

BRADFIELD COLLEGE FIVES HISTORY

Bradfield was founded in 1850, and before the decade was out some brick fives courts had been erected to the north of the Masters' Lawn, 'of a somewhat rudimentary shape... where the game could be played with either hand or bat'. Leach's *History of Bradfield College* records that 'they were originally four in number, divided by a high wall, which formed the back, and transverse walls descending in stages on either side, containing 'pepper-boxes' – projecting pieces of wall and buttresses, both of which threw the ball back from the direction of the striker. Surrounding the whole was a low standing wall. Here were played hand – and more rarely bat – fives and occasionally even racquets under difficulties.'

This intriguing description of the original courts is all we have to go on. On such limited evidence it is impossible to know where the 'projecting pieces of wall and buttresses' actually were, but the term 'pepper-box', associated with the sizeable buttress in Eton Fives, is probably misleading. The Bradfield projections were likely to have been structural features supporting the side walls and protruding only a few inches into the court. But this is speculation, partly based on the known design of the next set of courts to be built on the same site: two covered courts, 'erected by subscription in 1873'. These two courts, incorporated into the Maths Block built in 1975, had typical Winchester-style buttresses on the left wall, still visible today in two of the classrooms.

The influence of Winchester on Bradfield, as on other mid-Victorian schools such as Radley and Malvern, was considerable. Thomas Stevens, the founder of Bradfield, was 'the son of a Wykehamist and the friend of many Wykehamists' (Leach), while William Sewell, the founder of Radley, and Arthur Faber, the first Headmaster of Malvern, were both educated at Winchester. It was therefore not surprising that Bradfield, Radley and Malvern all played sports in their early days which had Wykehamical connections. Bradfield and Malvern both played Winchester football until around 1873, and all three schools built fives courts on the Winchester model established in 1862, when Winchester's first indoor courts were given to the College by Charles Ridding.

Singles and Doubles competitions within the school were held on the original open courts at Bradfield. A two-handled trophy dating from 1863 and won by F.A.Souper (nine years later the only O.B. to be appointed Headmaster of the College) is held by the College Archives, and a fine pewter tankard won by R.A.Fawssett in 1865 and presented to the School by his son in 1945, was still being competed for as recently as the 1980s.



The 1863 trophy

With the advent of the new courts, A.Scott presented a Challenge Cup for Single Fives in 1874, won by C.Powell. The next year there were 18 entries for the Doubles, Messrs Rogers and Hudson winning the cups presented by the Rev. Ernest ‘Gup’ Wilkinson, a popular master of the time. Rogers also won the Singles Cup. In 1877, Junior competitions were also played, the cups presented by Wilkinson and P.J.M.Rogers, Esq. – presumably the Senior winner of two years previously.

The Bradfield School (later College) Chronicle was first published in 1879, and fives reports appeared recording the ebb and flow of the sport’s popularity, judging by the numbers entering the various competitions. The letters pages carried complaints about leaky roofs, the price of fives balls at the Tuck Shop (threepence), squash players invading the courts and a lone appeal

from a bat-fives enthusiast who wanted the outside courts mended before being allowed to ‘fall into dilapidation’.

The first great crisis in Bradfield’s affairs, a financial one arising from Stevens’s autocratic style which allowed his headmasters no real freedom of action, came in 1881, by which time numbers in the school had fallen to 53. The future of the College was entrusted to H.B.Gray, an Old Wykehamist of legendary energy who became Warden, Headmaster and Bursar and proceeded steadily to rebuild the finances and the confidence of the school community over the next three decades. Indicative of the way things had declined is E.J.Bidwell’s recollection of 1882: ‘Rat-hunts were not unpopular, the chase being turned loose and pelted with fives balls. There were any number of rats in College at that time ...’

Fives balls were also used for the proper purpose in the early 1880s, as there was a full range of school competitions; but the second half of the decade saw a decline in activity, with only the Senior Singles regularly contested, and apparently inadequate organisation to rectify matters. In 1890 a letter was published requesting a fives fixture against Radley, probably with the idea of providing sterner competition for the complacent Bradfieldians. A response came almost immediately, and the first fives match against Radley was played away in 1892 and duly lost, both at Singles (2 games to 0) and Doubles (2 games to 0). It was not until many years later that inter-school matches were to be decided on points rather than games.

It was 1895 before the two schools met again at fives, this time at Bradfield, but the result was the same. Two Singles matches were played, best of three games each; and the Doubles match was best of five. The Radleians won every game, their volleying and low hitting commended by the *Chronicle* reporter. A letter in the next *Chronicle* asked why so little fives was being played in the School: ‘Why is it so common to see the courts empty, and yet hosts of loafers most afternoons infesting the iron bridge and Busket Hill, or throwing stones at one another in the neighbourhood of the cricket pavilion? Last year, with a pair rather above our average, with the games played in our own courts, we failed to make a match with Radley: a pretty clear proof of how low the standard is.’ The correspondent goes on to make the point that ‘fives cannot be learned in one or even two winters... There is a vast amount to acquire besides the stroke – the *real* fives stroke, low and hard, with either hand – and even this (the ABC) can only come with

constant practice.’ He even suggests that an element of compulsion should be employed in persuading young players to stick at the game – a system in force in some of the houses at Winchester when the present writer learnt his fives in the 1950s!

This heartfelt appeal to Bradfield’s youth met with little immediate response, as the next three Radley matches were lost. Nonetheless there seems to have been an increase in the numbers playing the game in 1898: 16 entrants for the Open Singles, 20 for the Open Doubles, and 41 for the Open Handicap, of which more below. In 1899 came the moment so long anticipated: L.F.Goldsmid and A.M.C.Nicholl, who had represented Bradfield three years running and were memorably described by Thomas Steele in Leach’s book as ‘old and wily’ by this stage, defeated Radley both at Singles (2-1) and Doubles (3-0).

The first victory over Radley, greeted with much relief and due praise in the *Chronicle*, also gave the reporter the opportunity to underline the importance of fitness (for the players) and of courtesy (for the gallery): you don’t cheer during a rally, nor do you do so when the opposition loses the rally through its own incompetence rather than your side’s excellence. All very schoolmasterly and old-fashioned, you may say; but miraculously, fives has retained this chivalrous spirit to this day.

A word here on the attempt to handicap fives. The handicaps in the 1898 competition at Bradfield ranged from +12 to –18, and according to the report in the *Chronicle*: ‘The games throughout were very even and reflected great credit on the judgement of the handicappers.’ Gardiner (–6), Goldsmid (–18), Layton (+4) and Clark (+3) were the last four, and both semi-finals (best of three games) ended 2-1. Goldsmid actually lost the first game against Gardiner before winning the next two narrowly, while Clark beat Layton 18-17 in the last game of their semi-final. Goldsmid, clearly the best player in the school, duly beat Clark 3-0 in the best-of-five final, but all the games were close. Conclusion: handicapping in fives can work, but the better player will usually win.

The Handicap Singles lasted about ten years at Bradfield before being abandoned, but the old scoring system allowing scores up to 18 under certain circumstances took much longer to die. It was based on the rackets model of ‘setting to 5’ when the score reached 13 all, or to 3 when the

score reached 14 all. This system survived in some schools into the 1950s or even later, although the Rugby Fives Association had stipulated, in its November 1930 *Rules of Rugby Fives*: 'Should each player score 14 points, the first player to score 2 points wins the game.' Modern rules are even clearer: 'Should each player score 14 points, the first player to reach 16 wins the game'.

