

Past and Present Nr. 16

Next Year's Past v. Present: Saturday, February 2nd 2008 (a week early!)

No *Past versus Present* passes without at least the threat of a major glitch. This year was no exception, as the building contractors at Oundle decided to demolish the old courts the week preceding the fixture. Reluctantly we had to turn to Bedford Modern School in the knowledge that the powers that be might insist that, for reasons of Health and Safety, we take out triple insurance, wear hard hats and play with foam balls. Thanks, however, to the magnificent diplomatic skills of Jerry Cooper we were able to play the match under the benevolent eye of Jerry and his chums, on hand to see that we behaved sensibly and safely. Unfortunately they were unable to arrange for Cambridge's bottom four to arrive on time for the Doubles. Luckily, though, they couldn't organise Joe Gribble to make it by 2 o'clock either!

Literary Trivia: *Doubtless plenty of academic, scientific and professional papers have been published by our many highly esteemed Sparrows, and certainly we have in Patrick Neate a major contemporary novelist, but is BWJG (Brian) Wilson (Sedbergh & Christ's, Captain CURFC 1959-60) the first to publish his memoirs? These appeared this February under the title 'Experience is an Arch', a line taken, of course, from 'Ulysses' by Alfred, Lord Tennyson (King Edward VI, Louth & Trinity) who didn't, to my knowledge, play Fives – but I am happy to be corrected.*

Alan Beverly and co. arrived well on time for the morning Singles, which saw Andy Pringle do his best to garner a few points (5) from the mighty Alan, as the Reverend Brian Elfick had declared himself unable to play the part of sacrificial lamb this year. James Richardson, fresh from 1½ hours of sleep over the previous week (junior doctor in nearby Huntingdon!), performed heroics in stretching Charlie Brooks for at least 40 minutes – 8 points. Jonathan Abecassis, likewise making his debut for the Past, ran Mark Belassie around even longer for 11 points, while round the back Simon Maskell gave Richard Lebon a lesson in sustained retrieving, winning 15-6, somewhat against the traditional script. Present 51-39 up at lunch.

More Bookish Trivia: *Tony Tiffin (Durham & St. Catharine's) (Captain CURFC 1957-58) tells me that he has a few copies of the only book published on Fives, 'Eton and Rugby Fives' (1935) by David Egerton and John Armitage (Bedford & Emmanuel), with dust wrappers, price £15. John Armitage was Captain of CURFC in 1932, the year Jock Burnet played in the Varsity Match; the illustrations show Jock, Jack Davies, Roger de Winlaw and John Armitage himself playing, perhaps at Roehampton.*

Lunch was taken in "the grotty pub round the corner in Palmerstone Street" as someone called it in a flurry of e-mails concerned with the catering arrangements. Barbara Windsor produced three massive plates of sandwiches: cheese, ham and corned beef. Martin Wilkinson reminisced about his youth when a slice of spam was the best a young fives player could expect after a hard singles; Mark Belassie manufactured a few roll-ups thinner than a sparrow's legs. Spam and cigarettes are, of course, are to be outlawed in pubs from July of this year.

Photographic Trivia: *David Barnes has sent me an informal photograph of the 1932 team which turned up in RFA archive material. It includes Jock, of course, and was taken at Roehampton where the Varsity Match of that year was played. Only Jack Davies is dressed in long whites, the rest in a delightful assortment of gear including a Winchester 2nd XI cricket blazer! The photograph will eventually be placed on the website.*

Matters after lunch were delayed by the late arrival of the Cambridge doubles players who had contrived to catch a bus that delivered them at Bedford Bus Station at 3 o'clock for a 2 o'clock start – a bit of ill-preparation that was to reoccur the following week at St. Paul's. Nevertheless some fives eventually got started, with Jono Abecassis now playing for the Present, as Simon Beal had been struck down by one of the countless bugs he must have been subjected to while on Teaching Practice. Unlike Robin Thompson (who?), who in 1997 managed to play for the Past without ever playing for the Present, Jono has now joined Simon Maskell in playing for the Present after playing for the Past after playing for the Present..... Isn't Fives complicated?!

