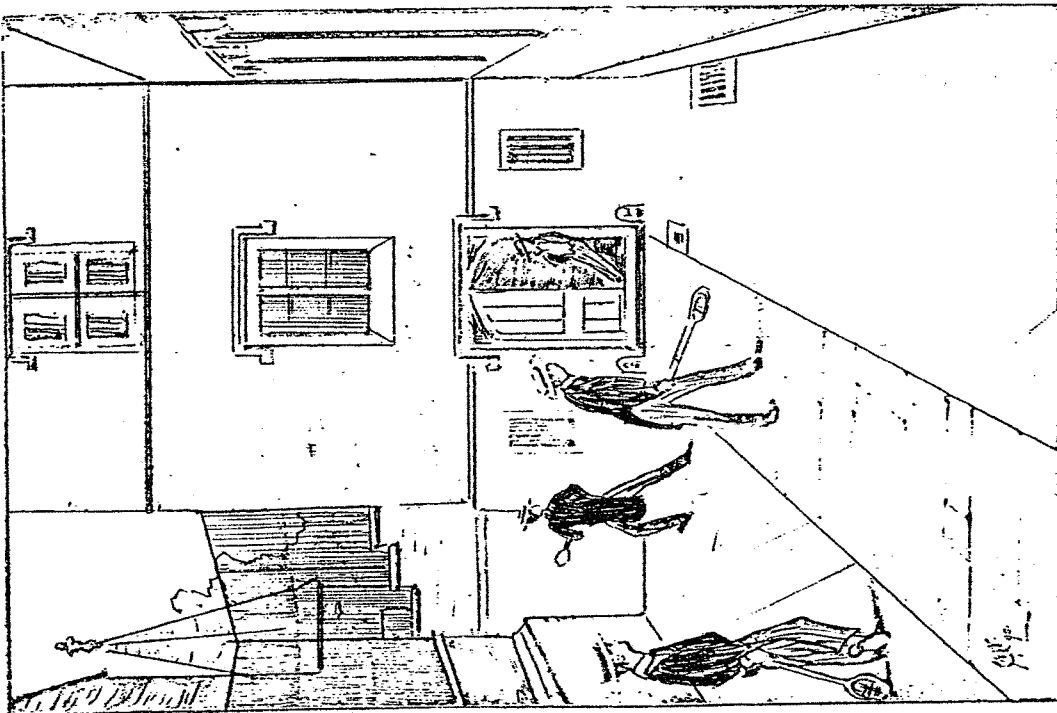
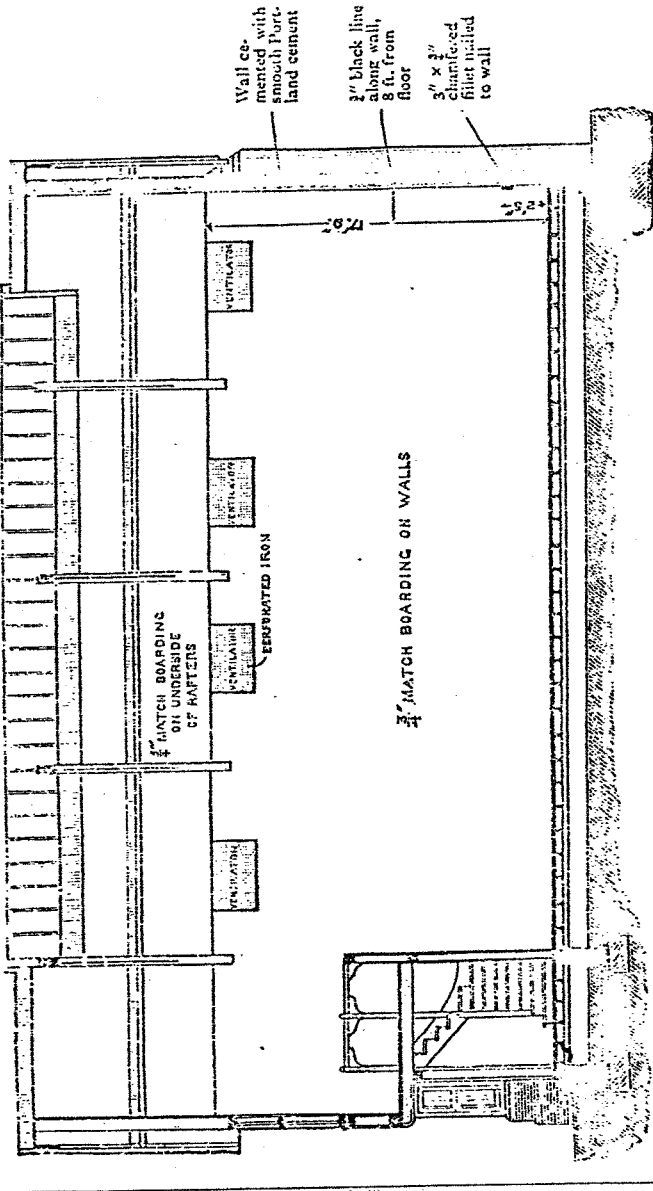


