

Past and Present Nr. 17

Next Year's Past v. Present is the Sixtieth!

Put it in your diaries now!!

Saturday, February 14th, 2009 – with partners

Not so much a glitch this year as an enforced change of format. Because Magdalene were unable to accommodate us on our preferred date a week before the Varsity Match, we had to stage the Past versus Present while Oundle School was still in session. Hence the need to start the Singles at 11 am and play the whole match straight through to 2.30 so that the schoolboys could use their courts that afternoon. It actually worked well; we might repeat the format in future years. It had one congenial consequence: the players got to the pub twice, once to The Ship for chips and chat and later to The Pickerel for pints and more chat. But enough of this pub trivia...

Pub Trivia: Is a 'Pickerel' (a) Radley College argot for a blackguard served down the left-hand wall [if not, it ought to be! Ed.] or (b) a young pike or (c) the member of an erstwhile team of Cambridge fives players inferior to the Sparrows but still vastly superior to the Beavers? Clue: Anglers should know this one.

In the absence of Alan Beverly, who was successfully defending his U25 National Singles title at Merchant Taylors' (bad planning by the RFA here), Richard Lebon did the captainly thing and took on Andy Pringle in the Number One Singles match. Richard had to work his way back from 2-9 down at an agonisingly slow pace, such that the match threatened to go on into the early hours of the evening. While this titanic struggle took place Jonathan Abecassis bruised himself in the process of getting 4 points off our top rower Chris Jones, and Bill Townley made a welcome return to the fixture to stretch freshman Alqahir Ladak for a further nine. Anish Bhuva, who came up to Oundle unfresh from several long nights on the ward, harboured far too generous sympathies towards the Present and lost to nought against the fast improving Malcolm Reid. Meanwhile the captain of the Present had clawed his way back into contention against the General Secretary of the RFA and, with the assembled crowd cheering him on, registered a 16-15 victory. The Past thus found themselves 33 points adrift at the end of the Singles. This is what happens when Joe Gribble doesn't play!

Ageist Trivia: Which member of the Past managed to play in this fixture twice while still aged 60? Clue: His namesake was not kicking England to victory against Wales at Twickenham that day.

Clearly the Past needed the big guns for the Doubles, so in came Joe and David Hebden to take on Lebon & Jones, and also Brian Elfick and Ian Jackson to take on Reid & Ladak. Joe and David had considerably less success than Brian and Ian, partly because the new courts at Oundle with their glistening waxy walls suited the front-foot style of left-hander Brian much better than the back-wall arts of Joe. Much the same pattern was repeated in the third and fourth pairs, where Tim Caroe and Bill Townley found the equally scratch pairing of Anand Ashok and Paul Simister a real handful (nice phrase that, somehow very appropriate to fives). The two Martins, however, – Wilkinson and Robinson, that is – playing their customary cameo part, were far too steady for Rupert Walter and Charles Compton in the nether reaches. The Past clawed back a mere 12 points by 'the turn'.

Historical Trivia: No sooner do I beseech my readers to do some research on Fives in Cambridge before 1925 than an Oxford man (!) alerts me to the existence, in the library of

St. John's College, of a wonderful album of photographs from the 1890s. In it I find a photograph of the St. John's Fives IV in 1896, so far the earliest known photograph of any fives team. In due course I shall put it on the Sparrows website along with a splendid group photo from 1926 showing both VIIIs in the first official Varsity Match. This, too, comes courtesy of an Oxford man, Alastair Mackenzie, President of OURFC.

Scenting a realistic sniff of the Trapnell Tankard Richard Lebon exhorted his lads to redoubled efforts. His fourth pair had to be remodelled as a consequence of an injury to Rupert's knee: Jon Abecassis once more played for the Present after playing in the same match for the Past. Points swung to and fro. Lebon & Jones found Elfick & Pringle a tough challenge: 10-15, 10-15; Reid & Ladak won two close games against Caroe & Gribble; Compton and Abecassis got 10 in both games against Bhuva & Jackson. It was left to Ashok & Simister to take advantage of a certain understandable tiredness and lack of concentration on the part of the two Martins to win 15-5, 15-13. Thus the second set of Doubles were tied at 101-101 and the Present took the Tankard by 248-227.

