

## Ancient Fives Balls at Brecon

David Barnes writes: In August 2022 I received an email from Felicity Kilpatrick, the archivist at Christ College, Brecon, who supplied me in 2016 with a lot of information about the Fives courts there.

She had been visiting the newly opened Brecon Museum, known locally as y Gaer (the Fort). There she had seen a small part of the permanent display which contained the well-known notice about Brecon Castle Fives Court entitled 'Brecknock Against All Britain', and three very ancient Fives Balls. She photographed the display and sent the photo to me with the email.

I emailed the Museum to find out if they had any information about the source of these balls, and if they had had them studied or dated. This is the reply from their Collections Assistant:

'Thank you for your enquiry concerning the fives balls we have on display at y Gaer Museum. Unfortunately we have no information regarding the discovery of the balls apart from the donor, who had a Southampton address. The balls and the notice are two separate acquisitions a number of years apart and the only link between them is the subject matter.'

Asking if the donor could be contacted, I was told that the donation was made in the 1970s and there was no possibility of contacting the person involved.

I have obtained permission from the Museum for the RFA to publish the photo of the balls on our website.

Regarding the photos on next page:

The ball on the left looks to be the oldest, but they all look old. One of the others is possibly too small to be a fives ball. Bat-fives (*Battleboards*), maybe? The donor may have been Welsh, despite having moved to Southampton, so they could be of Welsh origin. Why else would he have given them to Brecon Museum?

The Brecon Castle Fives Court text reads:

BRECKNOCK AGAINST ALL BRITAIN!

### *Brecon Castle Fives Court.*

There are Two Men in the Town of *Brecon*, that will Play a RUBBER at FIVES with *Battleboards*, in the Court at *Brecon Castle*, against any Two Men in the Kingdom, for ONE HUNDRED GUINEAS. ———  
They will likewise Play any Three Men that were born and bred in any one County in *Great-Britain*, for another HUNDRED GUINEAS.

-> *One of them will Play any Man in the Nation* for TWO HUNDRED GUINEAS.

If any would wish to accept of either of the above Challenges, they may apply to Mr. Jones, at the *Castle* aforesaid.

‡ † ‡ It is allowed to be as Fair an enclosed Court as any in *England*.

MARCH 10, 1786,

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