



Wimbledon Cricket Club – The Full Club History

With acknowledgment and thanks to Stephen Chalke, Bill Burton, John Williams, John Spalton and Paul Bedford amongst others.

Tents on the Common – No Smoking!

Three wandering cricketers, Messrs. Devas, Holroyd and Oliphant, officially formed the Club on 20 May 1854. The early games, the first on 22nd July 1854, were played on a pitch marked out on Wimbledon Common, with tented changing facilities – a far cry from today's opulent surroundings. One player, F.W. Oliver, dominated the Club from its inception until his final appearance in 1879. F.W. captained the side from 1854-1874 and, as well as being a prolific bowler, scored 7,281 runs. Nine times he took over 100 wickets a season, and in total he captured 1,774 wickets.

In 1855 matches were played against Hampstead and Mitcham, fixtures that existed until recently. Among the notable events in this era was the scoring of the Club's first century by W.T. Webber in 1860 against Surbiton. A copy of the 1859 rules still exists which, amongst the more mundane and usual regulations include Rule IX as follows:

“Any player who shall smoke in the field shall be fined the sum of five shillings”

It could thus be inferred that drinking during play may have been allowed, a possible tone setter for the future!

An interesting result in 1865, the Club beat Surrey twice by 7 wickets and 9 wickets.

From 1875 right up to 1919 no regular captains were appointed, and the side was run on a match manager basis. Prominent in this period were F. Charles, who took the Club's first 10 wicket haul in an innings – albeit in the 12-a-side games that were the norm then; while batting prowess was provided by G.P. Greenfield, the Reeves brothers and the Rev A.T. Scott.

New quarters, consolidation, and an enforced break

In 1889 the Club decided to move to a 9 acre area of ground near the Wimbledon lake. This was prompted when a right of way was confirmed across the middle of the existing ground on the Common. Originally held under a lease, the freehold of the new ground was purchased in 1899 by a far sighted Committee for the sum of £4,000. in 1890 the

first match took place against MCC. During this decade cricketers such as the Hon. Ivo Bligh of Kent and England, captain of the 1882/83 England touring party to Australia, appeared for the Club. The scoring high point occurred with H. Lomas' 175 runs against Streatham in 1889.

Playing on an improved wicket the Club thrived at its new venue, and up to 1914 fielded powerful players such as R.M. Reeves – who grew up on the ground under his father's (E.W.) guidance; G.F. McGrath, a hockey international; D.R. Dangar, who to this day holds the Club's scoring record of 199 against Streatham in 1905; and M.A. Green, later of both the Gloucester and Essex County Clubs.

No cricket was played on the ground from 1914 to 1918, and it was only due to the efforts of McGrath and Churchill that the Club was resurrected following the Great War.

Star Performers between the World Wars

The re-introduction of one captain per season came in 1920, with McGrath in charge of a younger side which incorporated fine performers such as Cronin, Morley-Brown, West, Goodfellow and Campbell. Several Wimbledon cricketers were selected at the highest levels of the game, including Test players A.E.R. Gilligan (Surrey & Sussex) and A.H.H. Gilligan (Sussex). 1924 saw the start of Sunday cricket, and the name of Cyril Simpson first appearing in Club records. A large, rotund English-gentleman type, Cyril acted as Secretary for many ensuing seasons and was the staunchest of members. 1928 embraced the debut of A.W.G Hadingham who at 15 years old headed the batting averages; while the original pavilion was both reconstructed and enlarged for the princely sum of £2,000. Between 1929 and 1939 names such as Hadingham, Monty Garland-Wells (both Surrey), D.P.B. Morkel (South Africa), and the redoubtable E.W. Swanton abound in the Club's averages, all impressive cricketers in their own right. In a portent of things to come, the legendary F.R. Brown, captain of England and later to be the father of Chris, played for three seasons when his county schedules allowed.