More Historical Trivia: I thought for a while that the cup presented to Brian Wilson's grandfather and partner in 1896 (See Past and Present Nr. 16) had been well and truly superseded by a 3-handled pewter tankard in the possession of Ian Roberts, editor of the excellent RFA/EFA Annual review. It is inscribed Trinity Hall Fives – GH Goldney EP Browne Lent Term 1871. But it's most probably for Eton Fives as the two of them were at Eton and Harrow respectively, so BWJGW's cup still wins.

As ever, the players swooped on the Pickerel to join as lively a flock of ancient Sparrows as ever took flight: Richard Thomas, Dickie Clarke, John Pretlove, Richard Jefferson, David Barnes, Richard Dyer-Smith (who had loyally spectated at Oundle and cheered on the Past throughout the afternoon), Andrew Lewis, David Arnold, Tony Palmer, Robert Cleave, Chris Cates, Graeme Denison, Andrew Cates, Matt Hanney and Bob Dolby. Alan Beverly and Charlie Brooks hot-footed it (winged it?) back from Merchant Taylors'. John Holroyd was prevented by illness from making it 57 dinners out of 59; Guy Whiting and Patrick Driscoll likewise were unable to take their seats. Dennis Silk had managed to double-book himself and felt compelled to honour a commitment to talk on leadership at a pukka girls' school, doubtless in the hope of encouraging some reincarnation of his beloved Margaret Thatcher.

Continuing Historical Trivia: I have discovered a little more about the late, lamented courts at Portugal Place. According to Kelly's Directory for Cambridgeshire 1896 "The University Racquet and Fives Courts in Portugal Street were built in 1892, by a company at a cost of £7000, and comprised 2 racquet courts, 2 squash racquet courts, 2 Rugby fives courts and 2 Eton fives courts : there is also a good billiard room." Those of you who remember that ramshackle building will not be surprised to see that all manner of modifications and additions must have been made to the original. The complex was demolished in 1995 and replaced by St. John's, who owned the site, with a residential block. I have a piece of the wall of Court One, courtesy of David Barnes, who donned a hard hat to root among the rubble.

At the Dinner Alqahir and his fellow freshmen marvelled at the presence on this occasion of Richard Thomas, who has not only been at the first Dinner in 1949 but had also been at Cambridge in the war years. An excited Matt Hanney told all and sundry of his up-coming meeting with Rowan Williams, which duly occurred only days before the good archbishop delivered his headline-making speech (what would Jock have made of that, one wonders?). On seeing his paltry plate of whitebait 2008-style, Andrew Lewis wondered if perhaps these

fish were not “an endangered species”. David Arnold thumbed avidly through the pages of the Record Book Vol. 1 in search of the occasion when Cambridge might have scored 301 points against Oxford – theoretically possible (indeed a maximum score of 320 is possible) – but discovered that we shall have to content ourselves with 300-108 in 1973 and 300-153 in 1974, though neither matches the victory by 392-103 in 1925 when a different scoring system and format pertained.

Captain Trivia: Only two players have captained both Oxford and Cambridge in the Varsity Match. Who are they, and guess which Dinner they both attended this year?!

Finally, there were, as usual, no speeches, just “a few words” from the President, principally concerning the small book about Jock Burnet planned for the coming year, and from the Captain. We wished the VIII good fortune against the old foe, drank a toast to Jock and retired to enjoy the liberal opening hours of the hostelry across the road.

The Varsity Match: As can be seen from the scorecard overleaf we were not strong enough in the lower pairs this year to gain a victory. From Cambridge’s point of view there was one highlight: Alan Beverly’s emphatic defeat of Dan Tristao, billed as “the decider” after Tristao’s victory at BUSA (when Alan was not match-fit) and Alan’s victory in the U25s a fortnight before. For once the Sparrows versus Beavers confrontation was a decent contest, much thanks to Anand Ashok and a fast improving Andrew Bailey. In their suits and Sparrows ties the Cambridge team looked smarter than for some time. The occasion was somewhat marred, however, by the loss [by St. Paul’s] of the Jock Burnet Trophy. To compensate the Oxford VIII for the lack of a trophy, the Cambridge President arranged for an engraved *boule* to be presented later in the term for them to hold in perpetuity.