HARROW

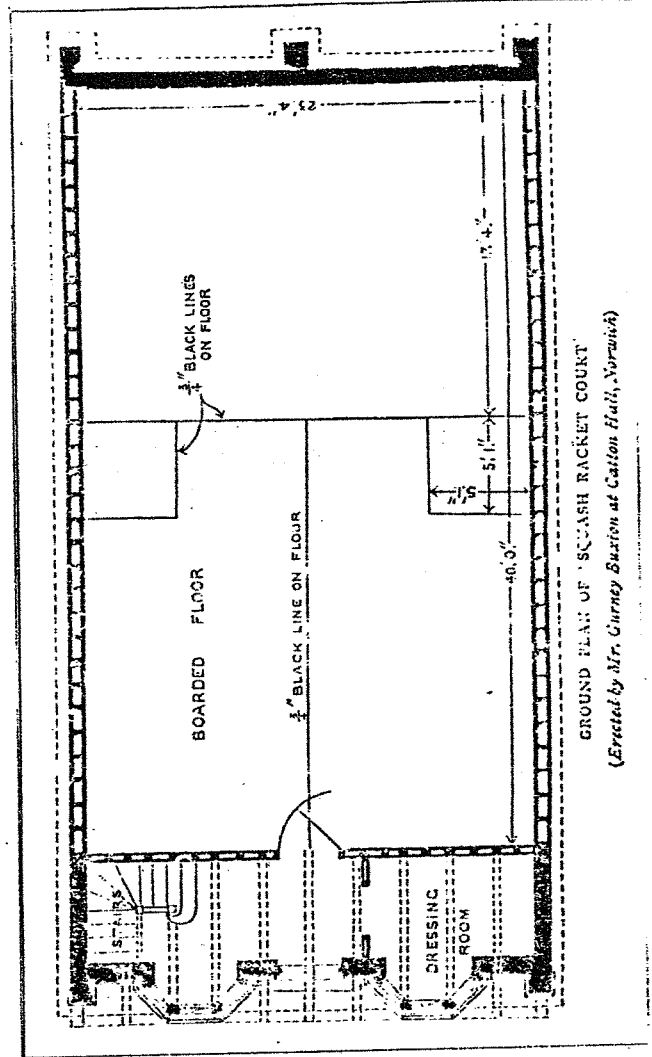


SQUASH RACKET COURT AT HARROW

NOTE.—Mr. Gurney Euxton has kindly supplied a ground plan and section of the 'squash' racket court erected by him at Catton Hall near Norwich; engravings will be found on following pages. We have selected this as being in all respects perfect of its kind. The cost of this court was 360/., but the outside walls are of wood. Brick would cost perhaps 20/ more. Mr. Holland-Hibbert at Mundon near Wauford, and Mrs. Charles Buxton at Fox Warren near Weybridge, have



LONGITUDINAL SECTION OF 'SQUASH RACKET COURT'
(Erected by Mr. Gurney Euxton at Catton Hall, Norwich)



GROUND PLAN OF 'SQUASH RACKET COURT'
(Erected by Mr. Gurney Euxton at Catton Hall, Norwich)

The Badminton Library of Sports & Pastimes 1897.
TENNIS : JAMES TENNIS : RACKETS : FIVES

A BRIEF HISTORY OF SQUASH TO 1900

from FLEET to HARROW

The origins of squash are just a stone's throw from where the Super Series Finals are held, at the Broadgate Arena. Stuart Hardy traces the unlikely jump from Fleet Prison to Harrow School.

For as long as man has been civilised he seems to have thrown, kicked or hit a ball. There are pictures of the ancient Egyptians and Chinese playing ball games. In the Middle Ages a popular game involved hitting a small ball with the hand – a game that was to become fives and developed into real tennis in the manner still played today. Its most famous player, Henry VIII, left us the tennis court at Hampton Court Palace. But, requiring an indoor court, tennis was a game for the nobility, whereas fives, which was neither expensive nor difficult, was accessible to all.