In 1939 only a limited fixture list was played, but Ivor Norton, an excellent slow left arm bowler appeared. 1940-45 was devoid of cricket; the ground ended up looking like a hayfield, and the pavilion suffered bomb damage. A great indebtedness is owed to Cyril Simpson who, throughout the Second World War, kept in touch with existing members then set about reviving matters at the end of hostilities. In 1946 a square was prepared and cricket resumed at Church Road.

Twenty five years of friendly cricket

Fortunes picked up tremendously from the late 1940's and into the 1950's when a host of excellent cricketers were attracted to the Club. It is impossible to detail all the individuals who contributed, but a few stand out: Victor Buckingham, a fine round the wicket bowler, hard hitting batsmen and astute captain, dominated the period between 1948 and 1952, topping 1,000 runs in each of those seasons: Bill Worsdale, an accurate slow bowler, who took 1,021 wickets in his career before bowing out in 1964: and the elegant left hander, Bill Burton, who first played in 1945 as an opener, and was an

inspiring captain following Buckingham from 1955 to 1964, before returning again to lead in the early 1970's. Bill is still heavily involved an avid spectator well into the 21st century.

There were also the fast, left arm Bert Seaborn, a prolific wicket taker and a great aficionado of the game: all rounder John (later Sir John) Stocker, of dry wit as befitting a High Court judge; and Ted Hart, an excellent wicketkeeper. With Jeremy Peters' resounding batting plus Theo 'Tippy' Tiphthorpe and Ivor Norton's slow bowling, success on the field was guaranteed.

In 1954 the Centenary celebrations included a victory against an Old England side (B.W. Burton ct Fender bowled Allen 0...) and a formal Dinner organised at Martinez Restaurant in the West End.

The late 1950's provided opportunity for younger stars; slow left arm Alan Gollan and Denis Hopkin, a devastating quick bowler, appeared on the scene, along with batsmen Brian Gibbons, a cricket exile from Suffolk.

The 'swinging sixties' proved to be a decade of mixed fortunes. Despite excellent individual performances, the team stagnated somewhat, the Club deciding not to accept an invitation to join the newly formed Surrey Championship.

Contributions from batsmen such as Alan Close, Colin Casemore and Nick Evans (yes that Nick Evans, now President of Cricket) should not be forgotten, while two new finds, keeper John Spalton in 1965, and Chris Aworth, a left handed batsman of Cambridge University and Surrey CCC, proved valuable long term assets.

Coming to terms with the League game

The launch of the 1970's coincided with the first phase of the building programme, in which the Club's pavilion facilities were greatly improved, and the important decision to embark on league cricket with the formation of the Surrey Cricketers League.

To start with Wimbledon were not very adept at this form of the game, and won only one match in the opening season. In 1973 things started to change, and probably the most influential event of the last 20 years occurred when Chris Brown joined. It took only until 1976 to achieve the initial title under Chris, who by then had attracted batsmen of the calibre of Ian Murray, Steve Perkins, Pete Howland, Pete Gibbs and Shahid Mir, an all-rounder. Two sad losses in that year, of Chris Aworth's father John, a very humorous raconteur, and also of John Whittaker, clouded the celebrations.

1977 and 1978 realised further championship success with a side strengthened by left hander Bryan Richardson, all rounder Steve Walford, slow left arm Nigel Bennett and Simon Dyson's quickish leg breaks – the latter duo frequently acting in tandem to hustle out opponents cheaply. The opening of the second phase of major development on the pavilion was in 1978, a year in which there was yet more sadness on the death of Vic Buckingham.

The champagne decade

Wimbledon eventually arrived in the expanded Surrey Championship in 1980. After so much success in the Cricketers League the Club did not know what to expect; however, under Chris Brown's driven leadership the 1st XI won the title in 1981 in the final game of the season. In the same year Southgate were defeated in the final of the Bertie Joel Cup. Simon Dyson's puzzling and accurate bowling proved a major factor in many games. The middle years of the decade proved halcyon days for Wimbledon cricket as an amazing roll of honour unfolded with two more Championships and three more Bertie Joel Cups.

Also during this period a 3rd XI was formed and home playing facilities were found for them at the University of London ground at Motspur Park. Under the dapper Roy Miles, they won their first title in 1984; while a hardly outshone 2nd XI were runners up on two occasions in their section.