***Historical Trivia:** Records for CURFC go back to 1925 when the first (unofficial) Varsity Match took place. But there must have been Fives being played at Cambridge long before that. For example, in Brian Wilson's memoirs there is a photo of the splendid two-handed tankard awarded in 1896 to Brian's grandfather, JAF Gregg, and his partner WD Monro, for the 'CU Rugby Fives Tournament'. John Gregg (Eastbourne, Bedford & Christ's), eventually to become Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland in 1939, was apparently Hon. Sec. of CURFC. Whom did they play? Not Oxford, to our knowledge. Would someone like to research the history of Fives at Cambridge pre-1925, please?*

The Past brought in the big guns for the Doubles: Gribble, Wilkinson, Jackson, Birch, Robinson and Hanney, though Matt Hanney would dispute that title having now worked himself to a mere shadow of his former self as Policy Researcher for Nick Clegg, MP (Lib. Dem.). Toil in the smoke-filled rooms of Westminster has obviously done Matt's Fives a great deal of good, as he managed this year to win his first trophy – the President's Cup –, carrying Hamish Buchanan to victory much as David Hebden has had to do on so many occasions.

***A New Home for Cambridge Fives?** Well, at least a temporary one. The new courts at Oundle are now up and running. Your Editor had the privilege of playing in the first trial match there in March – much like the various trial matches at Wembley that preceded the Cup Final this year – and can report that, while not the lightning fast courts that are to be replaced by a central Dining Hall, the new courts are a pleasure to play on and watch Fives in. Well done, Oundle, on having the vision to build four indoor courts with viewing facilities attached to the Sports Hall. Matters were doubtless helped by Oundle's Governing Board being chaired by a winner of the National Schools Doubles in 1949, JM Pickard.*

By the 'turn' the Past had turned a 12 point deficit into a 17 point lead, much of this in the bottom pairings, where the somewhat rusty Mark Belassie, Chris Jones and Paul Simister in particular were given a lesson in consistent doubles play. That tale continued in the final matches, with the unbeaten Charlie Brooks and Alan Beverly unable to garner enough points to make up for the leakage in the lower echelons. By the end of events the Past had gained a victory by 245 points to 201. The Trapnell Tankard would be collected later by captain Martin Wilkinson, who became only the second player to take part in the match in his sixties. John Pretlove, of course, sneaked a game in his seventies!

***The Second Australian Branch Meeting of the Sparrows:** This took place on Tuesday, 16th January 2007 at The Melbourne Club, Bourke Street, Melbourne. Those attending were Michael Seymour, Anthony Jannink and Michael Parkinson. On the menu were "Excellent Calves Liver and Bacon". There was no mention of Whitebait, but a good deal of discussion of geology over "Clare Valley wine and a fine Stilton".*

Back then to Cambridge for the usual pint in The Pickerel, Sherry in the The Parlour and Dinner in Ramsay Hall, where the players joined Dennis Silk, Alan Taylor, Mark Cornwall-Jones, Simon Bevan, Richard Jefferson, David Hares, David Barnes, Andrew Lewis, Bob Dolby, Chris Bascombe, David Arnold, Tony Palmer, Guy Whiting, Alan Matthews and Lyn Graham-Taylor. One empty chair: John Pretlove, who'd put March 17th in his diary – not as good an excuse for missing the Dinner as Tony Abrahams in 1999, who got locked in his potting shed for the evening in sub-zero temperatures.

As usual there were no speeches, just “a few words” from the President and then from the Captain, Alan Beverly, incidentally our first captain from Girton. Victorious captain of the Past, Martin Wilkinson, was presented the Trapnell Tankard, and Charlie Brooks received an engraved pétanque ball to mark his winning the BUSA Doubles four years in a row.

The final irony of the day was the fact, hidden from the players by the Match Manager, that the demolition of the courts at Oundle had been delayed until the following week. Next year's match will be played on the new courts at Oundle, a ‘first’ which might encourage more of the Past to volunteer to play? It's on the earlier-than-usual date of February 2nd, 2008.