Cambridge Successes: Congratulations to **Jon Abecassis** on winning the President’s Cup in December, partnering Phil Atkinson. Also to **Alan Beverly** on successfully defending his U25 Singles title. **Charlie Brooks** and **Alan Beverly** won the Plate in the Amateur Doubles in March 2008. **Ben Taberner** won the London Open Doubles with Hamish Buchanan, as well as helping the Manchester Y Club to retain the Wood Cup. Congratulations to **Andy Pringle** on winnings the Singles Plate at the Scottish Open and on his appointment as General Secretary of the RFA.

Valete: I have recently heard of the death, in 2002, of **Tom Slator** (Oundle & King’s, 1936 and 1937). Pre-war he worked in Nigeria in the Colonial Service, helping to form the Nigeria regiments, for which he was awarded the military MBE. After the war he joined English Electric, where he focussed on the creation of guided weapons and rose to be Vice-President. It seems somehow appropriate for a fives player to have been a driving force in the technology of guided weapons! We have also lost **David Bennett** (Whitgift & Robinson) who played in 1988. He died at a tragically young age of a brain haemorrhage. He practised as a GP in Gloucester; he leaves a wife and two young children.

<p>Next year’s Dinner will be the 60th. Magdalene have kindly allowed us to have the Great Hall, as in 1999. Sparrows can therefore bring partners if they wish! With a maximum capacity of 100 I advise you to book early! Saturday, February 14th 2009.</p>
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Correspondence welcome: Bob Dolby, 26 Waverley Avenue, Beeston, Nottingham NG9 1HZ (Tel.: 0115 925 2845). Also e-mail: bobdolby5@btinternet.com

CAMBRIDGE v. OXFORD 2008
 Saturday, February 16th at St. Paul's School

Cambridge	Oxford	
<i>Singles</i>		
A Beverly (St. Paul's & Girton)	beat DC Tristao (St. Paul's & Lincoln)	15-3
RS Lebon (Captain) (Christ's Hospital & Trinity)	beat JC Furniss (Joint Captain) (St. Paul's & Pembroke)	15-13
CP Jones (Hon. Sec.) (Tonbridge & Emmanuel)	lost to AE Jennings (St. Paul's & Corpus Christi)	6-15
A Ladak (St. Paul's & Christ's)	lost to DM Park (Sherborne & St. Catherine's)	11-15
		47-46
<i>Doubles</i>		
Beverly and Lebon	v. Furniss and Tristao	15-8 12-15
	v. RJ Holl (Joint Captain) and Jennings	15-4 15-8
Jones and Ladak	v. RJ Holl (Winchester & Worcester) and Jennings	10-15 10-15
	v. Furniss and Tristao	1-15 2-15
MC Reid (Edinburgh Acad. & St. John's) and PR Sinister (St. Paul's & Trinity)	v. SJ Adcock (Eastbourne & St. Edmund Hall) and Park	5-15 10-15
	v. Emmett and Wilman	6-15 15-16
RE Walter (Tonbridge & St. John's) and CK Compton (Eastbourne & St. John's)	v. EJ Emmett (St. Paul's & Christ Church) and ES Wilman (Giggleswick & Hertford)	3-15 6-15
	v. Adcock and Park	6-15 15-13
		146-214

Cambridge lost by 193-260

Cambridge now counts 50 wins against 28 by Oxford.

In the **Sparrows versus Beavers** match Oxford won by 160-93. Representing Cambridge were: A Ashok (St. Paul's & Queens'), PN Gwynn (Radley & Trinity), AFD Bailey (Clifton & St Catharine's) and RA Lloyd (Bedford & Jesus), and playing for Oxford were HR Wilman (Giggleswick & Hertford), HR Waite (St. Paul's & Magdalen), JSW Kelly (Christ's Hospital & St. Hugh's) and AJC Robinson (Tonbridge & Hertford).