

History of Rugby Fives at Marlborough College

Marlborough College was founded in 1843, and before 1849 two free-standing walls were built, described in a history of the College as 'a weird structure' where 'a primitive form of fives or bat-fives could be played'. In 1854 the middle partition of one of these walls was removed, the floor paved and a low back wall with side projections was built, 'thus producing something which slightly resembled a bat-fives court, though it was called a racket court'. The court was demolished in 1863, although the front wall was used to make the side wall of a new covered rackets court.

*The Old Fives Courts, 1849.
Painting by GF Glennie.*



The first three-walled fives courts were built in 1853 against the north wall of the old covered playground. They were nicknamed the 'Big Bear' and the 'Little Bear' (after their originator, a master called CS Bere). The larger court, later used only for bat-fives, played better than the smaller, which only lasted until 1863 before being demolished to make way for the Bradleian building.

*The first three-walled Fives
Courts (on left) built in 1853.*



At the same time, three open courts more suitable for hand-fives were erected against the south wall of the new rackets court mentioned above. As far as I can establish, no picture of these courts survives.

The first singles prize for hand-fives was given in 1863, showing that the new courts were regarded as good enough for competitions, and gloves started to be worn from this date. An early edition of *The Marlburian* noted in 1866 that there were both singles and doubles competitions in hand and bat fives, and a letter asked that an awning be provided 'to be drawn backwards and forwards at pleasure', so that the game could be played regardless of weather conditions. Fives at Marlborough was becoming a sport, not just a recreation.

An article entitled 'Fives Playing' was published in *The Marlburian* in 1869. 'In few respects are the wants of the school better provided for than in the matter of Fives Courts. It is true that we have no covered courts, no court with a back wall, or with a buttress, or any of those over-refined intricacies with which players of riper years and more fully developed powers delight to overlay the unadorned simplicity of the old straightforward game; but of courts adapted for plain, good, honest, play we have a fair supply.' The unnamed author goes on to give some hints on how to play the game: 'Never run any unnecessary risk; wait as long as you can for everything; avoid volleys and half-volleys except in cases of absolute necessity', and so on. Strange advice on a court with no back wall!

An interesting point emerges from this article and from the first edition of 'A History of Marlborough College' by AG Bradley and others, published in 1893. It seems that the received idea of a 'Rugby' court at Marlborough was of one with a small obtuse-angled buttress and a back wall – what we now would call a Winchester Fives court. The Master of Marlborough himself may have been responsible for this misconception. He was George Bradley (AGB's father), a Rugbeian who had taught at his old school before coming to Marlborough to be its Master in 1858; and in that same year Rugby was on the brink of building new fives courts, one of which was to have a buttress like the one at Worcester College, Oxford. The result appears to have been that the Bradleys, father and son, thought that Marlborough had its own style of fives courts, with three plain walls and no back wall, nothing to do with Rugby. No inter-school fives matches were to be played by Marlborough until 1908, so the College had no experience of other types of court, except the Eton court at Preshute, one of the boarding houses.

A strange practice was observed in early Marlborough fives: doubles play consisted of two players playing the rally, while their partners kept out of the way! This came in for harsh criticism in the *Marlburian* article: 'By this system a match is often lost which might have been won; the interest of the two out-players is lost, and the whole game is robbed of half its variety and charm.'

The Bradleian was extended in 1873, and this meant the destruction of the three 1863 courts and the 'Big Bear'. In compensation, six three-walled hand-fives courts were built at the north end of 'Court', between the gates to the College and the 1863 rackets court. Internal competitions were keenly contested – singles (sometimes handicapped), doubles, inter-house matches, the occasional Under 15 contest – and the scoring system was straightforward: games up to eleven or fifteen, no deuces, no set to 3 or 5 as in rackets.

The 1873 courts (on right) depicted in c. 1890.

