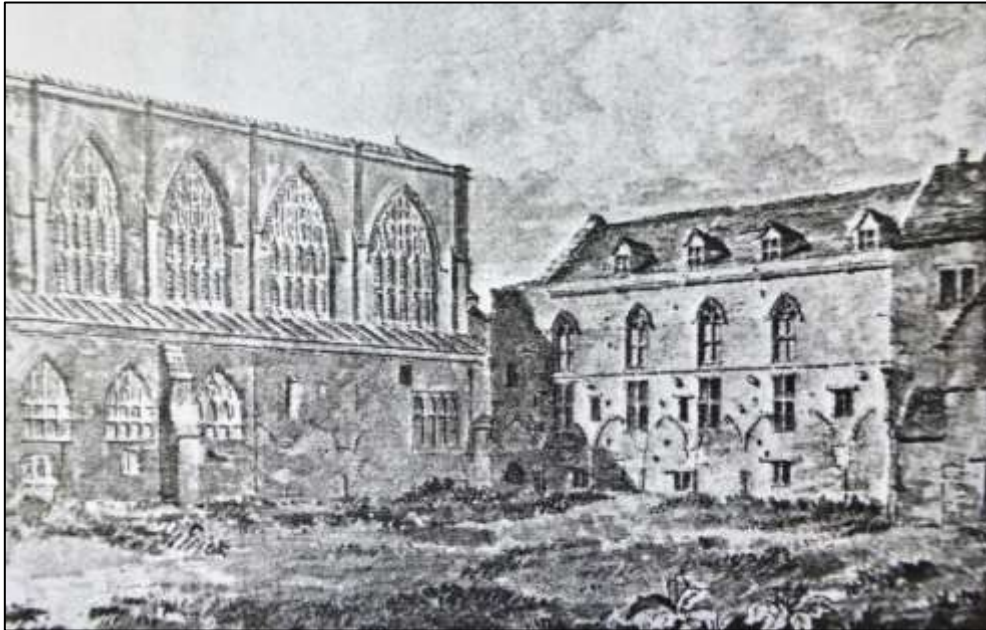


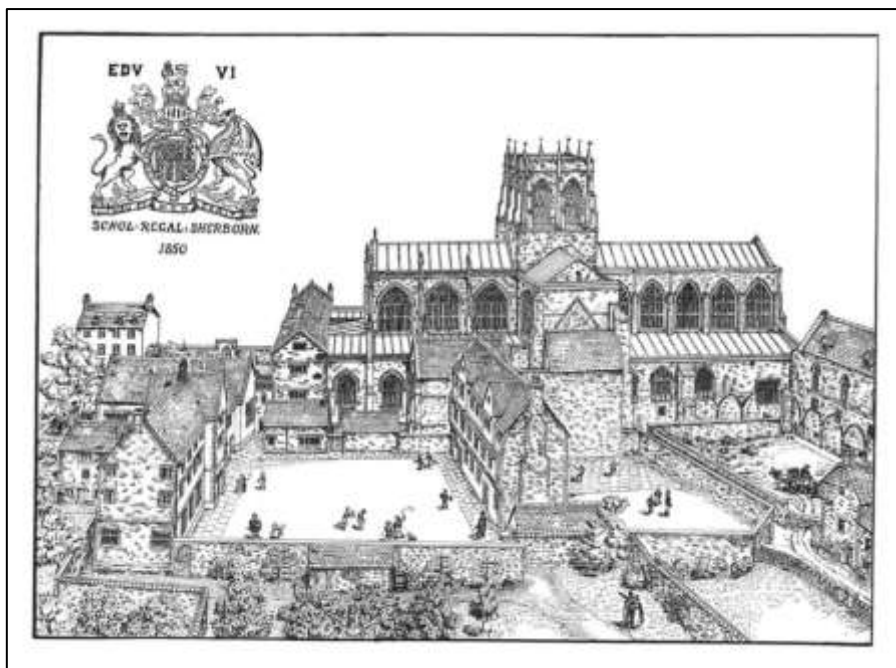
The History of Fives at Sherborne School by David Barnes

Fives has a long history at Sherborne, where a 'fives place' was recorded close to the north wall of the Abbey in the 1670s. The same area was referred to as a 'ball court' in a manuscript of 1694.



The Ball Court in 1802 by J.C.Buckler

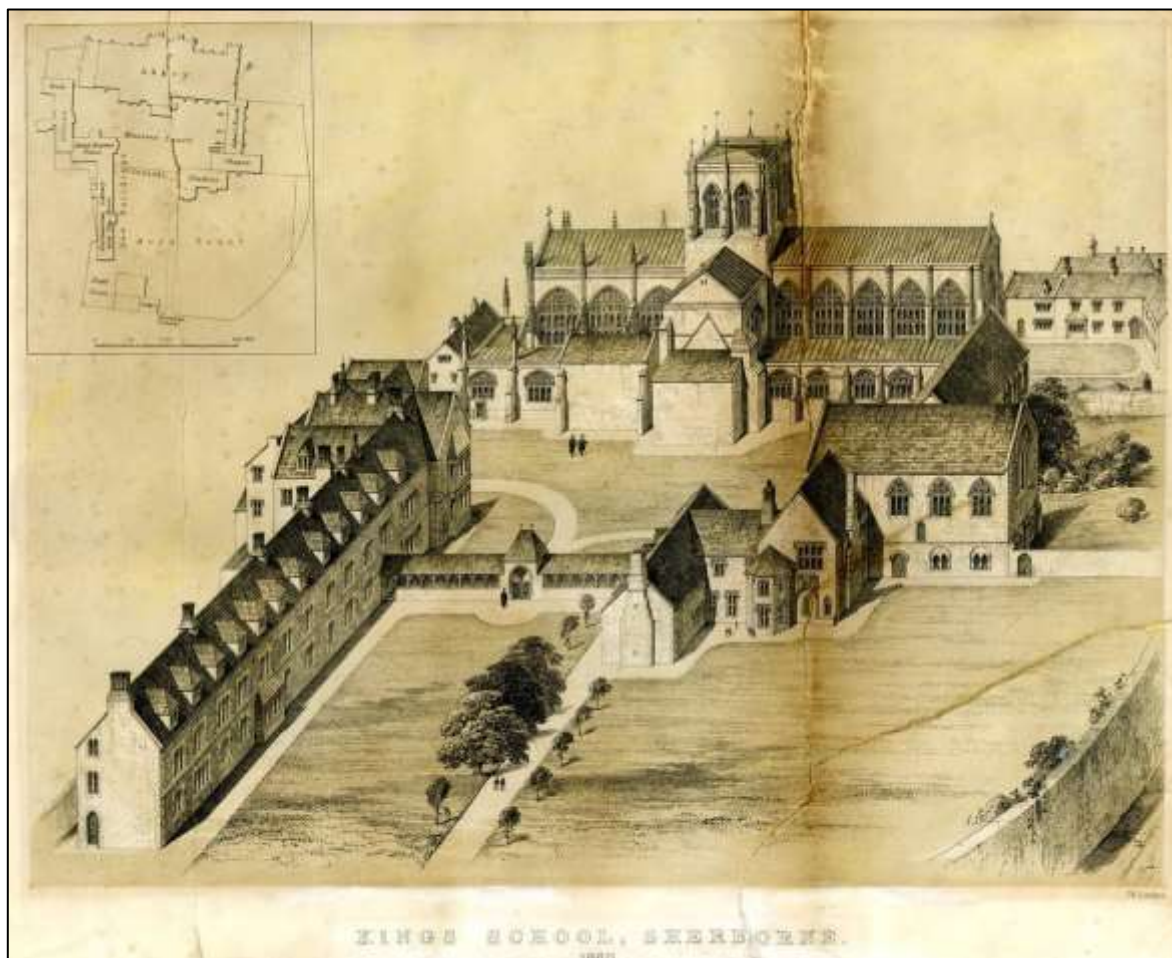
The earliest depiction of this 'Ball Court' is a painting of 1802 by J.C.Buckler, showing an unkempt area in which any game recognisable as fives looks to be quite impossible. The British Museum holds the artist's sketch of this area. W.B.Wildman, in 'A Short History of Sherborne from 705 AD', writes: 'In the year 1840 a new Fives Court was made in the Ball Court west of the Box Buildings, probably on the site of an older one, which is mentioned in the School Accounts as early as 1674, as a well known part of the School premises.'



