

## **RUTLAND SQUASH RACKETS CLUB – a brief history**

### **1970s**

RSRC was founded in 1971 and was originally known as the Falcon Squash Rackets Club as it was established by Mr and Mrs John and Sheila Ervin, who were the owners of The Falcon Hotel at the time. It was set up as a propriety club, which meant that Uppingham School leased its courts to Mrs Ervin (herself a qualified squash coach), and she was responsible to the School for the general running of the club. The tenancy was to run for ten years. A temporary committee was set up in the first instance, and at the first AGM on 29<sup>th</sup> November 1971 the formal elections saw the confirmation of the following positions:

Mr S. Thompson (Chairman)  
Mr A. Keene (Treasurer)  
Mr G. Glenn (Secretary)  
Miss P. Brodie (Asst. Secretary)  
Mr J. Ervin (Match Secretary and Men's Captain)  
Mrs S. Ervin (Match Secretary)  
Mrs P. Makey  
Miss V. Richardson  
Mr D. Halliday  
Mr J. Mawdesley  
Mr D. Holloway  
Miss F. Killick (later co-opted as Ladies' Captain)  
Mr R. Boston (co-opted as member of School staff to help with liaison with the School)

Court bookings were taken at The Falcon, and as there were no changing facilities for ladies (the School was an all-boys establishment then), one was constructed between courts 1 and 4. Originally there were 160 members, and at the beginning of the 1971-2 season demonstration matches were held between the current Leicestershire & Rutland men's and ladies' champions against international players (Ann Gee and Ian Turley), followed by a 'Steak and Kidney Supper' at The Falcon for which tickets cost 80p. This generated a profit of £9.00, so it was decided to open a bank account in the club's name. Indeed, annual exhibition matches followed by a supper continued almost throughout the 1970s, including the appearance of the 1977 World Amateur Champion Kevin Shawcross (from Australia) and some of the top players in the UK.

Originally one men's team and one ladies' team were established, with matches being organised against local opposition such as Peterborough, Nottingham, East Haddon, Hemingford and RAF Cottesmore. A club ladder was set up for members to compete against each other, and it was agreed that the top two players should have a play-off on 28<sup>th</sup> February 1972, with the winner being awarded the Keig Cup.

In 1973 monthly leagues were set up, with five players in each league, and a knock-out competition was introduced (with the Holloway Trophy as the prize). It was then decided, in 1974, that the Keig Cup should be awarded to the winner of the winter

leagues rather than the ladder winner. The 1973-4 season also saw the introduction of a men's 2<sup>nd</sup> team, and in 1976 an annual Handicap Tournament was begun in addition to the other club competitions.

However, even back in the 70s, when squash was in its heyday, club social events were not always well-attended, and at a committee meeting in April 1973 one committee member commented on the apathy of club members when it came to supporting social events, saying that it seemed that everything was being driven and supported by committee members more or less on their own. The minutes state: "At this point the meeting degenerated into personal feuds with the temperature being very high indeed, and the secretary refuses to record these events"!

As the 70s progressed, the club's teams joined official leagues; the men's 1<sup>st</sup> team joined the Ascot League and the ladies joined the Leicestershire League, where they came 3<sup>rd</sup> in 1978. Unfortunately in 1979 both the men and the ladies found themselves relegated to division 2 of their respective leagues.

## **1980s**

It is thought that when the club was established subs were around £10.00 for a single membership, but records make clear that by 1980 this had risen to £20.00. Also at this time membership cards, with an individual number for each member, were introduced, and members were required to quote their number when booking a court and to put their card in the holder on the court door when playing.

Largely because of the travelling distances involved in being in the Ascot League, the men's team decided to apply to join the Peterborough Leagues and were pleased to be accepted into Division 2.