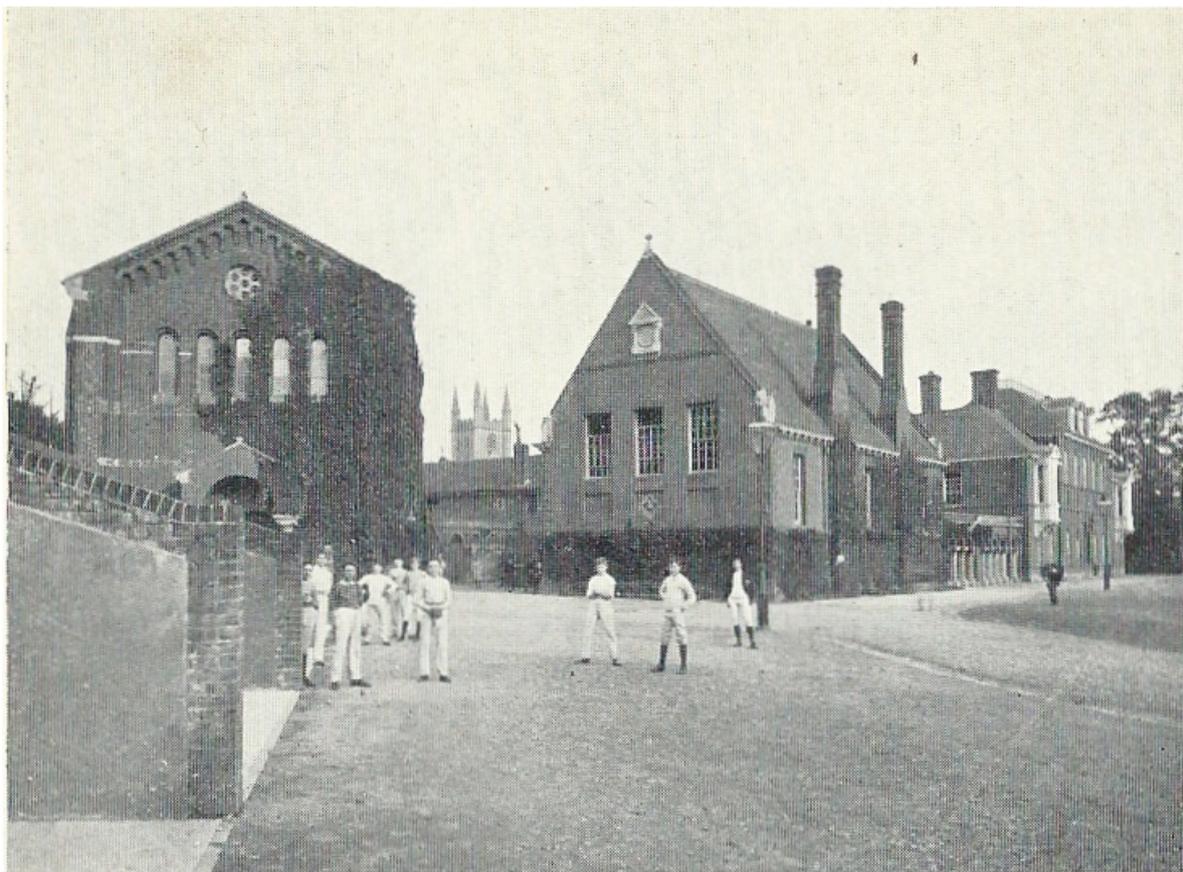


One of the young players in the 1870s was AF Winnington-Ingram, later to become the first President of the Rugby Fives Association. After Marlborough, he played fives at Oxford and in London, and was Bishop of London from 1901-1939. He had a fives court built in 1892 at Oxford House in Bethnal Green, a religious settlement of which he was the Head, and used to play fives regularly against another Old Marlburian, WT Grenfell, a doctor at the London Hospital (close to Oxford House), which had two fives courts around the turn of the century.

The House Fives Doubles winners (unnamed) in 1876, with their trophy.



