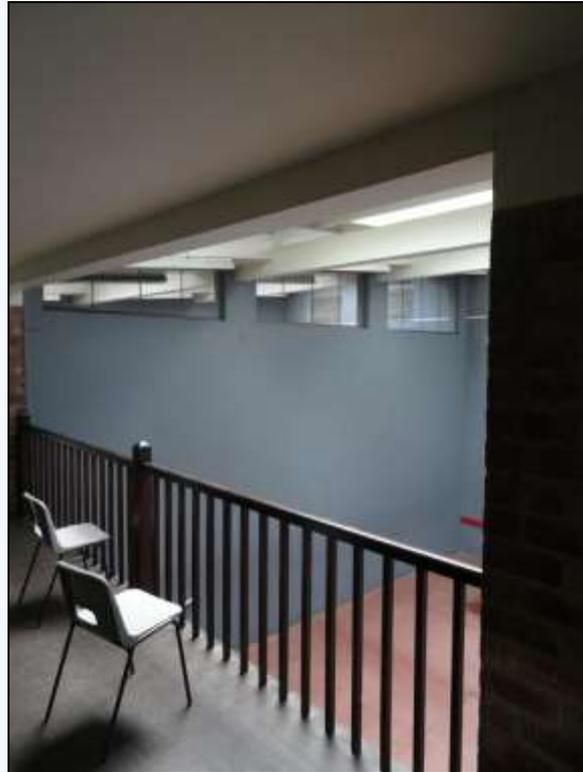
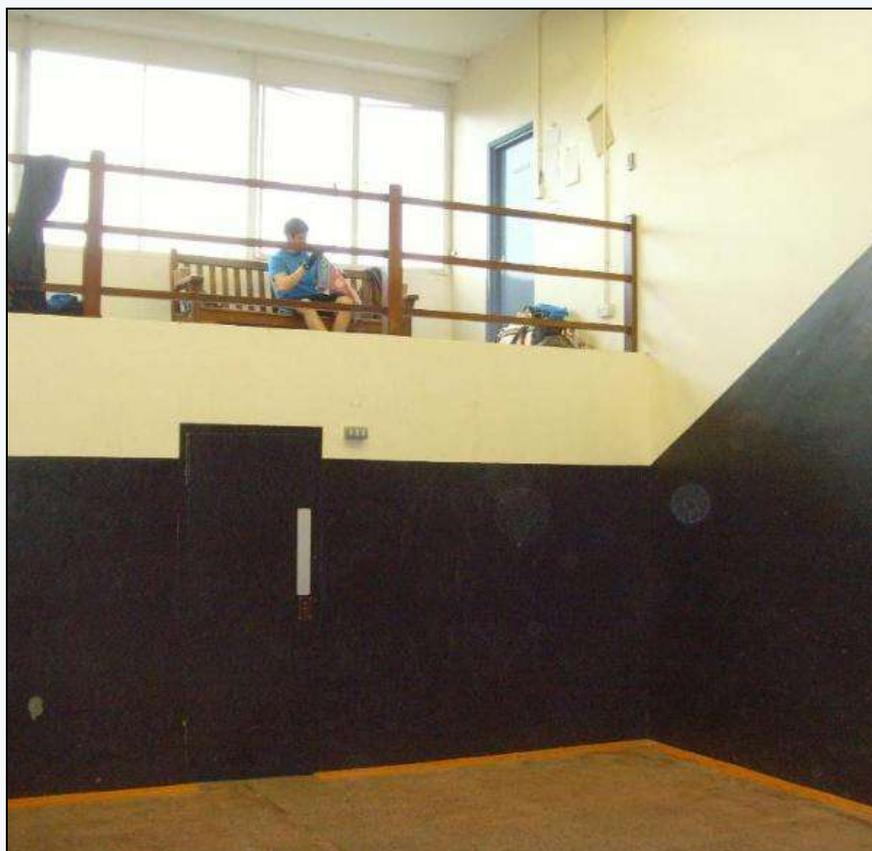


A Twitter Tour through Fives Court design 2020

June 27th: Think how many universities once had Fives courts: Birmingham, Edinburgh, Exeter, Glasgow, Leeds, various London colleges, Manchester, Sheffield. Those students now have to find a local club to play with, like the Caledonian Club in Edinburgh who play at Fettes College (below).