In 1981, ten years after the formation of the Falcon Squash Rackets Club, Mrs Ervin's proprietorial status ended and a steering committee (consisting of Mr R.J. Matthews (chairman), Mr K. Bentley, Mr T.J. Andrews and Mr J.V. Light) was set up to negotiate a new agreement with the School whereby the club would be able to continue to use the courts at certain times as before, and would pay a proportion of the subscription income to the School as rent.

On 8<sup>th</sup> May 1981, an Extraordinary General Meeting of the Falcon Squash Rackets Club was called, at which members voted in favour of the proposed agreement with the School and also voted to change the club's name to Rutland Squash Rackets Club. The first committee of the newly formed RSRC was as follows:

Mr J. Light (Chairman)  
Mr T. Andrews (Treasurer)  
Mrs J. Squirrell (Secretary)  
Mr P. Kirk (Men's 1<sup>st</sup> team Captain)  
Mrs M. Bussey (Ladies' Captain)  
Mr R. Matthews (Mens' 2<sup>nd</sup> team Captain)  
Mr M. Knauer (League Organiser)

Mrs Y. Howie (i/c/ Junior Members)  
Mr S. Watchorn  
Mr S. Dexter

All court bookings were now to be made via the Uppingham Sports Shop rather than The Falcon, and Friday Club Nights plus Ladies' Mornings on Wednesdays were instituted.

The 1981-2 season proved a successful one for the club's teams, with the men's 1<sup>st</sup> team being promoted from Division 2 to Division 1 in the Peterborough League and the ladies being promoted from Division 3 to Division 2 in the Leicestershire League.

In 1982, plans were drawn up with the School to alter the current Court 4 plus changing room areas into a club room and kitchen with improved changing facilities and to build a new fourth court. The cost was estimated at £60,000. It was proposed that the club should apply to the Sports Council for a grant, as RSRC funds at the time only amounted to approximately £1000, so it was impossible for the club to be able to fund shared costs with the School. However, Sports Council regulations did not permit this type of application, and as the prospect of raising £30,000 would entail doubling subs (which currently now stood at £25.00 for a single membership) and introducing court fees, it was decided at the 1983 AGM to shelve such plans amidst fears that the steep rise in fees would cause a significant number of members to leave the club. Instead, a small structural change was made in the installation of a screen in front of the door to the men's changing room in order to avoid men being seen in various states of undress from the foyer area every time one of them came or went through the door, (this was apparently causing some embarrassment to the lady members!). In addition, it was proposed to move the existing door to Court 4 to the corner of the court, thus creating room to extend the ladies' changing area; this was effected in 1984.

Also in 1983-4, a Plate Competition for the Holloway Cup was added to the club's annual competitions in order to give every member of the club a chance to win a trophy.

In 1985, Yvonne Howie became the club's first Life Member, having been a member since 1977 and having served on the committee, first as an ordinary member (i/c/ Junior Members), then as Treasurer and subsequently as Secretary .

At the AGM in 1986, it was proposed that the club's name be changed to Uppingham Squash Rackets Club, but this motion was defeated by 12 votes to 10.

In the late 1980s membership numbers began to decline, reflecting the general trend nationally, and actually dropped to fewer than 100 for the first time since the establishment of the club in 1971. It was agreed with the School that the court rental fee would increase each year by the annual rate of inflation rather than being related to the number of members, which would enable the club to budget accordingly.

## 1990s

By 1990 subscriptions had risen to £45.00 for a single membership, and in 1991 this went up again to £50.00. Also at the start of this year a letter was received from the School Shop terminating their provision of court booking facilities for the club and member numbers were continuing to decline, so two Extraordinary General Meetings were held, one with the new Bursar of Uppingham School, to discuss how to proceed. As a result, it was agreed that court bookings would be taken by telephone at the School Sports Centre, managed by Neil Spencer, and that in future the date of the club's AGM should always be in April so that the season could be reviewed as a whole and the full year's finances reported.

