

Some History of Cricket in Steep

Cricket has had an important place in local history for at least 250 years and it is inconceivable that Steep villagers would not have been amongst the thousands who flocked to Broadha'penny Down in the late 1700s, when Hambledon took on, and beat, the might of England, with Petersfield's John Small among the stars.

During Victorian times our local MP, William Nicholson, was a great enthusiast and used some of the fortune he piled up, selling cheap gin to the masses, to help finance the magnificent pavilion at Lord's (he also paid for the construction of Privett Church and we must hope that the wreckage caused by his gin was overlooked when the time came for him to confront St Peter at the Pearly Gates).

The earliest record of cricket in Steep dates back to the 1830s and later in his diaries the Vicar, William Hawker, mentions a match between The Single and The Married Farmers. Old maps show a field near Ashford known as Cricket Field which could be named in honour of the sport or maybe the grasshopper – who knows?

Steep Cricket Club as we know it was founded in about 1893, and there is a suspicion that the Vicar, The Rev. E.L.Puxley, and the Schoolmaster, Mr J.W.Skillington, initiated the Club to help keep villagers out of the Harrow. Certainly the original Club Rules set a high moral tone with a fine of thruppence for improper language and specifically forbade the use of club funds for refreshment. Happily these rules have since been rescinded.

The Harrow enters the story in the 1930s when one William Dodd, born in Kettlebrook Cottages, and great Uncle to Claire and Nisa, played occasional games for Hampshire. William was a policeman in Southampton and played a dozen or so times between 1931 and 1936 as an amateur. His team-mates included Lord Tennyson and his debut was against a Nottinghamshire side which boasted Harold Larwood, a matter of months before the notorious Body Line tour. He had the good sense be dismissed for a duck before Larwood could get at him. Over five summers his career figures were 95 runs and 10 wickets. Modest enough but he remains the only Steep born cricketer to play for the county.

We now move to the late 1940s when a group of returning ex-servicemen resolved to resuscitate the Club that had, not surprisingly, lain dormant during the war. However some members of the old Club had other ideas and refused to allow them to use either the ground or such equipment as had survived Hitler. So the newcomers, led by Eddie McCutcheon and his brother Sid, and with support from the delightfully named Ickle Crane and Rasher Leggett amongst others, arranged matches on Steep Common and in fields behind Johnson's Farm.

They called themselves Steep (1948), having rejected a suggestion that Harrow C.C.might be appropriate, when informed that a well known Public School in North West London already fielded a Harrow Cricket Club and indeed played an annual match at Lord's against Eton. It was left to the owner of the ground, Mr Levi of Steep Farm and Itshide, to broker a deal between the warring factions. The new side was firmly based at the Harrow if only because the Captain, Eddie McCutcheon, had a

very soft spot for the Landlord's pretty daughter, Ellen. It was also useful to be able to call on her brothers, Haden and John, when numbers were short and she made the most nourishing match teas in Hampshire, served in the Harrow garden. Since those pioneer days Steep has bought the Freehold of its ground, now one of the best in the locality, and built its own pavilion (which, incidentally, cost about the same to construct as the one financed for the MCC by William Nicholson but slightly less grand.)

In the years that followed Steep cricket has always been firmly associated with The Harrow which was the backdrop to a TV documentary about the Club and the scene of many high days in the Seventies when the Club were Hampshire Village Champions five times and represented Hampshire villages against Surrey, Sussex, Kent, Wiltshire, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Gloucester and Cornwall. A crowd of around 1000 circled the Steep ground when the village were narrowly defeated by Nottinghamshire champions Collingham, to be denied a place in the Lord's Final.

Those who were there will remember the consolation of being able to slip down to the Harrow to lick their wounds and take a post match pint (or two), as generations of Steep cricketers have done over the years.

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