At Marlborough in 1877, the Bath Road was crossed and four new open courts were built in the Field – on or near the site of the present courts. One of the six courts within the gates was knocked down to make way for the new Porter's Lodge, but with nine courts in all, plus some house courts, fives was well catered for. 1881 saw the first rackets court to be built in the Field, but the real upheaval came in 1892/3, when Marlborough celebrated its fiftieth birthday by starting to build the North Classroom Block, thereby displacing five old fives courts, the old rackets court and the positively ancient large bat-fives court. Bat-fives died as a result of this, but six new open hand-fives courts and a second rackets court were built in the Field on the site they largely occupy today.



The last of the 1873 courts (left) before they made way for the North Classroom Block.

One might think that with ten contiguous fives courts, albeit roofless and on the north side of the Bath Road, the 1890s would have seen a huge growth in the numbers playing fives at Marlborough. But this was not the case. As AEC Cornwall was to write later, in a publication to commemorate the Centenary of the College in 1943: 'They were not of a sort to encourage the finer arts of fives. The walls were quite plain – except for the cracks – and there was no back wall.' With two good covered courts, rackets matches were starting to be played, for example against London University and Cheltenham (1897), Clifton and Wellington (1901), but fives was slower off the mark.

Internal competitions chugged along, but entries were small and details in *The Marlburian* erratic. There was a match against a Common Room IV in 1901, but only the masters were named and they won every game – not much fun for the boys! Then suddenly in 1907 there were 27 entries for the Open Singles and 13 pairs for the Doubles, plus a

Junior and a House competition – and the Senior and Junior Champions were named in the report, with full initials! One suspects either a keen young master had turned up or else an enterprising captain had at last spread his wings.

In 1908, *The Marlburian* reported the first school match, against Cheltenham College: ‘A School Fives match is quite a new, and altogether a desirable, departure. The games were played in our Courts. As our opponents were accustomed to a larger court, with a back wall, they were considerably handicapped. This was shewn by the number of balls hit by them out of Court. It was a pity that two pairs were selected. An odd number should be chosen to ensure a definite result. The honours, on the whole, rested with us. The doubles resulted in a draw, but we won both the single matches.’ Full scores and a detailed account of each match were given.

The same edition carried an amendment to the Marlborough Rules, showing among other things that the College now accepted that it played at least a variety of Rugby Fives: ‘The rules under which the game has been played here have long been only traditional, and have differed in many ways from those used in other schools. The Tennis, Rackets and Fives Association has now issued a code of rules, which is being accepted by all schools who play Rugby Fives. The most noticeable changes from our former rules are as follows:

By rule 1 the innings is no longer played for.

By rule 3 a first stroke on to the end wall, in which the right wall has not first been struck, no longer counts against the striker, but may be taken by the server or his partner if they like.

By rule 12 the option of setting 5 at ‘13 all’ and 3 at ‘14 all’ is given. Formerly no setting was allowed here, though of recent years players have made their own choice on this point.

There is no rule to forbid the server’s partner to take the first return.

It is understood that a claim for a ‘let’, under rule 13b, can only be made if no attempt has been made to take the ball. A player may not try a stroke and then claim a ‘let’ when he fails, on the ground that he could not see the ball properly.’

Matches with Cheltenham now became a regular fixture, usually won by Marlborough, even when played on the big four-walled courts at Cheltenham. The occasional Oxford IV came across to play a match, but it was not until 1923 that another school, Clifton, was played. Although good numbers were still entering internal competitions at Marlborough, the Cheltenham match was lost for the first time in 1922, and in 1923 an away team failed to win a single game. ‘We hope they will forgive us for not giving them a better game,’ apologised the correspondent.

Fives activity seems to have died down in the mid 1920s, but in 1927 matches were again played against Cheltenham (away) and Clifton (home). Both were lost, but not badly, and when Cheltenham came in 1928, Marlborough won a tight match by 11 points. From correspondence in *The Marlburian*, it is clear that the ten fives courts, the youngest of which dated from 1893 and all of which were uncovered, were in a poor state of repair.

in 1929, the Martineau family made a timely and generous gift to the College, consisting of eight four-walled Rugby and four Eton courts, built on the site which the ten old courts had occupied. For the first time in Marlborough’s history, both main codes of fives could now be played on covered courts. Four of the Rugby courts and two of the Eton have survived to this day.



