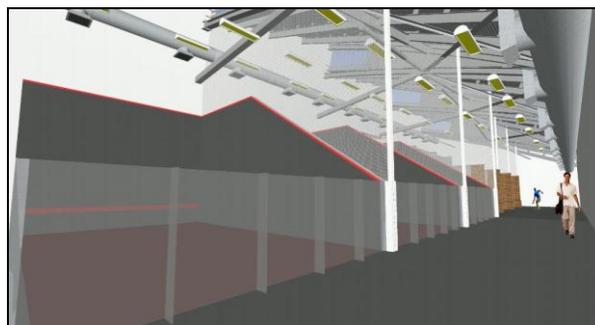
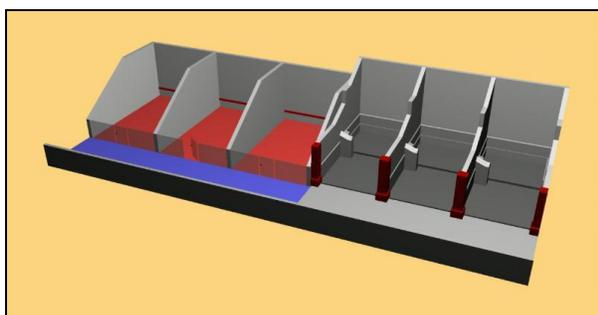


The Rugby Fives Courts in the Cambridge University Sports Centre

In June 2011 the Council recommended the construction of a Sports Centre on the West Cambridge site. The first signature on the document doing so was that of the new Vice-Chancellor, Prof Sir Leszek Borysiewicz. It soon became clear that Sir Leszek was to be a driving force behind this project to give Cambridge University, finally, a Sports Centre worthy of it. The proposal was accepted by the University. The firm of engineers chosen to design the building was Arup Associates.



Ever since the courts were demolished at Portugal Place the Director of Physical Education, Tony Lemons, had promised to find a way to incorporate fives courts into the design of a sports centre. The Arup design contained a space on the first floor of the proposed building. The Presidents of the Rugby Fives and Eton Fives clubs, Bob Dolby and Rodney Knight, were invited to advise Arup on the design of courts. What proved to be feasible in the space available was the construction of three courts of each type. Bob Dolby was able to call on the expertise of the Rugby Fives Association's Technical Officer, Stuart Kirby, to produce a design for the courts complex. In the case of Rugby Fives the black walls would be made of glass and be 4'10" high to facilitate coaching and viewing. The Eton Fives courts would have a run-off of adequate proportions. All courts would enjoy ample room for lob shots. The Rugby Fives courts would benefit from a viewing platform and seats to watch from (see the President's first sketch later!).



The 'ground-breaking' ceremony for the Sports Centre was held on in April 2012. David Barnes represented CURFC at the ceremony in the absence of the President. It would be some time before the firm chosen to build the centre, SDC Construction of Bedford, would involve itself with the details of constructing fives courts. The priority for both clubs was to raise the necessary sum of money to fund the building of the six courts, lest the space be lost to another sport or activity.



By the end of 2012 it was clear what sum needed to be raised: £825,000 for six courts. There was much uncertainty as to what might happen if one or other club was unable to raise the funds needed. One thing was clear: the cost of building anything other than the desired six courts would be higher. In the last days of 2012, to the great relief of all concerned, Tony Lemons communicated good news: it had been decided that six fives courts would definitely be incorporated into the project. Fund-raising had to begin in earnest.



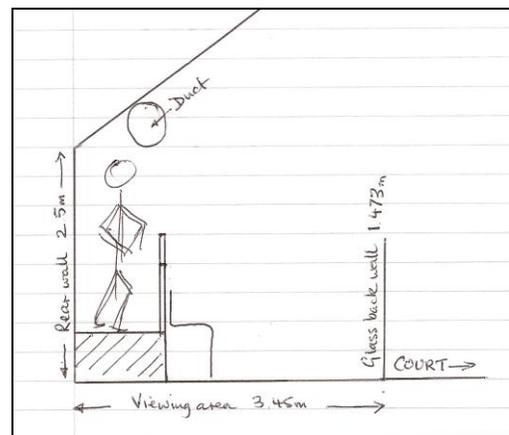
The Rugby Fives Club was well set to raise the money, having long prepared for the day. The President was in contact with all bar a handful of living Cambridge fives players, known as Sparrows, many of whom came to the annual Jock Burnet Dinner. A former Captain of Fives came forward in May 2012 with a pledge of £100,000 plus Gift Aid to set the ball rolling. Before

that the Cambridge University Fives and Rackets Association (CUFRA) had agreed to commit £250,000 of its funds to the project to build fives courts and squash courts within the proposed centre. This money derived from previous appeals, led by the late Jock Burnet, which had been made in the late 1980s with the aim of funding new courts. The sum allotted to Rugby Fives at the AGM of CUFRA in March 2012 was £97,000. Eton Fives received the same amount from CUFRA and in due course also found a lead donor prepared to pledge £100,000. With half the money necessary for the courts thus guaranteed, Bob Dolby and Rodney Knight were able to go ahead with their appeal.