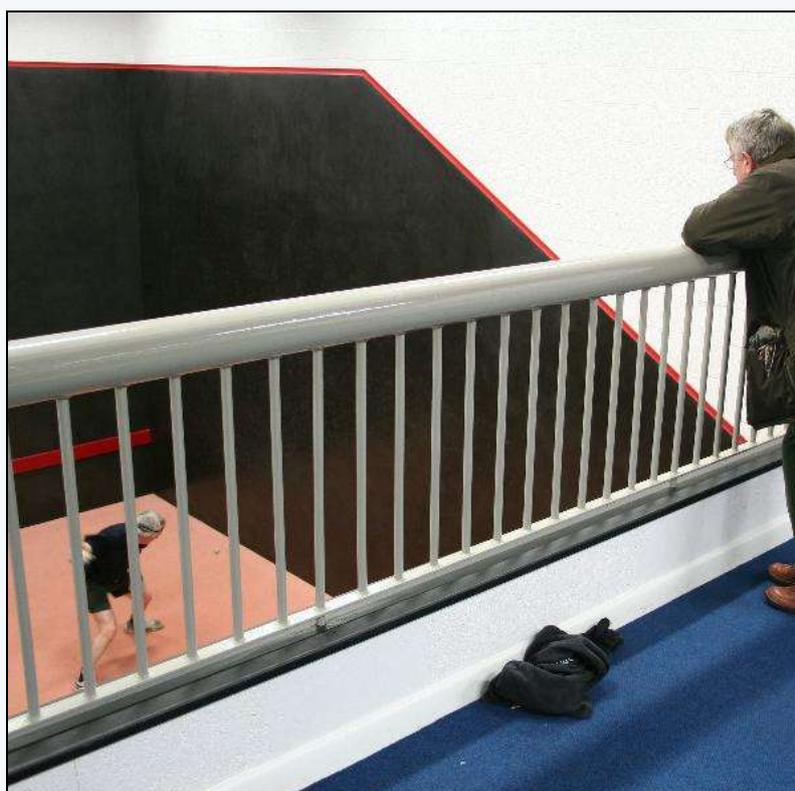
June 28th: So, all you budding Fives Court designers! What's the best design for watching? At Fettes (above) you can sit, but the view of play below is obscured by the vertical wooden struts. Durham University (below) at least has them horizontal. Over the next days we'll look at other configurations.



June 29th: Several other schools favour the gallery some 10-12 feet above the playing level, including Christ's Hospital and (now demolished) Merchant Taylors' School. At MTS (below) there was variation: you could sit on a step to watch, or stand at a rail, or just read a magazine!



June 30th: Other schools have a higher gallery, some 12-16 ft above the court. It can get noisy at Oundle (below), but there's plenty space to move around and a foyer to dump kit and set up refreshments. Spectator-friendly, with thinner vertical struts, but is it too high for coaching?



July 1st: Winchester College's gallery (here) is very high too. The restricted space for spectators is taken up with tiered seating that can be awkward to negotiate. The far end useful for admin, though. Nice wide ledge to lean on. Being redeveloped -- we look forward to the new design!



July 2nd: St Paul's: its long wide gallery (here) is popular with spectators but horizontal planks block the view if seated. At 18 ft wide no more than 13 people can watch a match comfortably. Could a court be designed with viewing along the side walls? Huge cost and space implications!



July 3rd: By accident rather than by design you can watch play on the two courts at the Manchester Y Club (below) from three vantage points -- at ground level through the glass back walls, from the upper walkway to the changing rooms and, above one court, from the stairs connecting the two.



July 4th: For those who are interested in the colour scheme of Fives courts, these two Manchester courts have now been changed from red floors & black walls to light grey floors & royal blue walls (see left hand court). Big talking point!



July 5th: Here is the Radley College design. Is this the ideal height to watch and coach from? Easy to turn round to see play on the other court, ask the score, dispense some wisdom. 4, 6 or even 8 courts would obviously be better than 2, and ample gallery space is necessary.



July 6th: Pre-war many courts were outside with little cover for spectators or protection from the elements: e.g. Allyn's, Bedford, Bedford Modern (below), Blundell's, Clifton, Denstone, Edinburgh Academy, Giggleswick, Loretto, Whitgift. Some, but not all, have been enclosed.



July 7th: On a cold, windy, rainy or snowy day, watching or coaching on an outside Fives court is not much fun. Hence enclosure at places like Alleyn's (below), Derby Moor, Edinburgh Academy, Loretto, Marlborough and Sedbergh. Heaters and dehumidifiers are still needed, though.