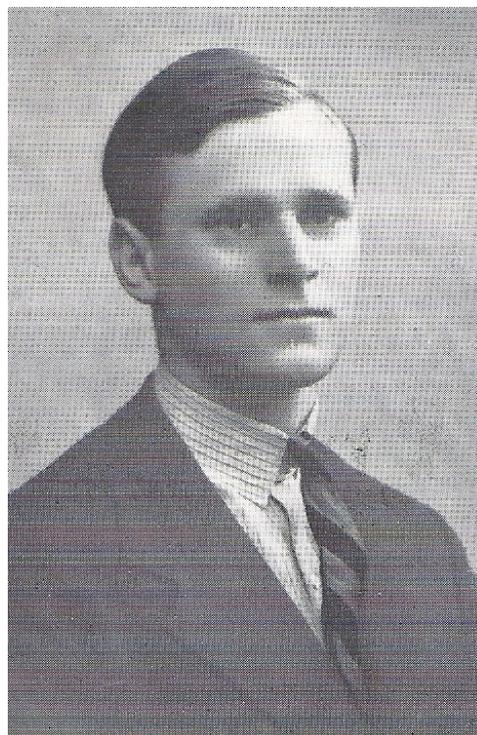
A letter earlier that year to *The Marlburian* had asked for the plain-wall courts to have back walls, 'to make the game as we play it here conform to the Rugby rules, instead of existing in the nature of a bastard half-caste, as it does at present. There can be, I feel, no sentimental attachment to the missing back wall, which by some is ascribed to Marlburian tradition but, by the more knowing ones, to the negligence of the former architect.' This allegation was perhaps a little unfair, but the appeal the letter contained was not in vain.

The 1930s were a golden age for Rugby fives in many schools and clubs, and with its new courts Marlborough made a fair start. After losing badly away to Cheltenham in 1930, they exacted revenge at home in 1932, winning a three-pair match 241-152. LH Waddy and WK Northcroft reached the semi-finals of the Public Schools competition in that year, losing to St. Paul's, the eventual winners, in two close games. Waddy went on to play for Oxford three times (1934-36), the first Marlburian to represent either University in the Varsity Match. The RFA sent a side to play Marlborough in 1932 – a sign of recognition – and a letter appeared in *The Marlburian* in 1933 asking for Junior Matches (for both Rugby and Eton fives players) against other schools.

Surprisingly, no further fives reports were published until 1938, leaving us to guess at the level of activity in the courts. The College lost heavily to an Oxford IV in 1938, and three pairs underwent a massive defeat at Clifton the next spring. 'Their fives courts had little back wall and were much faster than ours...' lamented the report. Even when Clifton came to play the return match, the Marlborough VI were unsuccessful. Fives was clearly stronger in the Marlborough Common Room at this stage than in the College, for when a five-pair match between the two sides took place later that year, the masters won by almost 100 points.

During World War Two, fives matches were of necessity restricted, but some interesting encounters were against the City of London School, which had been evacuated to Marlborough in 1939. At least one of these matches was Rugby Fives, in which the Citizens did well to win some of the games, if not the match. A later encounter – possibly Eton Fives – was won by the Londoners!

After the War, matters improved. In 1945, an outstanding Rugby Fives player, RJ Knight, later to become Headmaster of Oundle and then of Monkton Combe, joined the staff at Marlborough as a Housemaster, and at last Marlburians had a first-class coach and player to learn from. Knight had been runner-up in the Amateur Singles in 1936, and when the competition resumed in 1948, he became champion, defeating another fine schoolmaster, CT Reichwald, in the final.



*R J Knight, Amateur
Singles Champion 1948*

1948 was a great year for Marlborough Fives. A match in 1948 against Oxford University was won by 171-104, and the report asserted: 'The standard of Marlborough Fives is thoroughly respectable.' That same year PC Clemmow became the first Marlburian to represent Cambridge at Rugby Fives; and the 1948/49 captain of Marlborough Fives, AMB Salmon, was to go one better and play in successive years for Cambridge in the mid-fifties. Last but not least, no fewer than seven pairs played the Common Room, and the School won by 370-290!