Sherborne School and Abbey c.1850 (Fives court just right of centre.)

If the exact location of the 17th century ‘fives place’ is uncertain, a credible illustration of fives on the School Ball Court is provided by a view, reconstructed from documentary and archaeological evidence, of the School and Abbey in about 1850. It shows what is probably bat-fives in play on the paved area in front of ‘The Slype’, described as a ‘lean-to building against the north transept of the Abbey’.

The Box Building, a sick-house built in 1697 to cope with smallpox epidemics, was demolished in 1855, removing the side wall of the Ball Court but opening up the north wall of the part of the Abbey called ‘Bishop Roger’s Chapel’. This wall may possibly have become a second fives wall with short buttresses at either end, as shown in an 1860 artist’s impression by J.R.Jobbins.



1860 Kings School, Sherborne’ by J.R.Jobbins. Artist’s impression showing a second fives wall alongside the Slype in the centre of the picture

Now to the birth of what we might call ‘modern fives’ at Sherborne. A.B.Gourlay writes in ‘A History of Sherborne School’: ‘In 1859, an individual fives cup (the first such award) was presented by the masters – a date when the new courts were not as yet built – which suggests that the old style game played against the Abbey wall still had both a science and a following.’

The award of this cup added to the demand for ‘proper’ fives courts. In 1861, two three-walled uncovered courts with stone floors were built for £200, the cost partly met by Mr George Wingfield Digby, a local landowner and benefactor of the School.

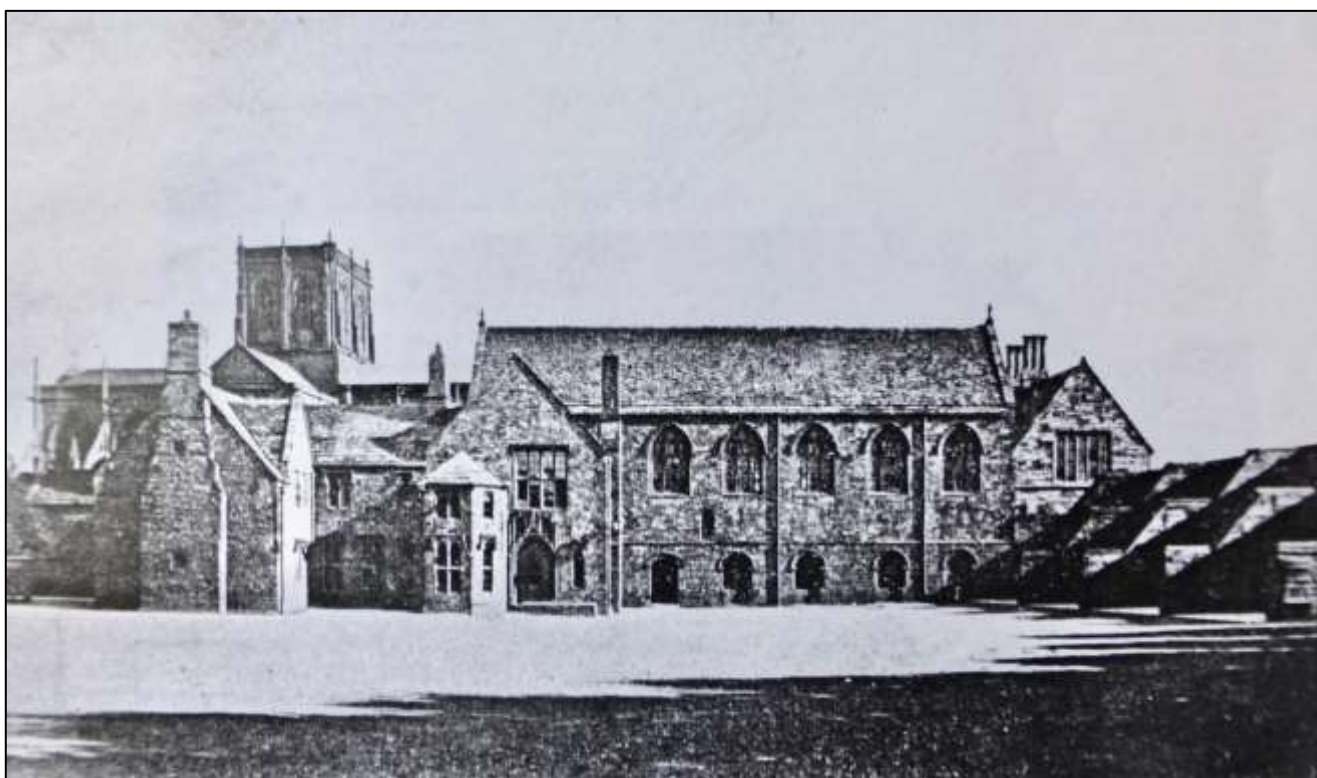
The Shirburnian of April 1865 records: ‘A series of Fives Matches were played on the School Courts, on March 7th, and subsequent days. Single-handed, E. L. TUSON. Double-handed, A. N. MALAN, E. C. MALAN.’ The last name will come up again later in this article, in less happy circumstances.

