

Reminiscences of an Old Trident by Abraham Shuker
From The Trident, the magazine of Trent College, January 1907

And now for a few words on Fives and our Fives Courts. No better or more wholesome game is played, and our courts are the best in dimensions, and the most sporting in the world. The swagger courts, true and smooth as a billiard table, elongated like a racquet court, are a mistake; the game becomes monotonous and is not half the fun we get out of ours. I wonder Old Tridents do not go in for private Fives Courts. See how keen they are when they re-visit the old place; some, almost quinquagenarians, seem to pick the game up again in 10 minutes and play as well as ever. It does not take a multi-millionaire to build a court; and when it is done, there is no petrol wanted, no rolling and mowing, no cost of maintenance; a little thinking out at first, and there you are! You have a single with your wife—ladies have been known to play, and well too—or you have one or three friends and real good healthy exercise, pleasure simple and satisfying. If I could have a court, it should be a facsimile of our old No.1, with all its little oddities; the door, exasperating at times, fitting none too accurately, with its uprights; the projecting beam on the right, giving time to argue and get breath; the ledge for the ball to roll along and quietly drop in the corner on the left; even the bits of missing plaster; the back roof “in”. All should be there, to the bit of board where the ball sounds “*tank*” —like the old Risley chime of three, and one was cracked, of a Sunday afternoon—“ding dong *tank*”, “ding dong *tank*”, and what a lovely village Risley was before it was modernised and vulgarised; it only wanted a big chestnut over the smithy to be perfect. They say Tettenhall is the prettiest village in England; but it is not truly rural like Risley. Digression again—.

Fives beats golf in many ways, and particularly in that it needs no special vocabulary. One never feels so much at peace with all the world as when playing Fives; the green-eyed monster cannot creep in, it would be impossible to play if it did. Masters and boys sometimes feel a bit irritable towards one o’clock—what a cloud-dispeller the Fives Court then is!

There is no “Fives Amateur Association” yet, and therefore no hard and fast written laws; and how smoothly we have gone on without them; the “spirit of the game” has been sufficient. Perhaps we do *argue* a bit—just to get wind—but not as in the American University match that came off lately, where an hour and 10 minutes were spent in play, and an hour and 25 minutes in arguing the rules and carrying off the disabled! A recent tendency, however, is not to be commended, where in a four game one player takes upon himself the work of two, and his partner has to scoot as best he can, like Mr. Page’s Norfolk rustic—“Well, John, I hear you have been to London for a week. What did you do?” “Why, sir, I seemed to occupy most of my time in trying to get out of the road!”

Our first really good player was Harris; Pratt was very fair; the best we ever had probably were Hugh Hanmer, D.S.O.Tucker and C.T.Symons. “Jim” gave me my “quietus”, but I should have liked a shot at him 15 years earlier. There have not been many to beat Mr Costigan, *at his best*, but he varied. Of the “ruck”, Bunny, Bobbin, Caput, and Joey are the keenest of Old Boys’ Teams, and cause their Captain most anxiety. F.W.Swann was the hardest slogger, Julip the maddest, and Billy the most dangerous! Mr. Hare was about the best master we ever had. And one word of explanation as to the masters’ right of “keeping a court”. When the four courts were built, No. 1 was reserved for masters only; there was a wire guard put up; it was kept locked, and each master had a key. However, it was often empty, and there was at times a great rush on the courts with the large number of boys. So the masters threw their court open with the right of reservation. The custom has held ever since, but its justice has possibly not always been apparent.