Inter-school matches started again in 1949. Canford and Bradfield were beaten at home, but the real challenge would come the following season year on their Winchester-style courts. The fives report, hitherto written by senior boys, now bore the stamp of a more experienced hand. 'The first few attempts to play fives usually produce less perspiration than bruised hands; but once survive the teething stages and you will find that there are few more enjoyable ways of spending an afternoon.'

Over the next decade, Marlborough's fixture list expanded and the quality of visiting adult sides improved. As well as Canford and Bradfield, Rugby, Sherborne, Clifton, Malvern and Winchester became regular school opponents; and the Jesters, Oxford Beavers, Bristol University and Alleyn Old Boys brought sides, sometimes containing very high quality players, to play at Marlborough. Names which stand out in the school's teams from this period are CC Simpson, who went on to represent Oxford in 1953, AS Horner, who played a lot of good fives in London as a medical student, and CJ Harvey, the first captain of fives to serve under AF Elliot when he took over as master-in-charge from RJ Knight in 1956. That year there was an entry of 32 pairs for the Open Doubles, and cups were awarded for both Senior and Junior Singles competitions. In 1957, Clifton were defeated for the first time, and a strong Marlborough pair (Harvey and MG Harrison) reached the fourth round of the Schools' Doubles, losing to the eventual winners from St. Dunstan's. Two Out-College houses, Cotton and Littlefield, each with its own court, were 'playing more fives than ever before'. Apart from the demands of hockey – an often repeated grouse – there was one other outstanding problem affecting the fives: some of the courts were unlit and

were to remain so until 1963, when new lights were installed in four of them, and the netting at the back of the courts replaced.

In 1958, the 1st IV (Harrison, ER Macdonald, AL Le Page and MJ Elliott) were unbeaten in school matches, and the next season Bristol Grammar, a strong fives school, and Dauntsey's (less so) were added to the list of opponents. The Marlborough side was led by a future National Doubles champion, MJ Elliott, destined to win the Cyriax Cup in partnership with JT Watkinson (BGS & Oxford) three times running from 1962-64. Elliott played three times for Oxford (1960-62), was captain in the latter two years and had the pleasure of selecting two other Marlburians, RL Ormond (1961) and PG Howard (1962) to represent the University.

Two regular club matches at this stage were against the Jesters, always a good side with so many members to pick from, and the Alleyn Old Boys, one of the strongest sides in the country. DRW Silk, who had come to teach at Marlborough in 1955, was responsible for bringing down such players as JF Pretlove and R Birmingham, both of them winners of National Singles and Doubles Championships, to play against the boys. After losing one of those matches by the respectable score of 64-110, CRN Clark, captain of fives in 1960, wrote in his report: 'Afterwards the opposition, at our request, criticised our game and, without being asked, our courts! They recommended the use of the soft shot at the front of the court, the lob, and the use of the side wall for carefully placed shots. They also advised us to get some new courts.'

The very fact that top-class players were coming to Marlborough, even if they were blunt in their criticisms, was praise enough for the young Marlburians. The man who deserves the credit for much of this improvement in Marlborough fives is AF Elliot, in charge from 1956. There were other masters who played and helped with the coaching of juniors, some of whose names appear later in this article, but Elliot's enthusiasm and skill were vital.

References to the 'better' courts at other schools (BGS 'much nicer', Dauntsey's 'small, fast and differently coloured') and to their peculiarities (Clifton 'small and unusual, back wall 2ft 6in lower than our own'), recur in the fives reports of the 1960s. Apart from the new lighting in four courts in 1963, the floors of courts 5 and 6 were relaid in 1964, so efforts were being made to improve the facilities, and plenty of boys were playing, among them one who was to play fives twice for Cambridge and become famous in cricketing circles, CDA Martin-Jenkins. Another Cambridge double in Rugby Fives was achieved in 1965-66 by AP Lewis, who played Eton Fives while at Marlborough and later coached Eton Fives at Repton.