The post-Goldsmid era saw an innovation in the 1900 Radley match: three players were selected, one to play Singles and the other two Doubles. Bradfield lost both matches, and the experiment was not repeated until 1907, after which it was used intermittently. The modern practice of playing two pairs per side first occurred in a match against the Old Boys in 1912, but it was not taken up in inter-school matches until 1923.

In the first decade of the new century, a number of schools built new courts in acknowledgement of the fact that fives was becoming more popular and that their old, often uncovered, courts were inadequate to the task. The two courts at Bradfield were already covered, although they suffered, as all outdoor courts do, from condensation when the weather turned warm and wet. And, although the 1904 *Chronicle* reported that: 'In recent times we seem to have acquired a veritable mania for Fives', and went on to describe the siege at the captain's door in the morning to book a court, Bradfield was to have to make do with these two courts for another 25 years or so. Radley was more fortunate, as two more courts were added to the existing pair in 1907.

Matches between the two rival Colleges continued to feature as a highlight of the season, albeit with several cancellations and postponements caused by influenza and other epidemics. In 1907 and 1908 the match was played in May, when on both occasions the heat of an early summer's day tested the endurance of the players to the limit. Bradfield won in Singles and Doubles both years, proving their fitness and achieving a first in 1908 – an away win! A match against Malvern, who had been playing Radley at fives since 1890, was arranged in 1913, but it was unfortunately cancelled, probably because of illness.

Matches with Radley continued throughout the First World war, with the exception of 1917, and each school had its share of success, particularly when playing at home. A new cup, leading to increased interest, was presented at Bradfield in 1920 for the best house pair, and a match was held against University College School. The courts were of course not lit in those days, and this

meant that many matches finished in near darkness. A report of a match against a visiting invitation team, ended: ‘At intervals ... gasping and sounds of combat were heard, and on the players emerging, it was discovered that Park had won the last game 15-12.’

The *Chronicle* reports were probably often written by boys, although sometimes the tone betrays a more pedagogic origin. At least two headmasters, Denning (in his early years) and Gray (who was in the fives pair when at Winchester), played fives, as did various members of the Senior Common Room. Names which stand out at this time are those of L. de O.Tollemache (housemaster of Hillside, 1920-33) and O.L.C.West (housemaster of ‘B’ House, 1915-21), both credited with coaching, and the former with refereeing, which was customary in those days. Another good player was C.S.B.Hayward, O.B., housemaster of ‘A’ House from 1919-34.

A perennial matter of interest which emerges from *Chronicle* reports is the differing pace of courts and balls. The very first Radley match report in 1892 had read: ‘The Radley Fives Courts were far smaller than our own, and their floors being made of stone instead of asphalt, the game was much faster than we were accustomed to.’ Opinions varied from report to report as to the relative pace of the Radley and Bradfield courts; but often a defeat would be attributed to the pace of the ‘foreign’ courts. And it seems clear that Bradfield played with a lighter and slower ball than Radley, and on a rather longer court. But these are favourite subjects for all fives players, a staple of post-match conversation and a cast-iron excuse for any shortcomings. *Plus ça change...*

In 1923, two pairs represented each school, and although the match was at home, Bradfield lost every game and the report in the *Chronicle* was terse and unforgiving. The response to this minor crisis was an intelligent one: to give the boys experience, invitation teams of adults played more matches against them. Thus, at the start of the next season, the Common Room fielded 3 pairs against the College and, while Tollemache and Hayward duly won, the second and third pairs were beaten. This potential confidence-booster soon became a fixture, in both senses; as did matches against various visiting Old Bradfieldian combinations.

During the second half of the 1920s, Bradfield fives came of age. Interest in fives generally was on the increase, with the formation of the Fives Associations and the standardisation of rules and

court dimensions. The Rugby Fives Association, founded in 1927, became the parent body for both Rugby and Winchester fives, the two games being closely related. National competitions were being contemplated, the Varsity Match was first contested in 1925 and the Cyriax Cup started as an Open Club Doubles Championship in 1926. The first Public Schools Rugby Fives Championships were to take place just 4 years later, in 1930.

Inter-school matches were more widely arranged, and Bradfield was no exception to this, adding Winchester (1926) and Malvern (1930) fixtures to the list. The 1926 Winchester match was the first to be decided on points (charmingly referred to as 'aces') rather than games, but the two systems coexisted for a while thereafter. Travel was becoming easier, and visiting adult sides (often composed largely of O.B.s) came from Oxford and London to play against school teams. There was a steadily growing demand for more, and better, facilities as the Bradfield team discovered that their school opponents had blocks of at least four courts and wanted matches between fours rather than pairs.

Who were the outstanding players of this period of growth and development? The best of them seems to have been I.C.Stuart, who had the remarkable record of winning five Singles competitions at school between 1922 and 1926: two Under 16 and three Open. How he failed to represent Oxford against Cambridge in his three years there is a mystery. Other good players were P.H.Cox, in successive winning sides against Radley (1913 & 1914); E.F.Power and N.E.Catchpole, joint architects of the 1921 win against Radley; R.G.Shaw and H.J.Sherren, who, in Stuart's absence, defeated two strong Oxford pairs in 1926 and ensured that future visitors from Oxford were even stronger; and I.H.G.Gilbert and F.G.Watson-Smyth, who not only beat both pairs in an Oxford four in 1929 but also managed a home win the same year against a Winchester pair containing the great Roger Winlaw, destined a year later to become the first winner of the Public Schools Rugby Fives Singles.

Bradfield had certainly improved sufficiently as a fives-playing school by 1929 to justify the building of new courts. The *Chronicle* reported in its 50th Jubilee number in 1929: 'The two new fives courts, opposite M.S. (Modern Side, now House-on-the-Hill), are now approaching completion and will probably be finished before the end of the term. To the unexperienced (sic)

eye they look more like film studios, and much too luxurious for a mere game.’ Whoever wrote that must have had a vivid imagination!

The new courts, built by subscription at a cost of about a thousand pounds and opened in 1929 with a match between the College and the Senior Common Room, were a sound investment. Judged at first to be too slow, at any rate by comparison with the old courts, they settled down within a few years to be the equal of any Winchester Fives courts in the country. Just one thing stood to their disadvantage: they were not enclosed. This meant that they were vulnerable to condensation, and also that rain, leaves and even snow were on occasions liable to invade the courts. The back walls were only five feet high, unlike the high back walls at Radley and Winchester, and although there were initially folding shutters available to enclose the courts when not in use, these had little effect and were eventually removed.

These minor faults did not stop the rising popularity of fives at Bradfield in the 1930s. To have courts both up and down the hill was a luxury, and there was, according to Mr Tollemache’s report in 1930: ‘an increase in the number of players and ... a more even standard of achievement throughout the School.’ He commented, however, on the slowness of players about the court and ‘weak support by the man under the line to his partner in doubles’ as being the most noticeable faults of even the better players.

In those days, and in some schools right up to the 1950s, it was customary in Winchester Fives for one player in a doubles pair to crouch under the bar at the front of the court to guard the buttress. This meant that his partner had almost all the play, and it turned doubles into a game of singles with occasional interventions (if the player ‘under the line’ was good enough) at the front of the court. The system was gradually abandoned in favour of a more even distribution of roles, with the right hand court player expected to move forward and retrieve the ball when it hit the buttress.

