

Past and Present Nr. 15

Better than *Masterchef* and Bigger than *Big Brother*!
Next Year's Past v. Present: Saturday, February 17th 2007

This is the year of Cambridge's 50th victory, in the 76th Varsity Match, and therefore a Year to Remember. When you read the account of the Varsity Match later in the Newsletter you will see there were plenty of other reasons for players, spectators and officials (David Barnes, anyway!) to remember it!

Reason for Joy: Charlie Brooks won the BUSA Doubles title for the third year in a row, this time in partnership with Alan Beverly, having won it the previous two years with Brian Elfick.

It's been a few years since we had a really good glitch with the Past versus Present. Changing rooms have been available, boilers have worked impeccably, courts have failed to sweat, balls have bounced evenly, playing attire has been immaculate, the referee has had no need to intervene in on-court disputes, the beer at The Ship has been of suitably high standard. But, finally, 2006 produced a ****-up of traditional proportions when eight Singles players turned up at Oundle at 11.30 for the Singles only for it to dawn upon the Cambridge Captain that the keys to the courts, so foresightedly vouchsafed to the Hon. Sec. a few days beforehand by Tony Burrows, were languishing in the back pocket of the aforesaid playing-Doubles-in-the-afternoon-only Club Officer in distant St. John's.

Reason for Jubilation: Alan Beverly won the National Under 25 Singles to add to his National Schools Singles title of two years ago.

In previous years the Match Manager would have done grumpy at such a time-honoured piece of undergraduate *laissez-aller* but nowadays we have MOBILE PHONES! A flick of a handset, a dab of a thumb, a murmured summons and within minutes a red Abecassis GTi was roaring along the A14 at speeds only seen in inter-galactic realms. Proceedings began only 90 minutes late, long enough for Michael Mills to reminisce about matches played "before these young men's fathers were born."

Reason for a Broad Smile: Jono Abecassis won his first Tankard – in the U25 Doubles Plate (with a bit of help from Mark Belassie).

Joe Gribble had discovered a loophole in his contract which allowed him to get out of the Singles this year, nor was he selected for the bench. So some other brave chap had to volunteer to take on Alan Beverly. As Andy Pringle, Iain de Weymarn and Niraj Patel jockeyed for lower positions in the line-up Brian Elfick found himself tossed into the lion's den, where he put up a truly magnificent performance, gladiatorial in effort and colossal in defeat. Andy, now entering his prime as a Fives player, was in no mood to sacrifice his unbeaten record against Charlie Brooks; nor was Iain keen to register an L against his name in playing Simon Beal. It was left to Niraj Patel to do the decent thing and lose gamely in the fourth game to Mark "Leyton Hewitt" Belassie, so that the Present came out with their traditional lead in the Singles, albeit of a mere 4 points.

No time for the traditional lunch at The Ship, though Richard Dyer-Smith, our sole spectator, found time for a deserved bite to eat after the long trek up from Hampshire. With David Barnes nursing a poorly back, there were only Richard and the Match Manager to watch a lively tussle in the Doubles. The scratch pairing of Brian Elfick and Iain de Weymarn teamed up to take on the young champions Brooks and Beverly, and came out two points up. Andy Pringle and Ian Jackson confronted the second pair of Belassie and Beal, who laboured under the effects of increasingly painful bruises and found no answer to the old stagers' skills. James Birch and Simon Maskell gave freshmen Richard Lebon and Chris Jones a very useful lesson in unusual angles and unpredictable striking in the third pair, while James Paul and Niraj Patel did shed-loads for the morale of Anish Bhuvu and Jon Abecassis by letting them win with reasonable comfort. Thus, as Brian Elfick departed for a well earned early bath and Iain de Weymarn dropped down to the fourth pair to team up with Martin "Fresh Legs" Wilkinson, the Past found themselves 19 points up.

This year's guest at the Dinner was Corpus man Peter King, master in charge of Fives at St. Paul's, who has sent us so many players over the last decade. This year we had our Captain, Charlie Brooks, our Hon. Sec. Anish Bhuvu and our Number One, Alan Beverly, from his stable. It seemed appropriate to thank Peter for his efforts on our behalf. The last time we had both Captain and Hon. Sec. from the same school was 1978 when Steve Davies captained and Richard Kemp was Hon. Sec. They were at Bedford School – whence come few players these days, sadly.

After the turn the match became very tight. On Court One Brooks and Beverly were honours even with Pringle and Jackson; on Court Two the much bruised Beal and Belassie came back to get a game off Birch and Maskell; on Court Three Lebon and Jones demolished a tiring Paul and Patel; but on Court Four experience told, as Martin Wilkinson and Iain de Weymarn gave Anish and Jon a real test. The Past added just two points to their lead, giving a final score of 249-228, and thus the Trapnell Tankard passed to the hands of victorious team captain Ian Jackson. It was the Match Manager's feeling that the tight match and narrow defeat had done the Present a lot of good for the up-coming Varsity Match – and so it turned out.

Military Trivia: Which Caiian Sparrow has finally acknowledged, 46 years later, the part he played in the third of Caius' famous student stunts? The first was the Jesus Gun wheeze of 1921; the second and most famous was the placing of an Austin Seven on the roof of the Senate House in 1958. The third, in 1959, involved the 'borrowing' of a cannon from the Crimean War that graced the grand entrance to Sandhurst Military Academy. The cannon was then transported by Land Rover to Caius Court, there to be anchored overnight in quick-drying cement. Details of this ingenious escapade can be found in *Once a Caiian...* Issue 3 Spring 2006. Clue: he played in 1959 and 1960.