Junior Matches were also being played by 1868, and *The Shirburnian* reported on them in some detail, but without scores. A letter was published with a complaint that was to become familiar: the floors were in a terrible state, the causes being rain and hob-nailed boots. Part of the problem was that the paving was not new: it had been brought over from the old Ball Court. A further letter later that year wanted the names of winners engraved on a brass plate let into the wall dividing the courts. The pseudonym adopted by the writer concealed his identity – could he have been a winner?

An appeal was started for £300 to cover the cost of ‘at least two additional covered courts’, and lists of contributors were published in the spring of 1869. The two courts, built on the same plan as the old ones and uncovered (probably for lack of funds), were opened on November 11th that year. The Headmaster, H.D.Harper, and other masters had offered six bats as special prizes ‘for double fives’, so the old tradition of bat-fives was continuing.

Fives became so popular at Sherborne that large crowds of boys and masters used to watch the finals of the competitions. Gourlay, himself a fives player at a later date, describes a curious rule applying to the doubles: ‘Double-handed matches carried on for two terms; if one member of a pair left, his surviving partner continued alone and in some recorded cases even won single-handed.’

Several factors impinged on Fives over the next two decades, and its popularity declined with the rise of Rugby football, which became the School’s principal winter sport from the 1870s onwards. The state of the uncovered courts meant that when the playing-fields were unusable due to weather conditions, the Fives courts were similarly afflicted. Fives competitions continued but were poorly supported in some years, and there was doubt as to which side of Christmas they should be scheduled.



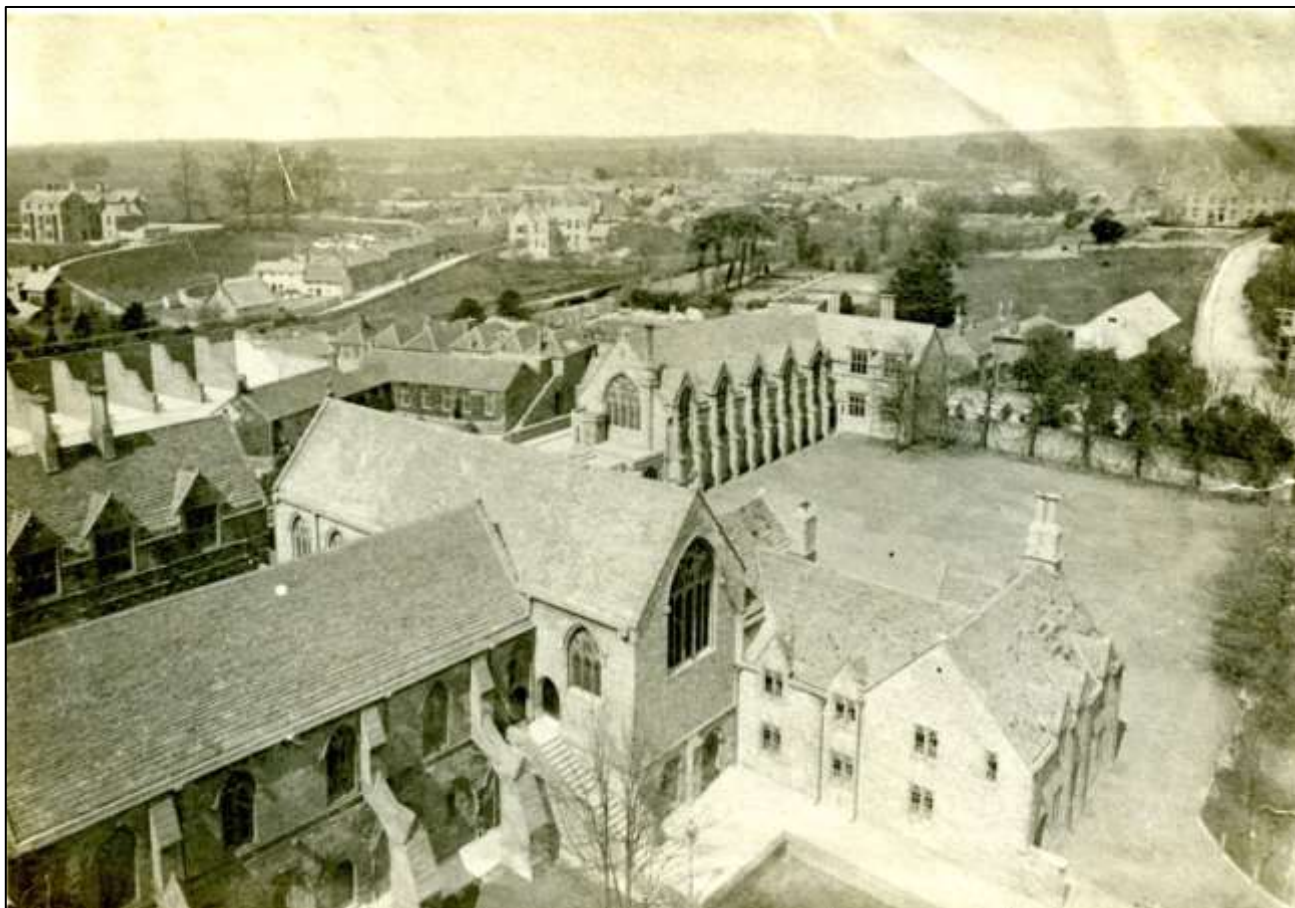
Sherborne’s first three-walled courts c.1870 (Far right of photo.)

The courts were moved in 1874 from a ‘central’ position to where they now stand. Two more courts (one of them with a Winchester-style buttress) were added at that time, but they were all still uncovered, had no back wall, and the stone floors were uneven. The Winchester court was not a success, and the buttress was eventually filled in.