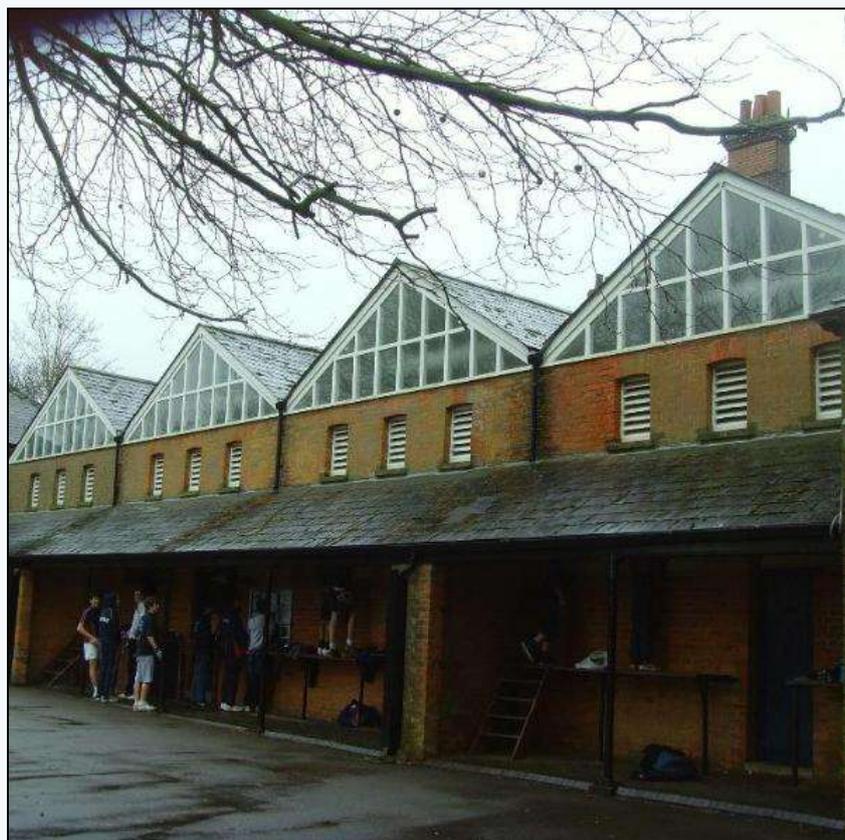
July 8th: One problem with outside Fives courts was the often primitive, sometimes dangerous step-up or platform provided at some, but not all courts, which restricted the number of people able to watch to perhaps 7-8. Some still exist. Some had no viewing facility at all, like here at Rugby School – long demolished.



July 9th: On some courts (here Sedbergh) a degree of athleticism is required of spectators, including a past President of the Rugby Fives Association, that might raise a few questions of Health & Safety! There ought to be easier ways to watch.



July 10th: Unfortunately, the remaining outside courts are sometimes listed buildings, which makes refurbishing or enclosing them an expensive prospect. Understandably, major expenditure on Fives courts does not come high on a school's priorities, even if they are well used – as here at Bedford School.



July 11th: What purpose does the mesh on many old courts serve? To keep boys out? Pigeons? Smokers? Courting couples? It certainly doesn't help viewing or coaching. Indeed, the RFA Risk Assessment deems that because of the mesh "viewing and coaching are unreasonably hampered".



July 12th: If the purpose of the metal mesh (or perspex) is to stop a ball striking a spectator, the RFA Risk Assessment notes that "there are no known incidences of a spectator being injured by a ball flying out of court". Some schools (here Denstone College) have recognised this by removing the mesh.



July 13th: Blundell's have found an ingenious replacement for metal mesh. They've rigged up an adjustable mesh of cord that keeps the birdlife out of the courts when they're not in use but can be raised so as not to obstruct the spectators' view. Wayne can then score at ease. [Sadly this arrangement no longer exists, Wayne informs us]



July 14th: So, what other designs are there that favour spectating and coaching? Bradfield, Clifton & Malvern have non-standard, low back walls, low enough for one of the Malvern courts to have no door. Just climb over! The ball does tend to bounce out a lot, though -- not ideal.



July 15th: Clifton College's old indoor courts from 1887 -- their more modern block of 4 courts from 1927 were demolished in 2002 --- have probably the lowest back walls. Since the days of master i/c Fives Charlie Colquhoun few players of note have developed their skills here.