At this stage, (1991), ten years after RSRC gained its new name, the committee members were as follows:

Mr M. Willis (Chairman)  
Mrs J. Salt (Treasurer)  
Dr M. Hardwick (Secretary)  
Dr C. Thomas (Membership Secretary)  
Mr R. Shelton (Men's 1<sup>st</sup> team Captain)  
Mrs J. Hollowell (Ladies' Captain)  
Mr P. Steward (Men's 2<sup>nd</sup> team Captain)  
Mrs M. Matthews (League Organiser)  
Mr A. Brown  
Mr T. Dickenson  
Mr A. Salt

In the 1993-4 season, a couple of new ideas for competitions were introduced : a Beginners and Improvers Cup for those in the lower leagues, and a Veterans' Competition for the over-40s. Both competitions were welcomed at this stage, but as club numbers continued to decline, (despite efforts by the committee to advertise the club locally), their existence was short-lived and focus returned to the already-established competitions.

In 1994 two setbacks occurred: for the first time since 1987 the club finances made a loss for the year, and the men's 2<sup>nd</sup> team were dramatically disqualified from the final of the Peterborough & District Squash League Cup Competition for allegedly fielding an ineligible player in the semi-final. Despite an appeal, (and despite the fact that their semi-final opponents had themselves broken two League rules!), disqualification was upheld, which was a great disappointment.

The 1994-5 season saw the replacement of the Holloway Cup, which was now twenty years old, by a new trophy, and it was agreed that this should be named the Willis Cup in honour of the continued long-standing chairmanship of Mike Willis. In addition, an affiliation with Uppingham Community College began, instigated by Andrew Brown, which provided a venue for AGMs, and white polo shirts with the RSRC logo embroidered on them were made available to all members at a cost of £12.50 and proved very popular.

In the mid-1990s, a Christmas Club Night was started to replace social events that had occurred in previous years, as support for the latter events (such as pub meals,

barbecues and petanque evenings), had been disappointing. It was also suggested that the club should seek sponsorship from The Vaults pub in Uppingham. The landlord, John Pearson, agreed and thus began several years of sponsorship from The Vaults. All team members were given a sweatshirt with the RSRC logo on the front and advertising The Vaults on the back, and in addition The Vaults provided post-match suppers for the teams and a venue for committee meetings, (with Uppingham Community College continuing as the venue for AGMs as these involved a larger attendance). The excellent meals provided, along with the hospitable ambience, led to the ladies' team winning the Hospitality Trophy in the Leicestershire Leagues on several occasions.

1996 saw life membership awarded to Bill Gray for his long-standing contribution to the club, particularly as a coach and as organiser of Club Nights. Also that year the key lock at the courts was replaced by a combination keypad, which meant that no longer did members have to remember to bring their keys – a great blessing for some!

Despite moves to advertise the club more widely, especially following the closure of the squash courts in Corby, and to keep the subscriptions as low as possible (they were now at £60.00 for a single membership in 1996-7), numbers continued to drop, and the court rental for 1998 was held at the 1997 level by agreement with the Bursar. Nevertheless, the club continued to field a men's and a ladies' team in the local leagues, and in 1997-8 both teams came 2<sup>nd</sup> in their respective leagues (the men in division 2 of the Peterborough & District League and the ladies in division 3 of the Leicestershire League).

## **2000s**

The 2000s saw wins for both the men's and the ladies' teams in their divisions of their respective leagues in 2001, and the men also won the Cup competition. Membership numbers also increased slightly in 2001-2, but this rise was short-lived. At this point, thirty years after the original foundation of the club, the committee comprised the following:

Mr A. Brown (Chairman)  
Mrs J. Squirrell (Treasurer)  
Mrs J. Wood (Secretary)  
Mrs R. Brayshaw (Membership Secretary)  
Mr J. Fowler (Men's Captain)  
Mrs M. Matthews (Ladies' Captain)  
Mr I. I'Anson (League Organiser)  
Mr R. Parnell  
Mr P. Latham  
Mr M. Willis  
Dr C. Thomas

For the remainder of the 'noughties' things continued to tick along, with the following events occurring:

2003 Summer leagues were changed to run for two two-month periods rather than four lots of one month in order to give members time to arrange their matches around their summer holidays.