Given these factors, combined with the lack of a Captain of Fives – an office that was only created in 1918 – it is a tribute to those who did play that the game survived at all. The first Sherborne Register (1823-92), lists the winner of the Challenge Cup for every year from 1868 to 1892, indicating a degree of organisation; but the entry was variable, and a number of early matches were not actually played, resulting in walk-overs. In some years, the Junior competition even failed to attract an entry. Games were not compulsory until about 1890.

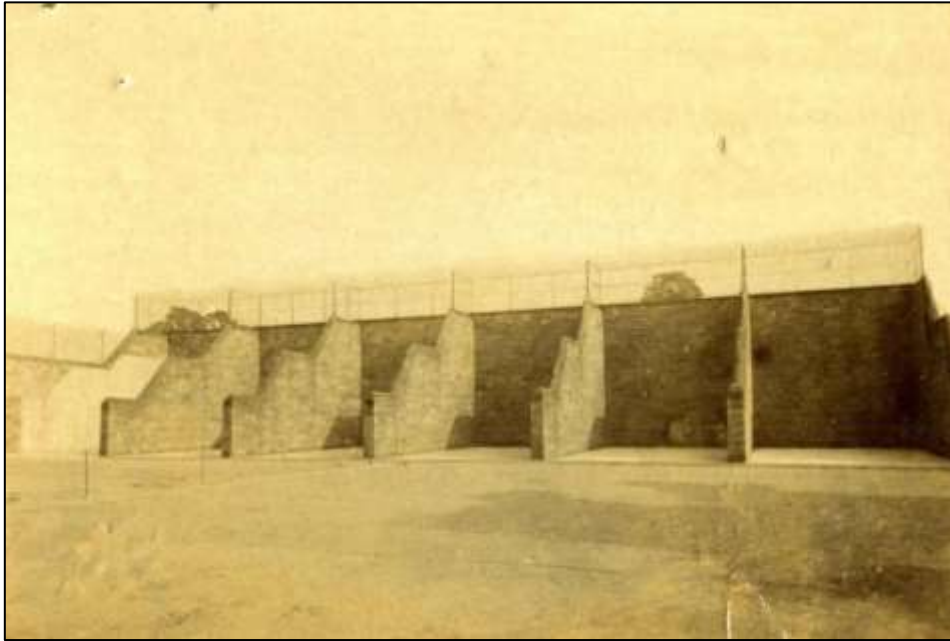
The later 1880s were not a good time for the School, as a court case resulting from a violent incident between the Headmaster E.M.Young and his house tutor, the aforementioned E.C.Malan, brought bad publicity and a dramatic fall in numbers. When Young resigned in 1892, there were just 124 pupils, and it took the new Headmaster, F.B.Westcott, more than a decade to get the numbers back up to 200.

What hope did a minority sport such as Fives have of investment in such circumstances? Unexpectedly, positive steps were taken to improve the facilities and encourage participation. One court was refurbished in 1893 and two more in 1896, the funding provided by a master, H.R.King, and the Headmaster himself. Westcott, who been a master at Rugby and was interested in sport, also presented a Challenge Cup for House Pairs in 1896.



c.1890 Fives courts on far left

The Shirburnian records the results of the five annual Fives competitions (Senior and Junior Singles and Doubles, plus the House Challenge Cup) taking place in the Lent Term for the period up to 1905 without further comment. Hockey was introduced into the Lent Term in 1900, although a letter in June 1903 makes the point that the term is already too full: ‘After the Football House Matches... we have School Fives, House Fives (in some houses), House Fives matches, Sports, Steeplechases, Point-to-Point, Drill, Musketry and various competitions in the Gymnasium...’



The courts in their final location c.1905

1906 saw the launch of the Fives Courts' Improvement Fund. 'To carry out necessary repairs and to provide two or three of the present courts with roofs and back-walls, a sum of not less than £500 is required.' Only £216 had been raised by June 1906, but the work went ahead and the opening ceremony took place on October 19th. Three of the courts had been covered and enclosed and three left open. The benefactor who had promised to bear a large part of the expense, on condition the courts were roofed in and repaired thoroughly, was J.B.Carrington – not an O.S. but a parent. Thanking Mr Carrington, the Headmaster described the courts as 'second to none in England' (cheers).



Three of the courts roofed and enclosed in 1906

It turned out that the generous Mr Carrington wasn't finished: in 1910, the remaining three courts were roofed and given a back wall, so as to complete the job. Despite this bounty, the next few years of Fives brought little response in *The Shirburnian*, although the competitions continued as usual. The years 1914-18 have only two references to the game: one a letter of complaint about unfinished competitions; the other, in 1918, a request for a captain of Fives to be appointed, as larger numbers were now playing.

The November 1918 edition featured a useful two-page article on Fives entitled 'Hints to Beginners'. It was unsigned, but the writer was clearly an experienced player. A clue to his identity is given by the fact that when Sherborne played its first school match in March 1919 against King's School, Bruton, three pairs including one master represented each school. The Sherborne master was M.B.Elderton, a Housemaster described in a later tribute as 'a horribly good fives player, with an exasperating skill with his left hand'.

A match against Weymouth College was held in 1920 and lost 100-177. The return match in 1921 was won by 166-130, 'thus avenging last year's defeat'. Weymouth had a top-class player both years in D.G.Mackenzie, a finalist in the inaugural Amateur Singles of 1932 and the Amateur Doubles of 1935 with John Armitage.

March 1921 saw hockey supplanting rugger during the later half of the Lent Term, and this was hailed by *The Shirburnian* as opening up the minor sports – athletics, boxing, gym and fives. 'Competitors for the fives cups and medals have had opportunity to practise, and as a consequence the various ties have been more evenly contested and scientifically fought out.'

The first of a long series of matches against the Masters was held in 1922. The Masters won 91-82, but the School IV won by 202-167 the next year, a possible reason being that eight games of singles were played as well as the usual doubles!

Colours were awarded to H.S.Storrs, Captain of Fives in 1923, and this mark of distinction, together with external matches, gave Fives some status. Nevertheless there were houses that played fives and houses that didn't. A report in 1926 read: 'The fact that the School is represented by one house alone, is a fair indication of how Fives is treated in the other houses. The School cannot hope to produce a good team, until all the houses play the game seriously.'

IN 1927, a letter was published calling for Squash courts to be built. Squash was already permitted in three of the fives courts, but the official position was that Fives was the School game and likely to remain so, and that no Squash courts could be built except through the generosity of benefactors. As if to emphasise this, two more Fives courts were built at Sherborne in 1928, the gift of W.J.Bensly, a Housemaster.