Such unqualified success was due to the exceptionally high quality of several players, who week and week out performed to the best of their ability for Chris Brown, backed up by general strength in depth at all levels.

On the club cricket circuit Simon Dyson's extraordinary feats are now legend but of course many others also made their marks in this era, and contributions from Nigel Bennett, Richardson, Surrey's Graham Monkhouse and Ray Alikhan, Walford, Stephen Henderson (Worcs and Glamorgan) and New South Wales all rounder Brad 'Buzzard' McNamara were all invaluable – even more so when Dyson left for the USA in 1984. Particular mention must be made of batsman/off spinner Chris Bullen who, after progressing through the colts and a precocious debut in 1977, continued to play for Wimbledon whenever his County commitments allowed. He personified the ideal club member.

Following their near miss in 1986, under Mike Dryden the 2nd XI won its division in 1987, 1988 and 1989. The 1st team finished runners up again in 1989, and once more reached the final of the Bertie Joel Cup.

Certain benchmarks were also set in this decade, and the scoring of 192 by left handed opener David 'Donny' Osmond in a National KO game at Brentham ranks alongside McNamara's aggregate record runs of 2,131 in 1985. The Club undertook its first overseas tour in September 1987 to British Columbia. In this year, and after twelve consecutive seasons Chris Brown relinquished the 1st XI captaincy. A hard hitting left handed bat and persevering medium pacer, Chris was always a capable performer on the field. Without his drive and determination, both on and off the pitch, little of the successes outlined above would have been possible. In order to thank him a memorable dinner was held in 1988. Chris also brought great credit to Wimbledon by his outstanding work on the Championship and Surrey CCC committees.

Into the Nineties and beyond

Hardly a year passed when one of the three sides did not win a league title, and in 1992 made history when all three won their respective divisions. Remarkably more than 75% of the wickets taken by slow bowlers.

The Club pushed for a more competitive top division of 10 teams rather than 20 but ironically, when the cut was made in 1998, Wimbledon finished 11th and spent the next season outside the elite. We responded in style, winning promotion and following it in 2000 by repeating the 1992 triumph with all sides winning their leagues.

2004 saw the Club's 150th Anniversary. A match was played against an Old England XI followed by a dinner in a marquee on the ground attended by 300 with speeches by Mark Nicholas and Sir Ian Maclaurin. The Club also embarked on an entertaining tour of Antigua where Richie Richardson made us very welcome.

2005 was overshadowed by the death in April of Chris Brown. The eldest son of Freddie Brown, captain of England, Chris was widely known and respected as a player and administrator of club cricket. He served on committees at MCC, Surrey CCC and the Club Cricket Conference and was influential in the development of the Surrey Championship.

A fiercely competitive man, his teams didn't often lose and everyone who played under him enjoyed the experience if not on the pitch then certainly in the bar. Brownie fully relished the social side and came fully into his element when touring. Possibly his somewhat hectic lifestyle brought its account when he became seriously ill. Casual acquaintances would not have noticed any great change but having altered his diet and fluid intake he was able to resume touring, so it was a great shock when he passed away in his sleep in April. His family gave him the most appropriate of valedictions with a memorial service at a packed St Mary's Church in Wimbledon, followed by a cricket match complete with refreshment marquee, attended by over 300 friends at his beloved watering hole in SW19.

The Club's record in the Championship has been formidable:

- The 1st team has won the title nine times
- There has not been one season in which the 1st team has lost more than it has won
- In the 32 years to 2011, the three (now four) elevens have won 35 league titles

Sunday cricket was a casualty of this increased emphasis on league cricket, and went into a sharp decline for a few years. Happily we are now running friendly fixtures every Sunday against established sides and are providing the sort of cricket that some prefer to play.

Sundays is also the day that our Academy team youthfully spring into action during the summer holidays – they have recorded great success over the last few years and have provided a number of players who have performed with distinction in the 1st XI. We hope to nurture the talent and provide a regular feed through into senior cricket.