After the Match all retired to Cambridge and The Pickerel, to meet up with Barry Trapnell, Richard Thomas, John Holroyd, Dickie Clarke, Dennis Silk, Alan Taylor, John Ingram, David Barnes, Don Ellwood, David Arnold and Bob Dolby. Sparrows ties were doled out to freshmen Simon Beal, Richard Lebon, Mark Belassie and Chris Jones, on the understanding that they wore them at the event for the next 57 years. Alan "Three Ties" Beverly also did his bit to support Dave Mackay Ties Ltd. Then on to Drinks in The Parlour and Dinner in Ramsay Hall, with its flash new kitchens. At the Dinner there were, of course, – as Jock would have wished – no speeches, just "a few words" from the President and from this year's Captain.

The Varsity Match: David Barnes' excellent account of the Varsity Match will be available in the new-style Fives Handbook at the end of the season. The match must go down as one of the most memorable contests ever. The result was the closest since 1928, and victory for either side hinged on the last two games of doubles, where Oxford were attempting to make up a deficit of just 2 points.

The Oxford 1st pair duly beat the Cambridge 2nd pair to 3, only to find that current BUSA champions Brooks and Beverly had beaten the Oxford 2nd pair to 1.

By this time it was nearly 8.30pm, the Cambridge 1st IV having been delayed by an accident on the M11 which immobilised traffic for up to six hours. The bottom half of the match had been completed before the Singles were eventually played at 5.30, followed by the top doubles. It made the glitch at the Past v. Present look like meticulous planning! There were even concerns that the two teams might not make it to the curry house in time to be served.

Throughout the match, there were never more than 5 points between the teams, with Cambridge 2 up after the bottom doubles, 3 down after the singles, 5 up half-way through the top doubles, and winning by 4 points at the end, 219-215.

Cambridge Successes: **Paddy d'Ancona** reached the Final of the North West Open Singles where he came up against the home player and reigning National Champion Phil Bishop; it was an all-Old Dunstonian final. Paddy also led the Old Dunstonians to victory in the competition for the Owers Trophy. **Andy Pringle** (who does such sterling work in managing the RFA website) reached his first Open Final, playing in the West of England Doubles. **Charlie Brooks** and **Alan Beverly** won the BUSA Doubles, while **Alan** won the National Under 25 Singles. They also won the Plate at the National Doubles competition. **Jon Abecassis** and **Mark Belassie** beat **Richard Lebon** and **Chris Jones** in an all-Cambridge Plate Final in the Under 25s. **David Hebden** scaled down his Fives-playing this year but won the South-West Doubles at the beginning of the season and retained his Vintage (over 55) Singles and Doubles titles at the end. **Bernard Atkinson** also retained his Doubles title in the Masters (over 65).

Valete: **GKV Clarke (Fettes and Jesus)**, Hon. Sec. for the season 1946-47; **Robin Jasper (Dulwich and Clare)**, classicist, jazz fan, cricketer, Samaritan and Colonial Office diplomat, who was awarded the CMG for his work in newly independent Nigeria after a successful stint in post-partition Pakistan. Robin wrote lively letters even in his 80s extolling the virtues of Fives, reminiscing about the golden age of the game at Cambridge (Davies, Knight, Trapnell, and others), and relating with some delight his refusal to support the post-war Dulwich College building appeal because the plans contained no provision for Fives courts. He played in 1936 and was thus our oldest Sparrow until his death in June 2004.

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Please do look at the website: www.cu-sparrows.org.uk

It will bring back many happy memories, I hope. It might even encourage one of David Arnold's thirty-seven partners to keep him company at next year's Dinner!

CAMBRIDGE v. OXFORD 2006
 Saturday, February 25th at St. Paul's School

Cambridge	Oxford	
<i>Singles</i>		
A Beverly (St. Paul's & Girton)	beat JR Pendergrass (Loretto & Balliol)	16-14
CG Brooks (Captain) (St. Paul's & Caius)	beat WR Hardyment (Captain) (Radley & St. Hugh's)	15-6
S Beal (Eastbourne, Durham & Homerton)	lost to EO Ronan (Bradfield & St. Hugh's)	7-15
MO Belassie (Christ's Hospital & Caius)	lost to JC Furniss (St. Paul's & Pembroke)	7-15
		45-50
<i>Doubles</i>		
Beverly and Brooks	v. Pendergrass and Furniss	15-8 15-1
	v. Hardyment and Ronan	15-6 15-1
Beal and Belassie	v. Hardyment and Ronan	10-15 7-15
	v. Pendergrass and Furniss	3-15 3-15
RS Lebon (Christ's Hospital & Trinity) and CP Jones (Tonbridge & Emanuel)	v. J Heath (Hon. Sec) (Radley & Exeter) and CM Powrie (Whitgift & Hertford)	10-15 15-4
	v. TR Windham (Radley & BNC) and AE Jennings (St. Paul's & Corpus)	9-15 15-10
A Bhuva (Hon. Sec.) (St. Paul's & St. John's) and J Abecassis (Clifton & St. John's)	v. Windham and Jennings	6-15 6-15
	v. Heath and Powrie	15-9 15-6
		174-165

Cambridge won by 219-215

Cambridge now boasts 50 wins against 26 by Oxford.

In the mini-**Sparrows versus Beavers** match Oxford won by 81-47. Representing Cambridge were: MT Hanney (St. Paul's & Jesus), and PM Driscoll (Whitgift & Christ's) and for Oxford ES Wilman (Giggleswick & Hertford) and R Holl (Winchester & Worcester).