The inaugural Malvern match in 1930 on the new Bradfield courts showed that the Malvernians had already, because of the unusual dimensions of their own courts, adopted something like the modern system. The *Chronicle* reporter noted: ‘The Malvern first string gave a fine exhibition of volleying, and the position he took up near the right hand wall half way up the court proved

disconcerting.’ It was to be another fifteen years before the *Chronicle* recorded: ‘This season (1945) the accepted method of having one man grovelling on the ground has been proved unsatisfactory; it seems better for him to stand up and volley the ball.’

The 1930s saw Bradfield’s first representatives in the Varsity Match: M.B.Hall, whose three sons were all to captain Bradfield at fives in their turn, appeared three times for Oxford (1935-7); R.E.Henshaw was selected for Oxford in 1938; and M.Paine overcame strong competition to make the 1939 Cambridge side as a freshman, and doubtless would have played for the University in 1940 and 1941 had the series not been interrupted by more urgent matters.

Bradfield sport generally was of a high standard in the 1930s. John Blackie, in his *Bradfield 1850-1975*, points out just how many sports were developing at this time: hockey, tennis, golf, swimming, fives, squash, boxing, fencing, athletics, cross-country and of course cricket and football were all producing good results and successful participants at school and beyond. If this sounds too much like Sparta, remember that Athens also had its say, as the triennial Greek Play continued to show the School at its very best in classical studies and drama.

Reading the *Chronicle* reports on the fives microcosm, one gets the impression of purposeful activity, well-coached and enthusiastic. An example from 1935: ‘A great deal has been done this year to improve School Fives. The system of House Courts has been reintroduced, and the best players in the Houses both Over and Under 16 have been coached by Mr Bellamy and Mr Hayward.’ Matches, sometimes with as many as three pairs per side, were played annually against Winchester, Radley and Malvern, as well as the Senior Common Room, the Old Bradfieldians, the Rugby Fives Association, the Jesters and various Oxford teams; and the Under 16s now had a regular fixture against the Nautical College, Pangbourne. Inter-house competitions were also keenly contested.

In 1937, Bradfield entered two pairs for the Public Schools Rugby Fives Championships in London, where R.E.Henshaw and M.Paine reached the third round of the Doubles and then were beaten by a pair from Oundle, the ultimate winners. Henshaw also did well in the Singles to reach the quarter-finals, again losing to the eventual winner, from Alleyn’s. The next year, Paine lost to the same player in the quarter-finals. The *Chronicle* report concluded: ‘The absence of the

butress in the Rugby game makes singles far more interesting than those in the Winchester game, but it is an obstacle in doubles as both pairs are crowded in the back of the court, which makes for greater muddling and confusion amongst those accustomed to playing with the butress.’ The idea that the *absence* of a butress might be accounted an obstacle is certainly original!

C.S.B.Hayward retired from Bradfield in 1940. The *Chronicle* ‘Valete’ read: ‘In recent years his hardest work has been done in coaching the School Fives. The excellent records of the School pair throughout this period bear witness to the success of his efforts. Surely there will linger in the Courts some distant echo of his voice calling out the score in matches, a little lugubrious perhaps, but never hurried and never incorrect.’

Although the Public Schools Championships were suspended during the War years, some school matches continued to take place, despite a shortage of balls. Illness struck in 1941 and 1942, wiping out almost all the fixtures, but in the other years Bradfield managed to play schools as far away as Tonbridge, Eastbourne, Haileybury and Dulwich, as well as the old foes Radley and Winchester. The only match played in 1941 was at Oxford, with each pair playing one match of Rugby Fives (at Keble) and one of Winchester Fives (at Worcester).

Outstanding players from this period were D.R.Gibbs and B.C.Elgood, who played three years together (1938-40) as a pair and lost only one game in that time, R.L.Elgood, A.C.Bambridge and H.M.Reeves. Of these five, the middle three each played once for Cambridge after the War: B.C.Elgood in 1948, R.L.Elgood in 1949 and A.C.Bambridge in 1950.



The 1949 Cambridge University VIII

1946 saw the first Fives report in the *Chronicle* by A.J.N.Young, just returned from the War. 'It is good to see plenty of Fives being played, even with the modern unresponsive balls. But elastoplast helps to lengthen their life!' 1947 was the worst winter in living memory, and the courts were very popular, although the ball situation had deteriorated still further. Young's report exhorted house games captains to get their 'new boy athletes' on court: 'Bradfield has a long fives tradition... Let us keep it up. The good games players have always played it.' He also praised the old (down-the-hill) courts as being faster than the new and giving a 'much better game except in muggy weather.' Malvern (home) and Radley (away) were both beaten, but a visit to Winchester proved unrewarding.

Results were respectable over the next few years, but the standard improved further with the arrival in 1950 of M.R.Ricketts, an Old Shirburnian who had played three times for Oxford and captained a winning side in the 1949 Varsity Match. Alan Young's valedictory report as master-in-charge in 1951 read: 'At present the emphasis is all on hard hitting, but the players of old were more subtle, and Fives is a game in which there is much scope for cunning.' Michael Ricketts's opening remarks were rather more prosaic: 'The two main weaknesses appear to be serving and the taking of service.'

More fives was now being played in the Michaelmas Term, and the standard was improving as a direct result of the experience gained. The example set by Ricketts, a Cyriax Cup finalist in 1952 and 1953 and the finest player to have coached the game at Bradfield, had its effect as well. Top-class players started to come down to play matches for the Jesters and other invitation sides against the School, and the response was encouraging. Under 16 fives started to feature again in the reports of competitions.

Throughout the 1950s, Bradfield Fives was a force to be reckoned with. The 1951, 1952 and 1954 sides were unbeaten in school matches against Radley, Tonbridge, Marlborough and Winchester. J.J.Broad, C.B.Pool, W.Laimbeer and R.C.Chapman were among the best players of the early fifties, with D.H.Beevers and A.W.Fuller coming through in the middle of the decade. Beevers went on, presumably after National Service, to represent Cambridge in 1959 and 1960.

His father, H.D.Beevers, a founder member of the RFA back in 1927, had been bringing an invitation team to play against the School since 1951, so his son's success must have brought him much satisfaction.

In 1957 an extremely unusual phenomenon occurred: the team against Winchester (and subsequently Radley) was composed of four left-handers – a considerable handicap when it comes to serving on a Winchester Fives court! These four were T.A.Woof, C.J.O.King, S.W.G.Groves and J.M.Tyrrell, the last of whom went on to play for Oxford in 1960 and 1961. One of his opponents in the 1961 Cambridge side was another Bradfieldian, M.D.Seymour, a top-class court games player with a fine school record, who also played for Cambridge in 1962 and 1963 – the first O.B. to represent that University three times at Rugby Fives.



The 1st IV 1960

John Blackie writes in his *Bradfield 1850-1975*: ‘An attempt to found an O.B. Fives Club was made in 1961 by M.D.Seymour (1954-60), and for a few years the game was organised quite keenly but this did not last.’ This rather blunt sentence fails to do justice to what has been, over the years, a considerable effort on the part of a number of people, including at the outset C.V.Fawell, one of Seymour’s school partners, to assemble in one place and at the same time four fives players who might possibly be described as Old Bradfieldians. The present writer, whose association with the School had as yet been only intermittent, recalls one particularly bleak evening in the early 1960s in South London, where his childhood friend Michael Seymour had invited him to play fives for an unidentified team against a club called the ‘Old Dunstonians’. Our team turned out to be the Old Bradfieldians – and the other one turned out to be rather good!