Colts matches were held in the 1960s against Radley, Bradfield and BGS, and a new coaching scheme was introduced in 1965, with help from new masters JE Osborne and JP Sabben-Clare. MJ Harrison also helped considerably with the fives in the 1960s and 70s. Marlburians from the mid to late 1960s who went on to play the game beyond school were PK Wingfield-Digby, AM Clark, CW Hattersley and JC Turnbull, who was to represent Oxford from 1970-73. Despite being a key member of the sides which beat Bradfield and Clifton for the first time in ten years in 1967/68, Turnbull wrote in his fives report in 1968 that he 'looked forward to the time when Rugby Fives is again a well-subscribed sport', indicating that the popularity of the game had diminished. The courts were re-roofed in 1970, but EC Wake-Walker wrote in his report: 'The team has been of its usual standard, playing more for enjoyment than devotion to the game, which is the normal and desirable frame of mind for playing Rugby Fives at Marlborough'.

AF Elliot continued 'coaching vigorously', in the words of his last captain, N Goodarzi, and when his long spell as master-in-charge came to an end in 1974, GJ Woods took over. His first captain, RJ Bickersteth, wrote that since the top six players from the previous year had left, the focus had shifted to junior competitions and matches, in order to rebuild. In 1975, the Colts and Junior Colts won the majority of their matches and although the Senior team was less successful, there was enough enthusiasm to undertake the repainting of the courts. Between them, three masters, Gordon Woods, John Osborne and Martin Harrison played a big part in keeping Rugby Fives on the road in the mid 1970s, and the response was good, with as many as four teams playing Radley in 1977. As a legacy of the Elliot years, JJ Wilmot played for Oxford in two Varsity Matches, 1974 and 1976.

Fives reports took on a literary flavour from the winter of 1977, when JD Byrom assumed responsibility for Rugby Fives at Marlborough. Henceforth the emphasis lay on behaviour as much as on results. 'If the welkin did not often ring to the whoops of victory, the games were conducted in an enjoyable and gentlemanly fashion. One asks for little more.' 'The world of Fives is a quiet one, being, in every sense of the word, courteous. Rackets are left to other games...' 'UCS Old Boys won 98-97 with a show that challenged several laws of physics.' 'When Adam was playing Eden Fives in the cool of the day with a rolled-up hedgehog, he felt the need of a companion to applaud his strongest shots against the garden wall. Thus was born the excellent pastime of Wenchester Fives, a tradition which Marlborough has recently taken over, welcoming the females to the courts to which they add their subtle charm.' JDB could be in trouble for writing that today!

In the eight years of Byromic wordplay, the picture that emerges is one of recreational entertainment, accompanied by a measure of success. In the winter of 1979, four of the eight Rugby Fives courts were demolished to make way for squash courts, but this does not seem to have affected matters. Matches were won against the RFA Club and UCSOBs, and one of the Marlburians was Richard Olver, a future stalwart of the RFA Club and a most unusual fives player, with only one arm – but what an arm!

A photo of two seamless Cliff balls, one white, one black, featured in the next report: 'The first action photo of the game in *The Marlburian* for years. Damp balls take on the colour of the walls, so expect a surprise in the third game.' In 1981, John Byrom reported another accident-free season in the courts. 'Recently released statistics reveal that proportionally more actuaries play fives than any other professional class, so the chances of survival must be encouraging.' A senior player that year was Simon Baillie-Hamilton, who was to earn himself a half-blue at Oxford in 1985.

New lighting was installed in the courts in 1983. Byrom wrote: 'In contrast to the more openly combative sports which combine blood on the pitch and yells on the touchline, Fives has remained in decent obscurity. Even a resounding win 15-0 is called a hiding to nothing. One reason for this at Marlborough was the physical difficulty of actually seeing the action as it loomed from the black-walled depths of the Martineau courts in successive rallies of crypto-fives – shots in the dark. Now that lighting has been installed, the players are dazzled by the moves they produce.'