July 16th: When you think how many wonderful players (of Winchester Fives and Rugby Fives), coached by David B. et al., have emerged from Bradfield College there's clearly something to be said for a design that incorporates a low back wall and ground-level viewing and coaching.



July 17th: So, does the future of spectating and coaching lie with courts with glass back walls? There are just three sets at present: 2 courts in Manchester, 2 in Oxford and 3 in Cambridge. The Oxford University courts (below) from 1990 are old specification, 6 foot high -- not so good for coaching.



July 18th: As we've seen, the Manchester courts have good viewing from various perspectives, but here too the 6 foot back walls hamper communication, which is vital to coaching and developing young Fives players and much appreciated beginners at the Y Club. [NB These colours have since been replaced by light grey floors and royal blue walls]



July 19th: Some 10 years ago, after extensive study, the RFA adopted 4'10" as the standard for back walls. So far only courts at Cambridge University (below) and Derby Moor have been built (or marked) to that specification. Yes, the odd ball flies or bounces out but rarely a good shot!



July 20th: Low level seating and raised standing platform (with more space available behind there could have been tiered seating) enables c20 people to watch per court, plus lower back wall facilitates communication and coaching. Is Cambridge the ideal 'geometry', as Stuart K. calls it?



July 21st: The Cambridge University courts are enclosed and in a row. This geometry ensures safe, easy movement and makes for good spectating and off-court communication. The raised platform is useful for scorer or umpire and as a base for filming. Rear walls offer space for posters, honours boards etc.



July 22nd: One last example of 'geometry' which facilitates spectating and coaching of Fives can be found at the recently enclosed courts at Derby Moor (below). Here the viewing area has been raised to 14" above the playing level, with a 4ft 10" brick back wall.



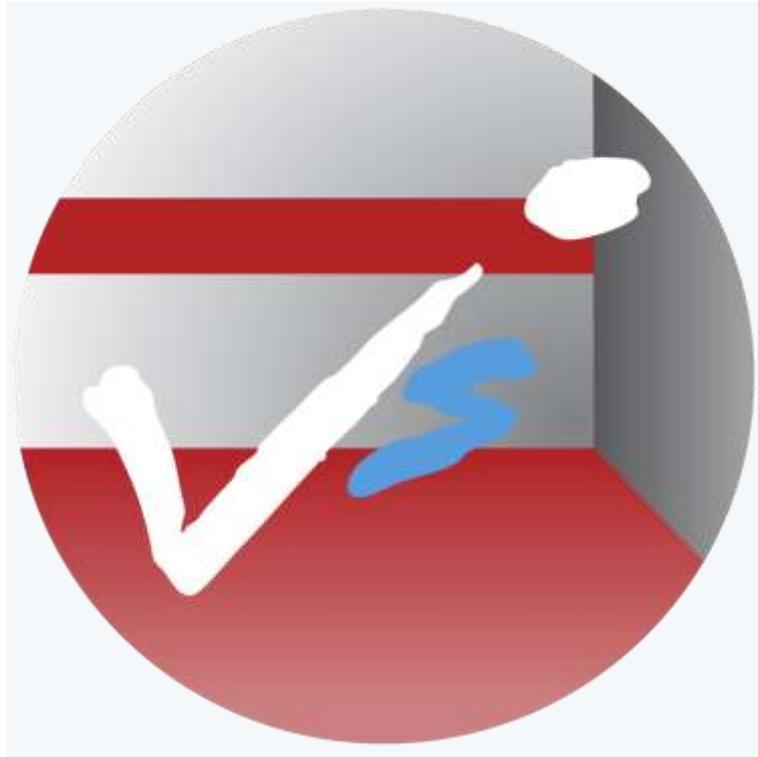
July 23rd: The Derby Moor model creates close proximity between players and spectator, and it facilitates immediate communication between players and their coach. Probably much of the Club's success in bringing on young players derives from this design.



July 24th: And as for filming play -- a useful tool in coaching the game of Fives -- you don't have to specially install a locker in your viewing area to provide a vantage point, but when you're as creative as Lewis



July 25th: Hope you've enjoyed the month-long Twitter Tour of Fives Courts seen from the point of view of spectating and coaching. Please relay any thoughts on court design to the RFA via its website at www.rugbyfives.com, even your preferred colour for the board or floor!



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