The first Shirburnian to make a mark on University Fives, A.E.S.Charles, was Captain at Sherborne in 1929, the year before the Public Schools' Championships were started. He won a Scholarship to Worcester College Oxford, the only College with a Fives court, and went on to represent the University four years in succession, from 1930 to 1933.

The 1930s were a good decade for Sherborne Fives. Healthy numbers entered the internal competitions, the annual match against Weymouth was usually won, and a good Oxford pair came down to play a IV selected by a master, R.S.Thompson. Housemasters were taking more of an interest, probably in response to the encouragement of the Headmaster, A.R.Wallace, himself a player, who arrived from Blundell's in 1934. There were entries from Sherborne (unrecorded in *The Shirburnian*) to the Public Schools' Rugby Fives Championships in 1934, 1936, 1938 and 1939, but none of the players reached the later stages of the Singles or Doubles.

A young player of note in 1935 was L.A.B.Pilkington, later to play three times for Cambridge and destined to win the Amateur Doubles title in 1947 partnering E.R.Conradi. A greatly gifted player of Fives and Squash, he won Senior competitions at Sherborne while still a Junior. Not surprisingly, the standard of Fives in the School improved considerably during his time. He left Sherborne in 1938 for Cambridge, where he immediately won a place in the 1939 team. He resumed his studies in 1946 and 1947 and played for Cambridge in both years.



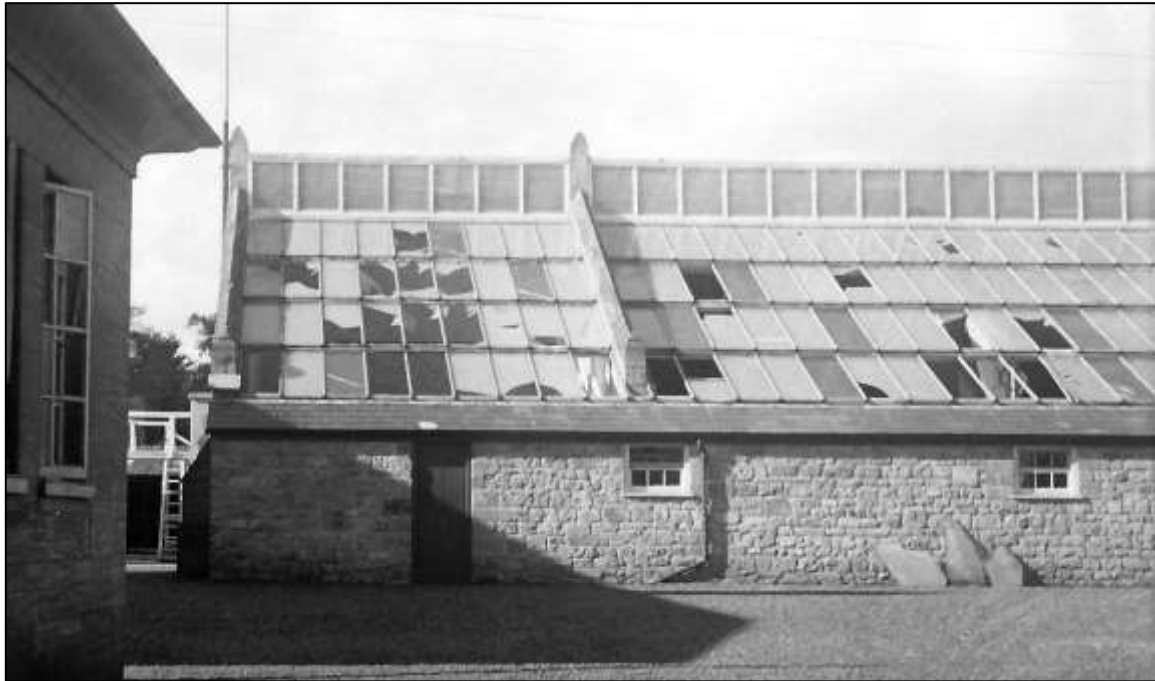
L.A.B.Pilkington in the 1947 Cambridge team

Lighting was installed in some of the Fives courts in 1936, and they were levelled and resurfaced in 1938. A photo from 1940 shows that an outer wall enclosing the galleries had been built. 'We take off our hats to the authorities who installed pegs by the Fives courts after 50 years of waiting', wrote a flippant correspondent. And as well as all this, the School started to beat the Masters at Fives! The only fly in the ointment was that the Clifton match (started in 1935) was lost year after year, even at home and with Pilkington.

In 1939, the Fives team had its first taste of Winchester Fives, away to Weymouth. They lost 179-209. 'The two games are little alike', wrote the Captain. F.E.Slingsby, in his report, 'but the game was a very pleasant and friendly one.' Only one further match was to be played between the two schools, as Weymouth College closed in 1940, because of shortage of numbers and proximity to the South Coast in time of War.

The first away match against Clifton (in 1940) was a disaster. The Clifton courts were slow and 'very different', and their players hit the ball much harder than the Shirburnians. A member of the Sherborne second pair was M.R.Ricketts, who was to play for Oxford from 1948-50 and to reach the final of the Amateur Doubles in 1952 (with J.V.Bardsley) and 1953 (with E.R.Conradi).

Bombs fell on the town in 1940, and many glass panes in the roofs of the courts were shattered. 'Fives this term has been considerably curtailed owing to damage to the courts, and the only matches possible are house pairs and, of course, the school six', wrote the Captain, R.A.Bethell, in 1941. Matches were held against King's College, London (evacuated to Bristol) and the Masters.



Roofs damaged by bombing in 1940

Singles competitions came back in 1943. Fives badges were awarded to the deserving, and a new boys' contest was started in 1944, but flu intervened to prevent its completion. There were 65 entries for this event in 1945.

An Old Shirburnian who played Fives but had little or no match experience at School during the War years was M.de L.Hart, who played for Oxford in 1946. Those at Sherborne immediately peace returned were luckier. The 1946 Fives team beat Bristol University, Crewkerne School and the Sherborne Masters, only losing to the Clifton Masters (away).

Captain of Fives and Squash in 1947 was D.S.Sheppard, later a famous England cricketer and subsequently Bishop of Liverpool. He was the first boy to be appointed captain of both Fives and Squash at Sherborne, a practice which continued until 1956.