The club had its first website entry created by Chris Thomas.

- 2004 The club's constitution was updated and formally accepted at the AGM
- 2005 Life membership was awarded to Alan Shelley
- 2006 Court 4 was altered to make it into a full-size court, though sadly the low roof beams remained so that it was still not possible to use it for matches.
- 2007 Membership cards were replaced by shoe tags, to be issued annually in a different colour for each year, so that membership of RSRC was clear for all to see.  
Life membership was awarded to Mary Matthews, Bob Black and Hilary Black.  
After more than ten years of generous sponsorship and excellent team meals, the teams ceased to be sponsored by The Vaults. New sponsorship was found from Insider Gold, and a new set of team shirts was purchased and also some money was used to pay for professional coaching, open to all members, from Tim Ayling. This sponsorship lasted for two years.
- 2009 Uppingham School announced its decision to build a brand new, state-of-the-art sports centre with three glass-backed squash courts. There were fears that this would mean the closure of our courts, but the School said that due to the popularity of squash amongst its pupils it intended to maintain use of the current courts as well.

## **2010s**

By 2010 single membership had risen to £90.00 per year, and sadly it was the last year in which the club fielded a ladies' team in the Leicestershire Leagues due to the very low number of female players available. The men's team continued to compete in the Peterborough Leagues, finishing 4<sup>th</sup> in Division 1 in 2013.

On the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the club's existence, the committee for 2011 comprised the following:

Mrs K. Gaine (Chairman)  
Mrs J. Squirrell (Treasurer)  
Mrs J. Wood (Secretary)  
Mr N. Wedge (Membership Secretary)  
Mr I. Burnett (Men's Captain)  
Mr R. Black (League Organiser)  
Mrs H. Black (League Organiser)  
Mr S. Philpot

The construction of the new Uppingham School Sports Centre (USSC) led to much negotiation between the club and the School, resulting in an agreement that the club would continue to use their current courts once the USSC opened, and that USSC would oversee bookings by telephone and e-mail. This was the club's preferred option, as the deal offered for RSRC to use the USSC facilities would have meant considerably higher subscription costs and less court time. In order to promote the fact that the club would continue to run alongside the new USSC facilities, a new website was set up by Neil Wedge which was also tablet/mobile compatible, and arrangements were put in place to provide an internet banking option for members to pay their subscriptions.

In 2014, Mrs A. Howe was co-opted onto the committee as the School Representative, (the Chairman had represented the School until then but was now retired), and life membership was awarded to John Cowan for his excellent support and service to the club.

Summer 2015 saw the refurbishment by the School of the changing rooms, entrance hall and balcony area which greatly enhanced the overall facilities. Whilst work was in progress, members were given access to the USSC courts and changing facilities so that everyone could continue to play. The actual courts themselves are scheduled for refurbishment in 2017, subject to budget availability.

### **A Historical Record of Chairmen**

Past chairmen of Rutland Squash Rackets Club from its inception to the present day are as follows:

1971 - 1974	Mr S. Thompson
1974 – 1976	Mr A. Keene
1976 – 1977	Mr E. Hackford
1977 – 1980	Mr J. Allman
1980 – 1982	Mr J. Light
1982 – 1984	Mr P. Ellard
1984 – 1986	Mr R. Matthews
1986 – 1987	Mr P. Smith
1987 – 1989	Dr A. Davidson
1989 – 1991	Mr R. Black
1991 – 1998	Mr M. Willis
1998 – 2001	Mr A. Brown
2001 – 2004	Mr P. Latham
2004 -	Mrs K. Gaine