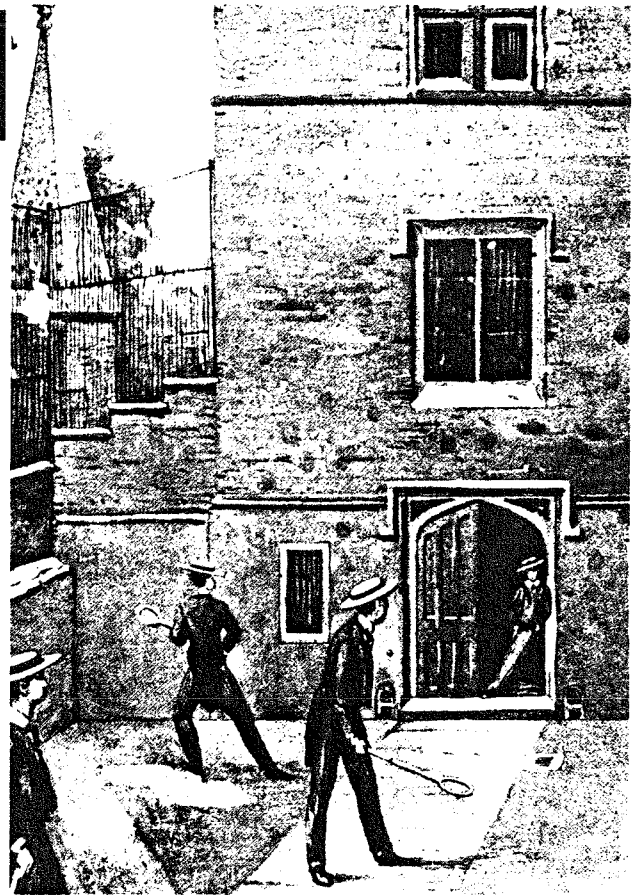
By the 18th century, the game of fives was more widely played, the ball being hit against one or more walls; courtyards were a preferred location. It is not known who decided that a racket should be used, but with one the ball could be hit further and harder. In the early 19th century the game of rackets was well established in London in two types of location: public houses and prisons, both being places where men had time on their hands and, most importantly, there were walls to hit a ball against. Rackets therefore became a popular 'pub game'.

There are numerous literary references to rackets in the early 1800s, and prints of the game being played at Fleet Prison – an infamous debtors' prison in London – show the enthusiasm it generated. Farringdon Street, where the prison was a dominant feature until its demolition in 1848, was the hub of the London underworld in the 18th and 19th centuries. Charles Dickens used to frequent the area and used his

impressions in his classic books, as it was a lively and dissolute meeting place for people from all walks of life.

It is something of a mystery how a game so closely associated with prisons and pubs as rackets made the jump some 12 miles across London to Harrow School. But by 1820 the boys at that most ancient and prestigious school (established 1571) were hitting a ball against courtyard walls with a racket. Over the next 30 years or so the game became more formalised in both the rules and playing area. As in the game of rackets today, the ball used was a hard one that travelled at terrific speed. But younger boys especially found a softer ball easier to hit while they learnt their strokes.

The ball was the key. Not only was it less lively – so more boys were able to play the game and it probably caused less damage, to both boys and windows – but less space was needed and almost any wall could be used to play against (the purpose-built courts for rackets were at a premium). 'Baby rackets', as it was originally known, was played against one wall, or sometimes with two or three walls. The ball was



squashed against racket and wall. This was the birth of squash.

The earliest recorded writing on squash appears around 1840 in letters and memoirs by old Harrovians. It was also Harrow that built the first squash courts, in 1864. Soon boys from other public schools such as Elstree and Winchester took to the game as well, and it slowly spread to other schools and universities over the following decades. The rules were borrowed from rackets and scoring was up to 15 points.

The first printed reference to squash rackets as a game in its own right dates from 1890 and is now to be found in the Badminton Library of Sports and Pastimes. Three years later, in the Boys' Own Paper, appeared the first article on the game, which entreated fathers to allow their sons to have a wall to play squash against, and perhaps even build them two or three walls for this purpose! A number of homes had their own courts, no doubt built by old boys of Harrow. Rugby and other public schools, but four-wall courts were a rarity and courts could be any size. The end of the 19th century saw the publication of reports and match results in the press. Squash was being played – not widely or with any formality, but with enthusiasm.