Like many schools, Sherborne suffered from a shortage of Fives balls in the late 1940s, and the damaged roofs of the courts leaked. Despite this, the numbers playing held up, and the 1949/50 team was a strong one, winning all but one of its matches. 'It is a pity indeed', wrote the correspondent of *The Shirburnian*, 'that such a strong team had only a short fixture list, but in neighbouring schools fives seems to be something of a dying game.;

The first acknowledgement of coaching came in the 1951 report, in which Messrs P.C.Boissier and J.C.Runge were thanked 'for all the help they have given us in playing with, and coaching the teams.' That year saw a Sherborne pair, T.V.S. Gordon and B.H.H.Longrigg, enter the Public Schools' Fives competition at Alleyn's. They won two rounds of Doubles (against Heath GS, Halifax and King's, Canterbury) and gave the Bedford Modern first pair a good game. Gordon reached the last eight of the Singles and lost to J.F.Pretlove of Alleyn's, who went on to retain his title.

The 1952 team had some good players in it: not only Gordon, but also T.R.Thomas, E.A.Sayres and M.H.Bryan-Brown. Sayres was to represent Cambridge in 1957, and Bryan-Brown Oxford in 1958. New matches against Marlborough and Canford were played, both won easily, but Clifton were still too strong. The Sherborne pair reached the fourth round of the Public Schools' but then had to retire due to illness.

T.R.Thomas produced the best performance by a Shirburnian in reaching the final of the Public Schools' Singles in 1953, losing to D.T.Sparrow of Denstone. The 1955 team 'suffered from the demands of hockey', but their enthusiasm saw them through to win five out of eight matches. Kelly College and Blundell's had been added to the list by 1956, but the four players who entered the Public Schools' had little success. The report attributed the lack of improvement during the season to the lack of a master playing regularly to set a higher standard than that at which the team was already playing.



The 1955 side: 'Enthusiasm saw them through to win five out of eight matches'

In 1957 the captaincies of Fives and Squash were separated into two distinct offices. The RFA Club started to visit, and one of the Sherborne team was R.M. Morgan, who was to play for Cambridge from 1959 to 1961, captaining the team in his last year. The Hell-Fire Club (a Cambridge offshoot) also visited in 1957 and 1958. Bristol G.S. (strong) and Dauntsey's (not so) were added to the list

Hockey was growing in strength in the early 1960s, and an arrangement was made whereby a boy could play Fives or Hockey, but not both. In bad weather (e.g. winter of 1963), this suited Fives admirably, but the standard was still variable. And the roof still leaked. Clifton and Blundell's were the bogey men, and there was a continuing undercurrent of dissatisfaction with the game's lack of status and the need for a system of coaching, in order to compete with other sports and with the stronger schools on the fixture list.

J.P.Riley had been master-in-charge since the mid-1950s, and his administrative qualities were not in doubt. He was repeatedly thanked for his enthusiasm and assistance, but he was not an expert coach. When C.J.Harvey, a fine player, took over in 1967, the standard improved and Lent 1968 was described as 'the most successful season for several years'. The Captain in 1969 was J.S.Schroeter, who was to be a leading player in the game over the following four decades.

A pair from Sherborne had entered the West of England Schools' Championships in its inaugural year, 1959, when J.W.Major reached the Singles semi-finals. Two pairs entered in 1963 but only one arrived. 1967 and

1968 saw two pairs entering, without great success. Schroeter and I.W.Scott entered in 1969, Schroeter reaching the semi-finals of the Singles.



R.M.Morgan 1960



R.D.Knight 1979



Jeremy Schroeter (right) with David Parlby in 1990

The coaching team at Sherborne was joined in 1970 by P.M.Whelan, his contribution acknowledged by Schroeter in his Captain's report as 'having a direct bearing on the team's results'. 1972 was a good year, with a 1st VI all winning colours and two colts' pairs. A new arrival in the Common Room that autumn was M.J.Cleaver, a 1968 Schools' Doubles winner and a Cyriax Cup finalist in 1970. His influence on the school's Fives over the next three and a half decades was to be incalculable, not only for the standard of play but also for the sportsmanship of the players and their enjoyment of the game.

The teams of 1973 and 1974 contained some very good players, the best of whom was R.D.Knight, the son of a famous Fives-playing father. In the Schools' Championships of 1974, he became the second Shirburnian to reach the Singles final, which he lost to a fine player from Bedford, 10-12, 4-11. Knight went on to reach the Singles final of the British Universities' Championships for Durham in 1977 and the Doubles final the next year. He also played for Cambridge in 1979.

Other Shirburnians of that time who went on to make a mark in Rugby Fives were M.A.Hopkins, who played twice for Oxford ((1978/79) and R.H.Green three times (1978-80), the final year bringing a comparatively rare victory for the Dark Blues. And no account of Sherborne Fives would be complete without a mention for M.Alexander, who enlivened the London scene with many fine performances, often for the RFA Club, in the 1970s and 80s.

The rest of the 1970s, with Messrs Cleaver and Whelan at the helm, brought mixed results, with some seasons spoiled by bad weather or illness. Regular school opponents at this time were Marlborough, Bristol G.S., Colston's, Clifton and Blundell's, and visiting club sides were the RFA Club, Jesters, Bank of England, U.C.S. Old Boys and Old Tonbridgians. A great shock came in 1980, when Paddy Whelan died at the age of 43. He was described, among his many other attributes, as 'a sportsman to whom victory was less important than good play, and a coach whose enthusiasm for cricket, fives and rugby inspired a dozen vintages.'