Cambridge University 1962

Michael Seymour extreme left front row

To be fair to Seymour and his associates, the O.B. Fives Club in 1964/5, for example, played a total of 12 fixtures, winning half of them. As well as a match versus the School, opponents included Old Whitgiftians, Old Merchant Taylors’, Alleyn Old Boys, Cambridge University

Sparrows, RFA Club, Jesters, Bank of England, Eastbourne College and, somewhat surprisingly, St. Thomas' Hospital. Since that time, others such as C.J.Thomas have organised regular matches under the O.B. banner, and the Club actually won the National Club Championship (Wood Cup) in 1995, albeit with a team containing one honorary Old Bradfieldian alongside three actual ones.

Another of Seymour's initiatives, this time while he was still at school, was the inauguration of a 'Captain's Book' with the results and detailed scores of school matches and, when the captain was keen enough, a short report on each. This custom was to last more than thirty years and fill several exercise books with Wisden-like information.

The School fixture list in the early 1960s was a respectable one, consisting of matches against Radley, Winchester, Malvern, Tonbridge and Marlborough, plus visiting teams from the Jesters, O.B.s, Oxford University and the RFA (usually in the guise of H.D.Beevers' IV). This meant, however, that the Bradfield players were very inexperienced in Rugby Fives, only playing away to Marlborough every two years. Nonetheless the standard reached by such as H.E.M.Murphy, R.J.Pakeman, A.O.Warburg, J.Leggett and M.Lintell was high.

Bradfield had entered players for the Schools Championships at Whitgift in the Easter holidays since the mid 1950s, but they had never made a great impression on the ranks of more experienced Rugby Fives players. Seymour played three years running and reached the third round on two occasions, while Leggett made it to the fourth round of the 1961 singles and, with his partner Warburg, the same round of the doubles. The same pair were to go one better in reaching the semi-finals the next year, and the Bradfield IV were undefeated that season and the next.

Meanwhile a champion was waiting in the wings. In 1963, the Bradfield 1st pair contained a young man who was to play cricket for England, G.R.J.Roope. But it was his partner, A.J.Spicer, who was to become the first Bradfieldian to win a National Fives title – not while at school, but at Bristol University in 1965, when he won the British Universities Singles Championship held that year in Durham. Then, to prove it was no fluke, he retained the title the following year in London. It was in those two same years, 1965 and 1966, that M.Lintell, a member of the successful 1961 Bradfield team, was selected to play for Cambridge.

Back at school, things continued to go well in the latter years of M.R.Ricketts's period as master-in-charge, with good players such as J.Lintell, K.C.M.Pink, R.S.Roy, D.Shilton, C.M.Tod and K.Michel. J.D.C.Vargas, an expert Eton Fives player, took on the fives in 1966, handing over to the present writer in 1968. By that time, another Rugby Fives fixture (Merchant Taylors') had been added to the list, but no Bradfieldians entered the Schools Championships between 1967 and 1971, and the results in school matches were patchy despite the presence of talented players such as M.J.Smith, S.J.Phelps, P.M.Hall, J.F.Webb and O.T.Steed.

The late 1960s witnessed the youth revolution which had its effect even in country boarding schools. Briefly, it became 'cool' to drop out of organised activities, grow one's hair and turn away from established structures, and this took its toll on sport as well as on other aspects of school life. Bradfield survived the storm better than some, and the fives microcosm with it, but there was one unrelated factor above all which made it hard to organise the game properly: there were four courts, but in two different locations with a substantial hill in between!

It was at this time that the decision was taken to organise more junior matches in order to ensure a supply of players for the future. Other sports, notably hockey, were doing the same, and boys were becoming increasingly specialised in their choice of sport. As Bradfield provided an ever wider range of activities, and as team sports grew in size and importance throughout the school, pressure came on minority sports such as fives, which had been played by good games players as an extra activity, often on Sundays, to become more 'professional'. Although this approach allowed initially moderate players to improve their standard considerably by practice, it was a mixed blessing, narrowing the field for team selection and causing the fives courts to be ignored by large numbers of good games players.

Another feature of the early 1970s was the growing practice of 'taking a weekend'. The opening of the Maidenhead – Swindon section of the M4 in 1971 put an end to the relative isolation of Bradfield, and the College authorities had to decide whether to allow boys to go home regularly at weekends. At first, a limited ration was permitted, but gradually it became more and more difficult for the master-in-charge to raise a team to play the Jesters, the RFA Club or the Old Boys on a Sunday. This was a blow to the concept of fives as an enjoyable part-time pursuit, and

the Club matches had to be transferred to Saturdays, when only specialist fives players were available – and sometimes not even then, due to the pressure of other activities.

A steady supply of left-handers became a feature of Bradfield fives teams in the early 1970s: C.M.B.Hall, P.B.Matthews, A.Archibald, J.P.Cornish and H.C.J.Collier all made life a lot easier for their right-handed doubles partners, and as singles had not yet been introduced into school matches, the weaker hands of both players did not come under severe examination. There was a well-contested annual internal singles competition for the Fawssett Tankard, but even fanatics will admit that the Winchester fives court is not ideal for singles. A.J.Roy, M.T.Bodkin, G.G.Fetherston, P.McC.Ker, D.C.Hunter and the future Kabaka of Buganda R.F.Mutebi were all useful members of early 1970s teams.

It was in 1974 that things started to happen again for Bradfield fives. An outstandingly unselfish captain, R.J.Hope, introduced a scheme known as ‘Fives for Amateurs’ to encourage non-team players to take to the courts on a regular basis; and the school started an official ‘Introduction to Games’ for first-year pupils, which led to a larger number of Bradfieldians taking up minority sport. The very next year, a successful 1st IV emerged under H.C.J.Collier’s leadership, containing A.M.Bradshaw, M.C.J.Nicholas and K.C.Smith, the last of whom was to become the first Bradfieldian to win a National Schools title.

1975 was the year in which the old fives courts down the hill were closed and partly demolished to make way for the new Maths Schools, so the main part of the season was played on two courts. But out of the ashes a phoenix rose... A plan was conceived to build two more courts up the hill, finance was made available, and by the start of the 1976 Michaelmas term an enclosed block of four courts stood ready for use. An eight-a-side match between the Old Bradfieldians and the RFA Club was arranged to open the courts on September 19th, with more Cambridge blues on show than Bradfield had previously witnessed – and the courts were unanimously declared a success.

Another innovation in 1975 was the RFA’s introduction of Under 16 Schools Championships to run alongside the Open event at Whitgift. Bradfield entered both Open and Under 16 events that year, and the experience gained was invaluable, enabling K.C.Smith to win the Colts’ singles

title in 1976, beating N.P.Straker (St. Dunstan's) in a three-game final. Smith had already won the Under 16 title at the West of England Schools Championships – a competition which had been in abeyance for two seasons – in January that year.

