love Mug being the most elusive prize. The youngest President's Cup winner, at 16 years of age, is Jay Gravatt. Six players have won the Cup two years running: Colin Hindson (1958/9), Peter Snowsill (1961/2), David Hebblethwaite (1976/7), Jeremy Schroeter (1987/8), Iain de Weymarn (2001/2) and John Minta (2009/10).

This year, after forty-six uninterrupted years of play on the Merchant Taylors' School courts at Sandy Lodge, the President's Cup has had to move, as the School has redeveloped the site and is temporarily without courts. We are immensely grateful to St Paul's School for making their

courts and gallery available for this, the RFA Club's annual pre-Christmas celebration, dreamt up by Geoffrey Rimmer all those years ago.

David Barnes, December 2017

Update: With the demolition of the Fives courts at Merchant Taylors' School in 2017 the event moved to Marlborough College. In 2025 it was played, exceptionally, on the new courts at Winchester College.