One might assume from all this levity that results a) were poor; and b) didn't matter. This was not the case. John Byrom's final report at Easter 1984 was heartfelt, albeit with the customary twist in the tail: 'Michael Payne, Lucas Dawe, Adrian Rees and Alan Leong, abetted by Matthew Edwards, were good enough to beat all-comers this term with a fine mixture of strength and subtlety. They have been crucial to the survival of the game at the

College for the last few years. The Common Room side, who lost to them in their amazingly close match, will be glad to see them go, and wish them well. Colts such as James Hunter, Seb Brooke, Tom Marriott and Andrew Newington look full of promise. If they looked as full of practice as well, they could emulate their predecessors.'

The next report in *The Marlburian* was in the 1987 edition. Rodney Harris, who had taken on the job of master-in-charge, reported that the courts were in poor condition, sweating badly and being unplayable for long periods. 'One of the worst seasons I can recall...' Nonetheless senior fixtures were played against the Old Marlburians and Loretto (on a Southern tour), while matches at lower levels were played with Clifton, Bloxham, Bradfield and Radley. 'After three seasons of more or less building the sport from scratch, the future is now starting to look more promising.'

No further reports appear for more than a decade after this. John Osborne writes self-deprecatingly: 'After Rodney Harris, I took over the Fives, but in a minor kind of way, as I had a few other things to do, such as being first a Housemaster and then Senior Master, and running teams in the major games. I continued introducing junior boys – and then junior girls – to the game, and if I felt that we had a couple of pairs of decent enough first-year players, I'd arrange ad hoc matches, with Bradfield for example.'

As in many schools in the 1980s and 1990s, the pressure of a wide range of other sports and activities had begun to tell on some of the so-called 'minor' games. All-weather pitches with floodlighting and sports centres with professional staff, coupled with a reluctance to invest in the reconstruction, or at least refurbishment, of facilities which had seen better days, combined to affect the image of sports like fives. Something had to be done if the sport was to survive at Marlborough.

John Osborne puts it in a nutshell: 'Edward Gould, as newly appointed Master of Marlborough (in 1993), saw that an enormous improvement was needed in the 'plant' to revive the game; that is where the RFA came in, and thanks to his initiative and the Association's advice, we entered the era of enclosed courts.' The covering of the whole area behind the Rugby Fives courts in 2000 made a huge difference to the comfort of players, coaches and spectators and transformed the playing conditions.

The next step was suggested in a letter to the Master by Howard Wiseman of the Rugby and Eton Fives Coaching Agency, and as a result, Matthew Arnott was appointed as a graduate assistant for the year 2000/01 to coach both Rugby and Eton Fives. No fewer than five separate reports appeared in *The Marlburian* in 2001 detailing the progress made in boys' and girls' fives that season, and his achievement was such that Matthew was invited to stay on for another year.

Boys' matches had been re-established with Malvern, Sherborne, Radley, Clifton and Bradfield, while some girls had entered the Ladies' Winchester Fives Tournament. In 2001/02 fifteen matches had been played, all junior levels being represented, and the Under 15s had won six out of their eight. The result of all this activity was that when Tom Kiggell joined the Common Room in 2002, there were some competent young fives players to work with.

The 2003 team, led by A Montagu-Pollock (still a Colt), was reasonably successful, beating Malvern, Bradfield and Radley (twice), but losing to Winchester and Sherborne. In the next year's West of England Schools, T Morton and E de Moraville reached the semi-finals of the Colts Doubles; Montagu-Pollock was unfortunate to meet the previous year's runner-

up in round one but gave him a very good game; and A Morton and J Davies reached the later stages of the Open plate.

*A Montagu-Pollock & J Davies, 2005
Winchester Doubles Plate winners.*



November 2005 saw Montagu-Pollock and Davies win the Winchester Doubles plate, and Montagu-Pollock reached the semi-final of the West of England Singles. Colts de Moraville and M Schofield played for the 1st IV. The first Girls' fixture was held: an U14 match against Malvern. The largest fives squad for many years, containing a particularly successful Yearlings group, assembled for the 2006 end-of-season photograph, and all that was lacking was success in a championship final.