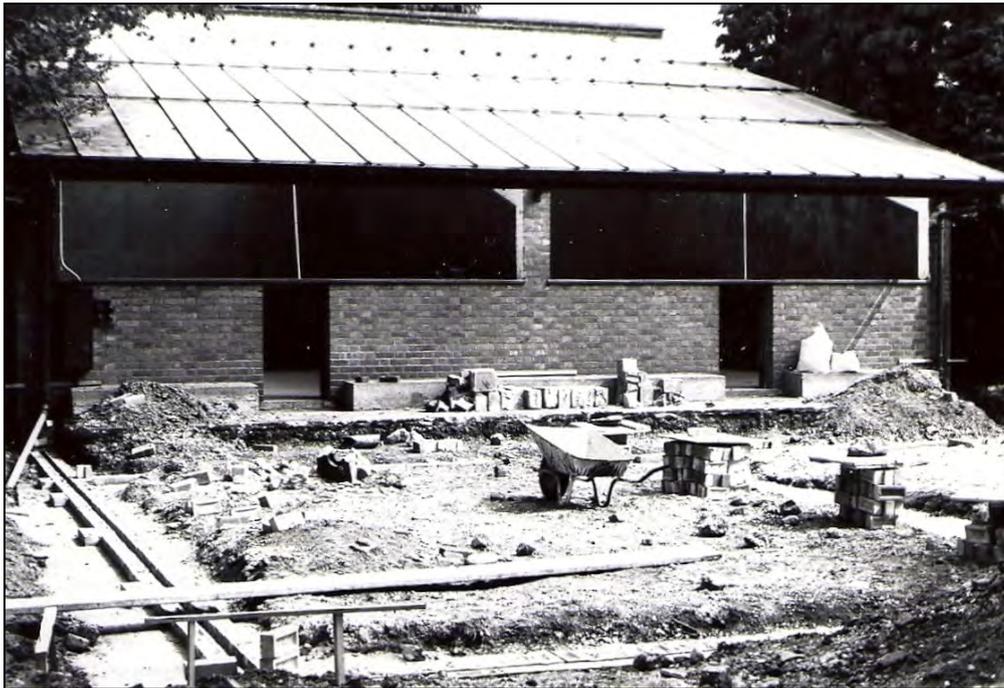


The 1975 squad

The new courts, coupled with Smith's example, brought a dramatic increase in the numbers of boys playing fives at Bradfield. People became aware of the game and started playing it for recreation, not just to get into a team, and a courts booking system was fully operational. The fixture list was restricted by the Games Committee, but we were allowed a new match at three levels against St. Dunstan's, then one of the leading schools in Rugby fives, which helped all our teams to gain experience at the top level.

In 1977, K.C.Smith became only the third player from a Winchester fives school to win the National Schools Open singles since its inception in 1930. In the final he defeated S.Ashton from

South Trafford College, Manchester, and the report in the RFA Handbook read: ‘... they played an exhausting final in which much of the fives was of a very high standard. One dare not guess how far Smith had to run in order to frustrate an opponent who probably had greater experience and a greater range of shots.’



The 1929 courts pictured here during construction of two new courts in 1976

This success was the precursor to a lengthy period of achievement for Bradfield fives players. The standard of fives played in school matches improved at all levels, and K.K-Mengrai, the 1978 captain, went so far in his report as to suggest: ‘... can we not begin to say that fives at Bradfield is the major of all the minor sports?’ Mengrai himself, H.M.Barford and N.D.H.Spencer all played serious fives after leaving school: Mengrai captaining Durham University; Barford representing Exeter University; and Spencer winning 3 half-blues at Oxford (1980-82), the first Bradfieldian to achieve this hat-trick since M.B.Hall in the 1930s. J.J.Birrane, unable through injury to play in 1977, and T.E.L.Wright were also useful members of the 1978 squad.

A recurring comment in the captain’s book at this time concerns the problem of bruising. The ‘Cliff’ ball which was the only one then available was both hard and heavy, and minor damage to

the hands was sometimes the outcome. Add to this the elbow strain which could result from overhitting when the ball began to lose its pace, and you have a game which was on occasions less enjoyable than it should have been. It was nobody's fault: Cliffs, the manufacturers, were doing their best, as were the RFA, to improve matters, but it took a revolution in ball-making in the 1990s (using a rubber core rather than a cork one) to produce a faster, lighter projectile less prone to cause bruising.

E.W.Vinelott, another left-hander, was the highly enthusiastic captain in 1979 and 1980. Despite suffering a thunderous defeat in the first match of his tenure at the super-strong St. Dunstan's, he managed to assemble some effective teams and himself forged a fine partnership with the rangy P.A.F.Wilson. This pair won the Manchester Youth Championships doubles in November 1979 and went on to reach the finals of both the West of England Schools doubles and the National Schools doubles in 1980. Two faithful members of the Bradfield IV in 1979 and 1980 were A.D.Johnson and P.J.Richardson, the latter going on to achieve selection for Oxford in 1983.

Vinelott's Colts and Junior Colts sides were full of talent. A.Brown and J.J.Davies, two fine games players, surprised even themselves when they both reached the final of the Schools Under 16 singles at Whitgift in April 1979. Brown won, but together they lost in the semi-final of the doubles to the eventual winners, Radley. A mix-up over dates meant that the master-in-charge was on holiday in France and missed the whole event!

Bradfield had further success at the Manchester event in November 1979, as the Colts, this time in the form of R.P.Hollins and B.P.L.M.Wright, managed, after a shaky start, to win the Under 16 doubles title. Taking both the doubles titles at that tournament served to underline the depth of talent in the School at the time and gave the players and the coaching staff confidence for the future.

A word here about the support offered by members of the Senior Common Room. Not only were C.J.Saunders and M.C.Parkinson particularly helpful in encouraging boys in their houses to give fives a go, they were both willingly involved in hosting matches when the master-in-charge was away with another team – and in running the game in 1977 when he was away on sabbatical leave.

A large number of other masters, including N.J.Barton, C.Read-Wilson, G.M.Laimbeer, D.J.Hodkinson and K.H.Cobb played fives, spurred on by R.H.Youdale, and eight-a-side (even on one occasion ten-a-side) matches against the School took place. In October 1980, for example, the fifth SCR pair consisted of N.A.Marshall and T.J.Ronan, two future masters-in-charge aptly described in the captain's report as 'inexperienced, but could go far'!

1981 turned out to be a vintage year. Brown and Hollins won the West of England Schools doubles in January and went on to even greater success in the National Schools in March, Brown winning the singles title and, with Hollins, the doubles. In addition to this, in N.G.Layton and I.P.Levett the School had the best regular second pair that this writer has witnessed. The results for this IV read played 11, won 11 – and this included away wins over St. Paul's, St. Dunstan's and Merchant Taylors', as well as a home victory against a strong Jesters side. Then, in October of the same year, Hollins and Wright won the Open doubles title at the Manchester Youth Championships, while J.M.Tremellen and R.M.Layton took the Under 16 doubles.



The 1981 IV

Further success was to come in 1982. Hollins won the West of England Schools singles – his nemesis, I.W.Jack of St. Dunstan's, having withdrawn from the tournament – and Tremellen and Layton the Under 16 doubles. The IV did well in matches, with S.G.Bates and N.J.Bradford improving hugely during the season, but the results in the National Schools were disappointing.

A characteristic of minority sports in boarding schools is for certain houses to specialise in the one or the other sport. Various attempts were made to spread fives more widely, among them a Minor League competition which started at about this time. And the 'Introduction To Games' scheme was still in place, to make sure that every newcomer was aware of the wide range of sports available. Both these undertakings were important, but they were only effective as long as they had broad support at the house level.