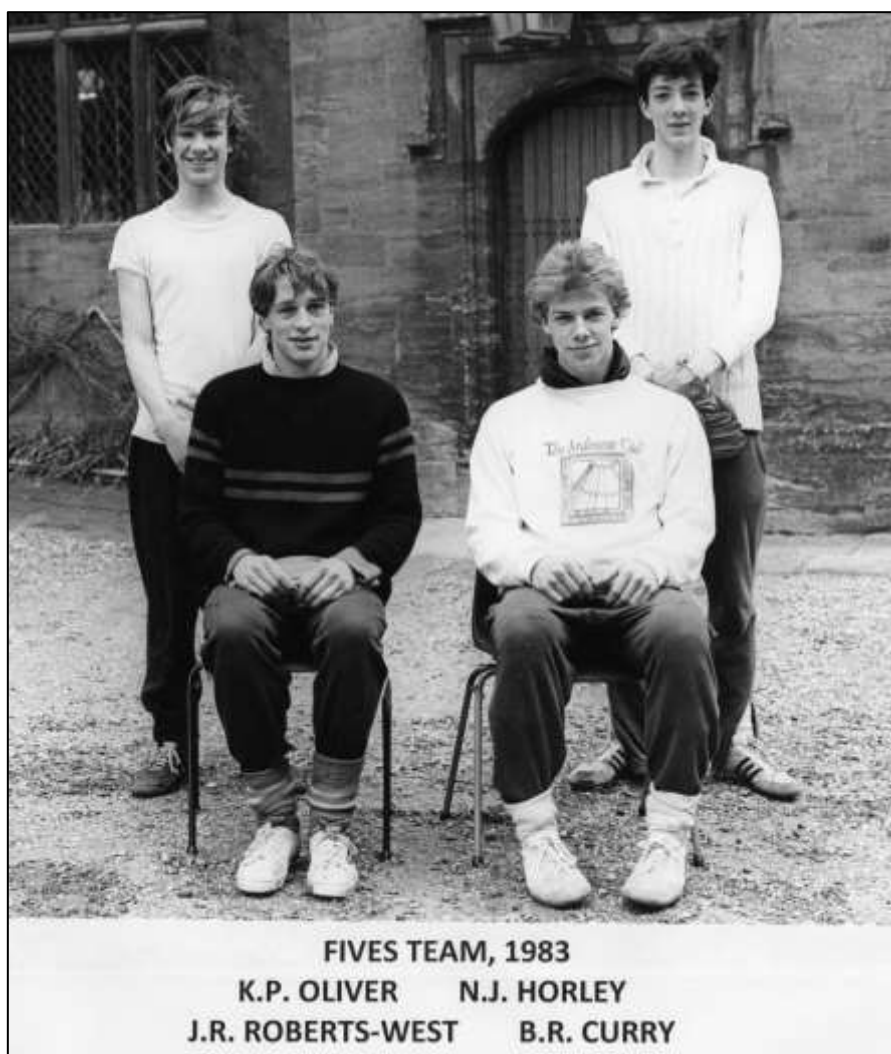
Into the breach stepped another Fives enthusiast, Paul Carling, and the results in 1980 were good, the Colts winning five out of six matches. A member of the 1st IV was Jeremy Stubbs, who although now resident in France, has made a dramatic return to Fives at Veterans level and shared (with Will Ellison) in a win of the RFA Club's President's Cup in 2012.



Future star of *Downton Abbey*, Hugh Bonneville (back, centre) in the 1981 side

1980 also saw the arrival of the West of England Schools' competition at Sherborne, to be run for the next eight years by Mike Cleaver. Another major Fives competition, the British Universities, had visited Sherborne for the first time in 1979 and was to return a further ten times between 1982 and 2014. One of these visits, in 2009, was to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Championships, marked by a party attended by a large gathering of past players.

The 1980s were a good time for Sherborne Fives, with improving standards and good team spirit. Blundell's were finally beaten on their own courts in 1984, and the team participated in the West of England and National Schools' competitions after a long break. In 1985, a pair of Shirburnians managed to play Fives non-stop for 31 hours for charity and a place in the Guinness Book of Records. 1986 saw J.W.Fussell and I.Groom reach the semi-finals of the National Schools' Doubles. Fussell was to go on to share in winning two successive British Universities' Doubles titles in 1989 and 1990 for Leeds University. The loss of the two 1928 courts at Sherborne to classroom development in 1988 was sad, as they were excellent courts when dry – but they sweated at the least opportunity and were often out of commission.



1983: 'Improving standards and good team spirit'

The Cleaver-Carling management team continued in full spate into the first half of the 1990s. At the start of the decade some highly promising young players were detected, and a forecast (always dangerous in sport!) was made that two of them 'will be the best players that the School has produced if they are prepared to put in the necessary practice'.

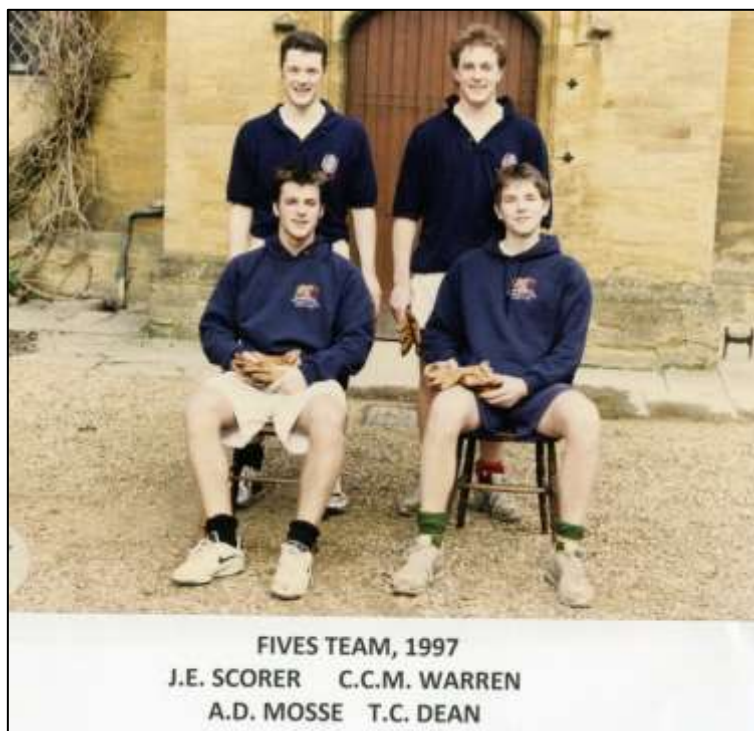
'The time has come for Sherborne to re-enter National Competitions' ran the first line of the 1992 report. The West of England Colts competition was at Clifton, and Sherborne's N.G.MacIver and N.P.C.Hyde proved their ability by reaching the later stages of both Singles and Doubles. In the National U16 Singles at St. Paul's, J.Deehan reached the semi-finals, and MacIver went all the way to the final, losing in three games. 'Sherborne must spread its wings and look further afield to play the best!' wrote Mike Cleaver in his report.

1994 was an unbeaten season for all four teams put out by Sherborne: 1st IV, 2nd IV, Colts and Junior Colts. And even better, it brought Sherborne's first win in the National Schools' Championships in the 64 years of the competition. The appropriately named 'two Nicks', MacIver and Hyde, played brilliantly to win the Doubles, beating Sedbergh in the final, 11-3.11-1. Overcome by this win, assistant coach Paul Carling called it a day at Sherborne after 15 years' unstinting work and went off to run a co-educational residential secondary school in Assam! Coaching duties were carried in the same spirit by Richard Brewer – 'our unpaid professional', as MJC put it – and Finn Spicer, endlessly enthusiastic and a devotee of the half-volley.