More Marlburians played for the College in 2006/07 than in any of the previous four seasons. E de Moraville and A Wall led the Club with distinction, and M Schofield proved himself the top player. Inaugural matches were held with Wessex, St. Olave's and King's Bruton, and the Junior Colts and Colts had a very good season. The Town Club gave a new Cup to the College for a Senior Competition.

Marlborough made an impact at the West of England and the Nationals in 2008. At Sherborne, S Rolls won the U16 Singles plate and, with his partner K Bowyer-Knight, the Doubles plate as well; and the top U16 and U14 pairs reached the quarter-finals of the Nationals. The 1st IV, captained by H Wills, had disappointingly few matches, but tied with Wessex and beat Sherborne and Malvern 2nd IV by a point.

The next two seasons could have seen a major win in one of the Schools' competitions, but although Rolls and Bowyer-Knight played well when required, they practised too little and only won plates: the Doubles plate at the Nationals in 2009 and the Winchester plate at the beginning of the next season. Rolls won the inaugural Colquhoun Trophy for West of England Schools in 2010 as a consolation prize. It was disappointing that none of Sherborne, Radley, Malvern or Bradfield could put out a full side at Senior level, but the

*S Rolls & K Bowyer-Knight, 2009
Winchester Doubles Plate winners.*



U15s had good wins over Sherborne, Winchester and Malvern. And the Common Room match made a welcome return to the fixture list!

Although 2011 was unsuccessful in terms of match results, interest in fives was maintained and the girls came up with Marlborough's first win in a National Championship, when Louisa Treadwell and Laura Jardine Paterson won the Under 18 Girls' Doubles. The boys did well at the West of England event, A Frosell and B Heath reaching the semis of the Open Doubles. Frosell also won the Colquhoun Trophy. The Senior IV built on this in 2012, remaining unbeaten in matches against Wessex, RFA, Bradfield, Winchester, Sherborne and Malvern.

*S Smith & C Bugel, 2014 Girls' U14
National Doubles Champions*



In 2013, Frosell and Heath won the West of England plate doubles, and H Fry played beautifully to reach the semi-finals of the Colts singles, 'the first Marlburian for years to get to the sharp end of a national event.' The 2014 highlight was winning the National Under 14 Girls' Singles (C Bugel) and Doubles (Bugel & S Smith), while the Under 14 boys (F Powell & O Walters) won the plate at their Nationals in 2015. JSW Godding represented Oxford in the 2015 Varsity Match, the first Marlburian to do so for thirty years.

David Barnes, RFA Archivist, October 2015.



Not another plate! Tom Kiggell, master-in-charge since 2002, with the Veterans' Doubles Plate, played for at Marlborough in 2015.

Note by the writer. *None of what follows was published in the RFA Review for 2015, but it needs saying and recording somewhere.*

In recent years, the Marlborough courts, for years rather bleak, hidden away in a windy passage behind the rackets courts, have changed their character. This is largely thanks to the College's wise decision to reinvest in the game after years of relative neglect. The courts themselves now play better and are well lit, the area behind the courts has become a welcoming and much warmer space for spectators (and players between games), and the game itself is being caringly and expertly taught and organised. The development of the Town Club has helped, too, proving that local players can make use of school fives facilities and persuade bursars and others that fives courts are worth keeping in good shape. Various championships have now been held on the courts, among them the British Universities', the National Girls', the National Veterans' and the National Masters.

We should pay tribute to all the people who have organised fives at Marlborough over the years, and perhaps especially those who stood for hours in that windswept cul-de-sac coaching and supporting young players in the dim, dark days before enlightenment came. They and their charges most often had to be content with slim pickings in the realm of trophies and championships; a good season would be marked with success in school matches, which is satisfying in itself but does not hit the headlines. Now Marlborough is knocking on the door, so to speak, of greater success, and its girls have already done what many a boy has dreamt of achieving: winning a national title. Let's hope that the boys accept the challenge and realise that, with the top-class coaching available to them and the hard work needed to achieve true success, they too can rise to the top of the class!

D.B. 2015.