An early highlight of the 1983 season was an away victory by the 1st IV (Bradford, Tremellen, Layton and J.P.Boorman) over St. Dunstan's (Jack, Moar, Beauchamp and Bishop); the modest Bradford's report concludes: '... what a great pleasure it is to be a member of this side.' A game of singles had by now become an integral part of school matches with Rugby fives schools, and Bradfield had just enough serious players to field a 2nd IV as well whenever possible in addition to the Colts and Junior Colts sides. It was not to be long before Junior (1st year) matches were also on the programme, in an effort to maintain the momentum.

Although by now an established 1st IV player, Layton was still young enough to qualify as a Colt and he won the Under 16 singles title at both the West of England and the National Schools Championships in 1983. Tremellen reached the final of the Open Schools singles a year young, and he and Layton contested the doubles final as well, losing to old rivals St. Dunstan's.

In the Michaelmas term we were again successful in Manchester, Tremellen beating Layton in the singles final, and the two of them winning the doubles. Disaster occurred shortly after this, however, when Layton suffered a horrendous knee injury playing football which put him out of fives for the rest of the season. This stroke of ill fortune turned what was potentially a triumphant season into a real battle, especially for the captain, Tremellen, whose game suffered as a result. Even in relatively prosperous times, the loss of a key player from a team of four is a crippling blow. The team never really recovered from it, although Boorman played impressively and

J.B.W.Keaney, M.R.Wood, D.R.H.Spencer and C.A.J.Glennie (who was to play for Oxford in 1989) tried hard to make up for the loss. Sadly, P.M.Last, a potentially effective left-hander, was so badly bruised that he was unable to play much.



The 1984 squad

What turned out to be our penultimate trip to Manchester, in the autumn of 1984, brought further success, Spencer winning the Under 16 singles and, with R.J.Maitland, the doubles. They confirmed their quality at the West of England Schools in January 1985 by taking the Colts doubles, although both were found wanting in the singles. Keaney beat good players to win the West of England singles plate and the National Schools singles plate. Results in school matches were mixed.

1985 ended on a muted note, with a small entry to Manchester and little success in the tournament, and the start to 1986 was similar, although Spencer and Maitland reached the semi-finals of the West of England Schools doubles. The general depth of fives in the school was declining, while St. Paul's, Radley and the ever-present St. Dunstan's were growing stronger. The first-year players, however, were able to win their matches, coached by the evergreen F.E.Templer and M.C.Parkinson.

While things were going through a bit of a dip at Bradfield, Old Bradfieldians at university were flourishing. R.P.Hollins won half-blues at Oxford in 1984, 1985 and 1987, taking the British Universities doubles title with C.M.Denny in 1984. J.M.Tremellen was selected to play for Cambridge from 1986 to 1988 and won the British Universities singles and, with D.G.Moar, the doubles in 1986. R.M.Layton, playing for Durham, won the British Universities singles in 1987. Between them, these three represented the British Universities half a dozen times or more in the annual matches with the RFA.

Layton and Tremellen were also to have success in the Winchester Fives National doubles, played in quadrennial rotation since 1982 at Bradfield, Winchester, Sedbergh and Malvern. They took the title five times in all, in 1989, 1990 and from 1993-95. In 1990 they also reached the final of the Cyriax Cup, the Rugby Fives National doubles; and Layton, at one stage ranked No. 2 in the country, contested the National singles final in 1988 and 1992.

Back at Bradfield, Maitland's side in 1987 got off to a good start by defeating a strong St. Paul's team, albeit at home. Against an even stronger 1st IV from St. Dunstan's the next week, however, we suffered a narrow defeat, singles fitness being the deciding factor. J.N.B.Birch and A.J.Chitty were building a solid reputation for themselves, but the fourth spot in the team was often a weakness, as the stock of respectable players had diminished, not through lack of organisation or encouragement. Hockey leagues and the All-Weather Pitch (opened in 1985) were taking their toll, and there was a dearth of players from that games mecca, G House.

It was a predictable struggle in 1988, with losses across the board to the strong schools, a test of character for our players. However, a pleasant visit from Loretto on tour, and a tour of our own to Sherborne and Blundell's at the end of February redeemed matters somewhat for the 1st IV. We did well to hold Blundell's in the doubles, but they were too strong in the singles. How hard it is for Winchester fives players to get truly fit for Rugby fives singles! Birch was a determined captain who went on to play fives at Exeter and win selection for the British Universities side in his third year there.

A consistent 1st IV led by J.G.Hibbard in 1989 and 1990 recovered well from the usual tough start against St. Paul's and St. Dunstan's. D.J.Wiggins, T.M.Hebblethwaite and M.A.E.Fetiveau

learnt a lot during the two years, and the captain's pithy reports ('Outclassed, but we enjoyed it!') bore witness to a plucky team. The younger teams had much better results, and all benefitted from some inspirational coaching by members of the SCR, including F.E.Templer, N.A.Marshall, T.J.Ronan and P.T.Fraser.

A broken leg – another football accident – put Fétiqueau out of the first part of the 1990/1 season, but Hebblethwaite, R.W.Fox, M.J.Burns and B.J.Backhouse played well to defeat St. Paul's (away) and St. Dunstan's (home), and Fétiqueau played very well on his return in February. S.J.A.Lord, a player who had commitments elsewhere, featured in the win against Merchant Taylors'. He was later to play in three victorious Oxford sides from 1993 to 1995, captaining the university in his last year and sharing in a British Universities Doubles victory. We were in fact unbeaten in matches versus schools in 1991, and all that was missing was success in Schools competitions.

Fox took over as captain in 1991/2, leading yet another team with a key player, in this case Burns, absent for most of the season. Backhouse, J.P.A.Ball and M.J.Dorman (promoted from the Colts) played courageously, managing to win three school matches but being outgunned by the usual suspects – plus Clifton, who had a truly excellent side that year. The writer of this article retired from teaching in 1992 and handed over the fives to N.A.Marshall after twenty-four years in charge.

Neil Marshall's first year as master-in-charge, saw an inexperienced side under Dorman's leadership building for the future. Members of this team included B.R.Elfick, J.G.Bulloch and R.A.Bower. As well as the usual school matches, two tours took place, one to the not-so-remote Clifton and Sherborne, and the second to the United States, where a group of six players attempted to keep the accompanying adults, Messrs Marshall and Fraser, in order.

The next season, with the same captain and a team strengthened by the addition of good young players such as J.Sinton, P.M.J.Lord, J.H.McGill and R.J.Holland, the 1st and 2nd IVs were back to winning ways. In January Dorman and Elfick won the West of England doubles title, while Sinton and Holland emulated them in the Colts doubles. Three months later, Elfick showed the tremendous progress he had made by reaching the final of the National Schools singles, where he



The 1994 harvest from the West of England Schools competition

lost to another left-hander. And to cap it all, Sinton and Lord won the Marchant Cup, the largest trophy in fives, for the National Under 16 doubles.



Sinton & Lord win the Marchant Cup in 1994

While things were going swimmingly at the top, there was cause for concern lower down in the school. The fives report recorded the 'expansion of hockey to unprecedented levels', taking the majority of talented games players away from minority sports. The All-Weather Pitch, as its name implies, was making it possible to play hockey in almost all conditions, including under floodlights, removing at a stroke the main advantages of indoor sport. So raising a fives team to play at Junior Colts and Junior levels was becoming a real challenge, and the Juniors lost all five of their matches as if to prove the point.