The Varsity Match: While Cambridge had the class players in Beverly and Brooks, who were largely responsible for a substantial lead after the Singles, Oxford had four aggressive and effective pairs of consistent strength who overwhelmed Cambridge's lower pairs in the Doubles. The RFA match report by umpire David Barnes suggested that Cambridge looked rusty and unprepared, a point they will need to address next year as they practise on the new courts at Oundle. They will certainly need to warm up a lot longer than they managed this year! For match scores see overleaf.

Cambridge Successes: **Paddy d'Ancona and Ben Taberner** reached the Final of the London Open Doubles 2006 and the semi-finals of the Open Doubles in 2007. **David Hebden** continued his remarkable sequence of wins in Doubles tournaments by winning the West of England, the Yorkshire Open and the North of England with Hamish Buchanan, plus the Vintage with Keith Puckle, and his customary contribution to the success of the Alleyn Old Boys in the Owers Trophy; **Matt Hanney** partnered Hamish to success in the President's Cup. **Alan Beverly** won the BUSA Singles for the first time and the Under 25s for the second consecutive year; with **Charlie Brooks** for the second year running he won the BUSA Doubles (Charlie's 4th in a row!) and, for the first time, the Under 25 Doubles. **Bernard Atkinson** won the Masters Doubles with David Bawtree for the third year running.

Valete: **Mark Lintell** (Bradfield & Magdalene, 1965 and 1966) was an unconventional but brilliant environmental planner, lauded as an “early advocate of sustainability”. After a double First in Architecture, he spent a period as a Fellow in Urban Design at the University of California before returning to the UK to devote the bulk of his professional life to the work of Land Use Consultants, a pioneering, multi-disciplinary environmental practice of which he became Chairman from 1990 until his death last year as the result of a brain tumour.

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

It will bring back many happy memories, I hope.

CAMBRIDGE v. OXFORD 2007
 Saturday, February 24th at St. Paul's School

Cambridge

Oxford

Singles

| | | |
|---|---|--------------|
| A Beverly (Captain) (St. Paul's & Girton) | beat JR Pendergrass (Loretto & Balliol) | 15-1 |
| CG Brooks (St. Paul's & Caius) | beat EO Ronan (Bradfield & St. Hugh's) | 15-2 |
| RS Lebon (Hon. Sec.) (Christ's Hospital & Trinity) | lost to JC Furniss (St. Paul's & Pembroke) | 11-15 |
| CP Jones (Tonbridge & Emmanuel) | beat NP Warrillow (St. Paul's & Pembroke) | 15-13 |
| | | 56-31 |

Doubles

| | | |
|--|---|----------------|
| Beverly and Brooks | v. Pendergrass and J Heath | 15-10 |
| | (Radley & Exeter) (Captain) | 15-5 |
| | v. Ronan and Furniss | 15-8 |
| | | 15-7 |
| Lebon and JM Dickens (Bedford & Emmanuel) | v. Ronan and Furniss | 10-15 |
| | | 8-15 |
| | v. Pendergrass and Heath | 1-15 |
| | | 4-15 |
| S Beal (Eastbourne, Durham & Homerton) and MO Belassie (Christ's Hosp. & Caius) | v. Warrillow and RJ Holl (Winchester & Worcester) | 2-15 |
| | | 11-15 |
| | v. TR Windham (Radley & BNC) and AE Jennings (St. Paul's & Corpus) | 5-15 |
| | | 6-15 |
| Jones and PR Simister (St. Paul's & Trinity) | v. Windham and Jennings | 10-15 |
| | | 4-15 |
| | v. Warrillow and Holl | 5-15 |
| | | 5-15 |
| | | 131-210 |

Cambridge lost by 187-241

Cambridge now counts 50 wins against 27 by Oxford.

In the **Sparrows versus Beavers** match Oxford won by 176-42. Representing Cambridge were: M C Reid (Edinburgh Academy & St. John's), R Walter (Tonbridge & St. John's), T Eccles (St. Paul's & Trinity) and CJ Wright (Oundle & Homerton), and for Oxford CM Powrie (Exeter & Hertford) (Hon. Sec.), D Park (Sherborne & St. Catherine's), EJ Emmett (St. Paul's & Christ Church) and ES Wilman (Giggleswick & Hertford).