In the case of Rugby Fives an appeal went out first to some 200 ex-Cambridge Fives players; they responded with predictable generosity. In due course an appeal to all non-Cambridge members of the Rugby Fives Association followed, which once more resulted in significant donations. A third appeal went out to individual members of the Jesters Club, and finally we appealed to players of fives who had represented Oxford University in the Varsity Match since the Second World War. There was a particular appropriateness in this appeal as many ex-Cambridge players had contributed to the two glass-back courts built for the Oxford University Fives Club in 1990 on the Iffley Road site. Oxford players responded with admirable generosity.

The Rugby Fives Club also received substantial grants from the Rugby Fives Association Charitable Trust, the Jesters Club and the Newby Trust in memory of John Charlton, captain of CURFC in 1962. By August 2013 the necessary money had been raised for the Rugby Fives courts and with a late surge of donations and pledges the Eton Fives Club managed the same. A board facing the Rugby Fives courts records the names of all benefactors of 'The Jock Burnet Courts'.



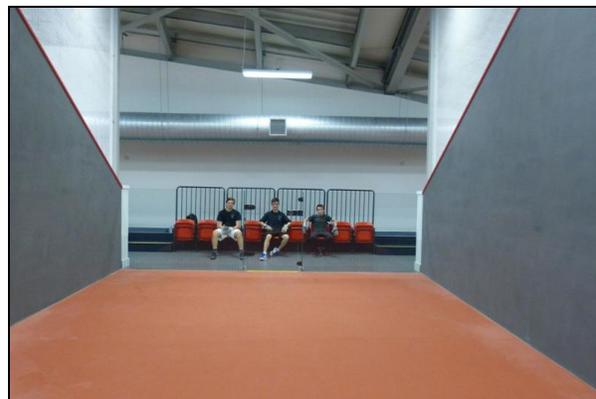
The undergraduates played their part too. The Captain of CURFC, Ed Kay, organized a Marathon Fives Match versus the Rest (of the World) at St. Paul's School in December 2012 to raise funds. The first match began at 4pm and the final match, 24 hours later, was played by Bob

Dolby, Ed Kay, Ben Quarry and David Barnes (see above). Between them Ed and Will Sloper were seldom off court; several other members of CURFC did their bit. The opposition was provided, in two-hour stints, by members of the RFA, Sparrows, schoolboys, among them several national champions. The sponsored event raised some £4000. The Rest won by 820 points to 593!

With the Eton Fives Club also managing to raise the money required with a late burst of donations and pledges we were able to concentrate on helping the lead architect from SDC Construction to build the perfect courts. A Cambridge man, Daniel Changer had ironically been a pupil at Dulwich College, whose Fives courts had fallen foul of the Luftwaffe in 1944. Daniel and his team were tireless in their efforts to achieve courts of the desired quality. From the first site meeting to discuss the details of the courts, in February 2013, it was not all plain sailing by any means. The first building blocks for the courts were laid in April 2013, soon after the topping-out ceremony for the whole building; the sheer weight of the walls and the floors, particularly those of the Eton Fives courts, were of constant concern. Attempts to achieve the perfect render on the walls failed at the first attempt despite the best efforts of the plasterers working for Courtcare UK. These problems were rectified in time for the floor of the Rugby Fives courts to be laid by McDaid Screeding Services and for the glass back walls to be installed by Courtcare. Subsequent testing by Stuart Kirby and a group of players from the Derby Moor Fives Club in August proved satisfactory. Likewise the Eton Fives adviser, John Reynolds, a multiple National Champion, pronounced the surfaces of the Eton Fives courts satisfactory.



Play began in earnest on these new courts in October 2013 when the undergraduates returned to Cambridge. The hope that such superb new courts would bring about a surge in interest in the game was realized. Over 100 students signed up for Rugby Fives at the Freshers' Fair; some 25-30 came along to try out the game. The captain of CURFC, Jack Malde, was able to run both a University Squad and a Development Squad. The President was delighted to see that some ladies expressed an interest in playing fives and came along to try the game out. He challenged the Club to produce a National Ladies Champion within three years!



The Eton Fives Club held an Opening ceremony in November 2013. The Rugby Fives Club preferred to wait until February 2014 when the annual Past versus Present Match and the Jock Burnet Dinner took place. There players and spectators were able to admire a full set of Honours Boards celebrating the history of CURFC since 1925. A plaque was unveiled by Gareth Quarry, captain of CURFC in 1981, dedicating all six courts to the memory of Jock Burnet, who had been President of both Fives clubs from 1949 until his death in 1989. The current President, Bob Dolby, expressed a wish that the whole area of the courts might be referred to as ‘New Portugal Place’.



Thus begins a new era in Rugby Fives at Cambridge University. There is evidence of various kinds of fives being played at the university in the nineteenth century. The courts at Portugal Place date from the 1890s. The Cambridge University Rugby Fives Club was founded in 1925 and is fully documented since. Much of its history can be read on this website. The new courts, built in 2013, are constructed in such a way that they will outlast the building they are housed in. Let us hope that we are talking about at least another century!

Bob Dolby February 2014