The new Sports Centre, opened in 1995, was another source of attraction, but fives remained competitive at the top of the school for another couple of seasons, thanks to a fine captain in J.H.McGill and other good players at his disposal, of whom Sinton, Lord, Holland (still a Colt) and S.C.Lightfoot were the pick. Two other VIth formers who played regularly for the 2nd IV, I.D.Chaplin and M.J.E.Underwood, were so keen on the game that they were later to become the driving force behind the institution of fives at Warwick University – played with a specially developed ball on squash courts. This initiative lasted for several years and led to good participation by Warwick in the British Universities Championships.

Holland was the winner of the West of England Colts singles title in January 1995, and he and R.D.Nevin reached the Colts doubles final. Holland went on to win the National Colts singles in March, and he and Sinton reached the Open doubles final. These superb achievements served to mask the looming crisis in Bradfield fives, although the master-in-charge reported in the Chronicle as follows: 'The fourth form struggled as usual; inexperience, lack of strength and excessive hockey conspiring to hinder progress.' '...no real impact will be made, unless new players, and good games players at that, are attracted to the sport next year. The authorities profess their support for fives, but seem unaware of the difficulties that this sport faces. It will die, sadly, at Bradfield within five years, unless something is done to redress the balance in its favour.'

Ironically, 1995 was the year in which, as already mentioned above, the O.B. Fives Club won the Wood Cup for the National Club Championship, beating in successive rounds the West of England Club, Alleyn Old Boys, the White Rose Club and, in the final, the mighty Manchester Y.M.C.A. The team for the final consisted of R.M.Layton, J.M.Tremellen, P.M.Last and

A.G. Wilson, the latter an honorary member of the Club. All played well, it goes without saying, but Last produced the form of his life to defeat the YM top pair of Wayne Enstone and John Beswick and bring about a shock result.

The advent of coeducation at Bradfield brought together a select group of girls, under the tutelage of Denise Hall-Wilton, to play some good fives in 1994 and 1995, entering the Ladies' Winchester Fives Championships in both years. Ailsa Mackay was the first girls' captain, and she and Emily Prest were the outstanding players in an enthusiastic group. Denise had in fact been encouraging Bradfield girls to play fives for a decade or so, and she was often mentioned in dispatches by Bradfield boy captains, thanking her for her faithful support of their matches. For many years she and Paula Smith had formed the core of the Sunday evening club – a disparate group of fives players, some of them beginners, who came to play social fives at Bradfield on a weekly basis. Reading University students were also encouraged to take advantage of this opportunity. As a result of Denise's initiative, the Ladies' Winchester Fives Championships have been held since 1988, visiting Bradfield every four years; and a Mixed Doubles competition has been held at Bradfield almost every year since 1997.

The 1996 boys' season started well, with Lord winning the West of England singles and, with Holland, the doubles as well. Unfortunately, Sinton damaged a shoulder, keeping him out for most of the rest of the season, and Lightfoot picked up a bad bruise, so once again what looked like a vintage year became rather less, with defeats by St. Dunstan's and Merchant Taylors'. Finally, just before the Nationals, Holland twisted his ankle and was unable to play, leaving Lord and the by now recovered Sinton to reach the doubles final, where they lost to a good Sedbergh pair.

Meanwhile, the games authorities in the form of S.A. Long, Director of Sport at Bradfield, had heard the cry for help in the last Chronicle and agreed to support fives by allowing the institution of a Junior House league, which injected some fresh enthusiasm into the sport. The master-in-charge press-ganged a couple of young recruits from the Common Room to help with the younger players, but sadly neither of them stayed long enough to have a lasting effect.

Only Holland was left in 1997, and he did his best to build a senior squad around him. C.S.T.Rees, F.A.S.Gray and O.D.Proudlock improved enough to win a couple of matches at 1st IV level, while the 2nd IV, made up of a combination of J.E.N.Price, H.R.W.Sabin, R.J.Pack, J.A.C.Wilson and J.G.Dyson, won five of theirs. Holland himself, lacking competition at school, managed to win the West of England singles in January but was beaten by a Bedfordian in the quarter-finals of the Nationals. Internal school competitions were not played this year.

The 1998 season saw left-hander Gray take over as captain, with a side lacking in stars but possibly the more determined because of it. All the previous year's players (minus Holland and Rees) improved their consistency by hard practice, and there were some very well-fought matches. The Colts, too, were a committed group of players, but there was little support for the game lower down in the school, despite the good intentions of two years before. Meanwhile girls' fives too was struggling, with 'more conscripts than volunteers', although Anna Moss-Gibbons and Suzie Trevor tried hard as successive captains to involve their recruits.

One of the signs that all was not well was that schools with which Bradfield had previously had good contests started to pick teams of lesser strength to provide a close match. A fresh attempt (called 'Introduction To Activities') was made to teach the basics of the game to the new intake in the 1998 Michaelmas term, and this attracted some youthful talent to the fives courts, giving hope for the future. The 1st and 2nd IVs were respectable, with T.H.Scott-Malden and I.S.Peacock-Edwards making a good first pair, backed up gamely by D.Williams and R.Collinson. J.A.C.Wilson was a useful stand-in and won his colours for long service and devotion to fives. Trips were made as far as Sedbergh and Edinburgh, and the master-in-charge, Neil Marshall, by his own account 'finally won a trophy, being part (but not necessarily half!) of the winning pair of the RFA President's Cup in December.'

The new millennium saw Terry Ronan take over the running of the fives, and there was some renewed enthusiasm in the Shell and IVth form. Evenings were used for leagues and practices, which worked wonders for turnout and brought enjoyment and progress. There was an element of dynastic compulsion, in that the two best young players were A.J.Marshall and E.O.Ronan, but they provided a great incentive and example to the others. The top side had Scott-Malden and Peacock-Edwards as the by now experienced first pair, and a variety of players including old hands Collinson, D.Williams and T.Dewar, plus newcomer J.O'Halloran, making up the second

pair. Close matches – not always because of the opposition’s reduced strength this time – were a feature of the season, with a win and a loss by one point each ... plus a tie!

2001 was a rebuilding year, as there were no Sixth Formers of quality playing. Nevertheless, four pairs of Bradfieldians entered the West of England Colts at Marlborough, and O’Halloran did well to reach the singles final. He and Marshall also got to the semi-finals of the doubles. Disappointingly, however, no-one from Bradfield entered the Nationals.

The Colts had a great year in 2002. First, Marshall won the West of England U16 singles at Marlborough and, with his partner Ronan, the doubles. Then, at Christ’s Hospital in March, Marshall won the National Colts singles, and he and Ronan only just failed to win the doubles in an epic final. The Lower VIth group of O’Halloran, J.Mason, N.Hooper and R.Markham found the competition tough in school matches, but J.A.C.Butler and A.J.Inskip played well to win the doubles plate at the National Under 14s.

The next season, 2002/03, was not as successful as it might have been, with injury and illness disrupting teams. Marshall and Ronan reached the final of the inaugural Winchester Schools doubles but lost to Radley in a tense final. As I write (February 2011), Bradfield has not yet won this trophy, which should surely be a priority target. Mason did well to reach the final of the West of England plate, and he, Hooper and Markham played hard in school matches, but only Ronan entered the Nationals, losing in three games to his old enemy Beverly.