Left: The Fives IV in 1994, including Mappin Cup winners Nick MacIver and Nick Hyde;
 Right: A delighted Mike Cleaver holding the Mappin Cup for U18 Doubles in 1994

The standard remained high in the second half of the 1990s, with T.J.Ambrose, later to play twice for Oxford (1998/99), winning the Singles plate at the West of England in 1995 and the Colts having an unbeaten season. T.D.H.Morgan and A.D.Mosse reached the quarter-finals of the Nationals in 1996. Then there was the exciting prospect of four new glass-backed courts being built, adding to the already positive attitude to Fives in the School.



1997: 'The standard remained high in the second half of the 1990s'

In 1997, T.C.Dean reached the quarter-finals of both the Singles and (partnering Mosse) the Doubles at the Nationals. C.C.M.Warren, a member of the 1st IV, was to represent Oxford in 1998. Sadly, the reports for the next two or three years, although positive about the keenness of the players at all levels, make no mention of the planned new courts; and by 2000 two of the regular courts were out of action with dangerous roofs. This inevitably led to the cancellation of some 2nd IV and Colts' fixtures, and it was clear that the money donated to the Devitt Court Appeal was urgently needed. A member of the first IV in 2000 was N.C.Scorer, who was to return to teach at Sherborne and became master-in-charge of Fives in 2009.



FIVES TEAMS, 1999
 B.J. WOOD, N.C. SCORER, S.A. MASON, N.J. WHATMOUGH, W.J. MORE, J.A.T. FOWLE, E.J. HORDER
 M.J.S. TAYLOR, O.P. KAY, A.R.W. PECK, S.R. MOSSE

The 1999 squad including Nick Scorer

B.J.Wood, a member of the 1st IV in 2001 but still a Colt, came close to achieving a National Colts' Singles title, but he met a talented Pauline in the final and lost 5-11, 6-11. Two other members of the 2001 Colts' squad were D.N.Kirk and D.M.Park, names for the future.

The refurbishment of five Sherborne Fives courts was complete by November 2001, making them an excellent venue for practice, matches and major championships, with good lighting and heating. The West of England Open Championships were held there from 2002-2005 before going back to Clifton, and the West of England Schools' competition returned in 2007, to be held at Sherborne every year since. The British Universities' Championships have also been played there four times since the refurbishment.

2003 saw Sherborne's second National title, with the two Davids, Kirk and Park, winning the National Colts' Doubles at St. Paul's. Their semi-final against Radley was an absolute cliff-hanger, but they won 12-11, 9-11, 11-9. Their final opponents, Tonbridge, had also had a tough semi-final, and the Sherborne pair won 2-0 after a close first game. David Park was to go on to represent Oxford three times (2008-10) in winning sides, captaining in his final year.



David Kirk and David Park
with Mike Cleaver and the Marchant Cup in 2003

Numbers surged after this success, and the 1st IV started to beat not only school opponents but also adult sides. In the 2004 National Colts, M.R.J.Oates-Wormer and E.F.Leakey reached the Doubles final, losing to a good St. Paul's pair. A highly successful season followed in 2005, the 1st IV winning all but one of their eleven matches, including home victories over St. Paul's and Tonbridge. Further trophies eluded them, however: two West of England finals were lost (Senior Doubles to Winchester and Colts' Singles to St. Paul's), and Leakey was beaten by the same St. Paul's player in the National Colts' final.

A rebuilding season in 2006, with some U14 matches to encourage the new intake. The 1st IV beat Marlborough and Blundell's, lost by one point at Clifton and more at Winchester. St. Paul's proved to be once again their nemesis in the Nationals.

The introduction of Soccer into the Third Form in 2005 was beginning to have an effect on the numbers playing Fives in 2007/08, and the young Senior squad struggled to compete, although the Juniors managed to beat Blundell's and Kelly.

It was the end of an era for Sherborne Fives in 2009 when Mike Cleaver's long reign as master-in-charge came to an end as he handed over to Nick Scorer. Mike, with support from many helpers on the Staff, had made a massive contribution to Fives at Sherborne and beyond, ensuring that the facilities were improved to make them playable in all weathers and accommodate major championships. His example, as player and coach, was to be seen reflected in his players' tenacity, skill and conduct. The lack of a National Schools' singles title for Sherborne is his one regret, but there is a huge credit balance to set against that, readily confirmed by the large numbers of Shirburnians who enjoyed their Fives during his time in charge.



Pilgrims at Sherborne to play fives in 2019. Simon Stokes, John Barber, Jeremy Stubbs, Toby Dean, Nick MacIver, Edd Horder, Tim Ambrose, Nick Scorer, David Kirk.
Lying are David Park, Richard Bridge

Sherborne Fives has kept a steady pace in the present decade, with smaller numbers and competition mainly in matches and the Colquhoun Trophy for West Country schools. There have been occasional entries to the Nationals, and recently, the West of England Schools'. H.Newman reached two successive Colquhoun Singles finals, the Colts' in 2013 and the Senior in 2014. In 2016, the 1st IV fielded two players who were later to play in the Varsity Match: E.C.S.Pyman (Cambridge 2018/19) and W.J.R.Shardlow (Oxford 2019).

Increasing numbers in 2016/17 saw 10 matches against school and adult teams. B.S.J.A.Mercer won the Colquhoun Colts' Singles, and H.R.Harvey the Colts' Plate. The two of them were at it again in 2017/18, when Mercer beat his teammate in the Colquhoun Colts' Final. In the West of England Schools' Colts, Mercer reached the Singles semi-finals, while he and Harvey also won a Doubles semi-final place. It was Harvey's turn to reach a Senior Singles final in the Colquhoun in 2018/19, and when it came to a larger field in the West of England Schools, Mercer reached the Open Singles quarter-finals and with Harvey the quarter-finals of the Doubles.

Remarkably, the Sherborne courts have now been in use for 145 years, and they are still in good shape. This must surely be a record for Rugby Fives – and it calls for a massive party in five years' time. All O.S. Fives players (and others) take note!

Many of the photos are provided courtesy of Sherborne School. Special thanks to Rachel Hassall, School Archivist, for all her help, and to Mike Cleaver for his memories of 36 years in charge!

D.B.
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