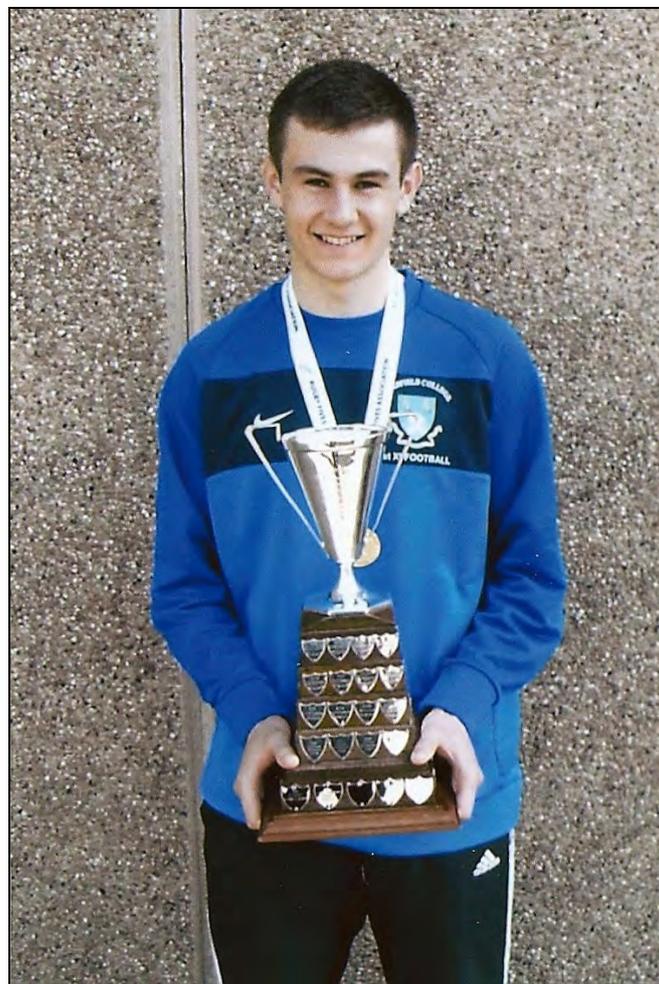
Ronan & Marshall with the RFA Bowl in 2002

The same theme continued into the 2003/04 season, with key players unavailable for tournaments. The Winchester doubles gave M.J.C.Cowie, the Bradfield No.3, the chance to partner Marshall, and he took his chance well as the pair reached the semi-final only to lose to the Wykehamists who eventually won the title. The West of England event saw Butler and Inskip confirm their expertise at winning plate competitions, this time the Under 16 one. The term's matches were enjoyable, with Cowie and J.D.Williams earning their colours, and there was a good group playing recreational fives on a regular basis as well. The Nationals were rather an anticlimax after the successes of Marshall and Ronan two years earlier; they had simply, for whatever reason, not improved as much as their contemporaries from St. Paul's and Winchester. Two quiet years followed, with no entries for any of the Schools competitions. Matches were played as usual, and visiting teams were matched in ability as far as possible, so as to give a satisfying contest to all concerned. The 2006/07 season saw two brave Colts, J.Stevenson-Hamilton and A.Phelps, enter the West of England event, while O.Smith managed to qualify for the knockout section of the Open singles at the Nationals – a good performance. He and C.R.M.Trollope played in some fixtures against adult clubs as well as against other schools' pairs. A first-year group also played enthusiastically.

A fives ladder was introduced in 2007/08, which stimulated interest and improved fitness levels, and a wider range of ages played fives. Stevenson-Hamilton, Phelps, E.Mearns, L.Douglas and H.Walker made up the senior squad and had some very good games. The Under 15s were competent and the Under 14s showed real promise, three of them – D.T.Butler, S.Cummings and S.Scott – entering the Nationals and gaining valuable experience. Tournament play is different to school matches, as psychology plays a greater part, and in singles, you're on your own!

A major advance in Bradfield fives was achieved in 2008/09 without a ball being struck: the leaky glazed roof of the courts was replaced by a solid one. This should ensure play even on the rainiest of days and preserve the fabric of the courts for many years to come. As for the fives, there were respectable performances by the seniors in the Winchester Schools tournament and the West of England Schools, as well as in the matches against Tonbridge and Radley. The Under 15s had good results in the Lent term and Butler reached the quarter-finals of the National Colts singles, while the Under 14s had a thrilling tie with Radley in a six-a-side match.

2010 witnessed the emergence of a champion, as D.T. Butler first reached the final of the West of England event and went on to win the National Colts singles. He did even better in 2012, with victories at Senior level in both competitions. This makes him only the third Bradfieldian to win the Jesters' Cup and is a tribute to his fitness, skill and determination. Sadly, much of his play went unwitnessed by members of the school, as he trained with the Wessex Club in Winchester and up in London with the stars of the Executioners Club. Fives at Bradfield has not really benefitted as a result, and the game lacks the status it deserves. Almost all schools prioritize the 'major' sports, it's true, but enlightened ones encourage diversity when such excellent facilities are available.



David Butler with the Jesters' Cup in 2012

Meanwhile, David Butler has gone on to achieve a top ten national ranking in both singles and doubles. He has captained Durham University and twice been a member of the winning Wessex team in the National Clubs Championship. He has shared in regional doubles wins in Durham and Yorkshire and is the current Scottish Open singles champion.

David Barnes (updated in 2016)

Supplementary photos 2014-2016:

RFA v. Old Bradfieldians at Bradfield College 2014



Master i/c Fives Jeremy Ball in action



Jeremy Ball



Jez Sinton and James Marshall

The President's Cup 2014



David Butler with Bernard Atkinson



David Butler serving at Merchant Taylors'

The North West Open 2015 at Manchester



David Butler and fellow players

The National Winchester Fives Doubles for the Barnes Bridge 2015



James Marshall with Ed Hawke at Winchester College

The Yorkshire Open Doubles at Giggleswick School 2015



Finalists Tristao, Ellison, Butler and Buchanan



Doubles Champions Tristao & Butler

British Universities and Student Championships (BUSF) 2015 at Cambridge



Butler (Durham University) serving to Ackland (Bristol)

Jesters Club tour to Scotland 2016



Jez Sinton in action at Fettes College

The National Doubles Championships at Alleyn's School (The Cyriax Cup) 2016



Plate winners Ollie Arnold & Dave Butler

The Club Knockout competition for the Wood Cup at St. Paul's School 2016



Munn, Akerman, Butler and Ellison at St. Paul's School

The Scottish Open Doubles at Loretto School 2016



Doubles champions Jez Sinton and Archie McCreath at Loretto School



Dave Butler in action in the Singles Final



Dave Butler in Singles action



Jez Sinton playing Doubles



Singles champion Butler with Tilston and Murby

The Owers Trophy at St. Paul's School 2016



Old Bradfieldians Butler, Marshall and Ronan



Matt Shaw (Old Pauline) and Dave Butler between matches

West of England Championships at Clifton College October 2016



Dave Butler serving to Dan Grant at Clifton

The British Universities and Student Championships (BUSF) at St. Paul's November 2016



Jeremy 'Jez' Sinton and Dave Butler representing the Edinburgh Universities