

Village Echoes

As the former cricket field behind the houses in Church Road slowly turns into woodland, it is hard to remember that the men of Goudhurst have played cricket in the village since the 19th century. The Goudhurst Millennium Book informs us that the present-day cricket club (which now plays elsewhere) was formed in 1984, nearly ten years after the previous club which had been “revitalised” in 1964 had finally ceased to function through lack of support in 1973.

There was a thriving club in the village in 1935 when the Goudhurst Jubilee book was published, and reports of Goudhurst cricket matches appeared regularly in the newspapers during the 1920s and 1930s. During the 30s the most well-known Goudhurst-born cricketer was William Howard Vincent Levett, nicknamed “Hopper”, who was born in the parish in 1908 and played cricket for Kent between 1930 and 1947 as wicket-keeper. During the course of his career he played one Test in India in 1934 when Leslie Ames was unable to play because of injury.

An earlier claim to cricketing fame for Goudhurst is as the birthplace of Alfred Mynn (d.1861) who was born at Twysden in 1807. Mynn went on to play for Kent, Sussex and the MCC, as well as the All England Cricket Club. Well over 6 feet in height and weighing more than 20 stone, it is not surprising that he was generally known as the “Lion of Kent”.

One form of cricket which was popular during the 19th century and which Mynn also played on occasion was the “single wicket” match, in which two individuals take turns to bat and bowl against each other with the winner being the one who scores most runs. This is probably the kind of match which was reported in the local newspapers in 1819 as having taken place between Peter Bonnick of Goudhurst, aged 68, and John Baily of Marden, aged 60. Bonnick was the winner by 10 runs. Similarly, in 1846 two Goudhurst men, John Waghorn, a 64 year old blacksmith, and John Morris, aged 77, were reported to have played two games, each of them winning a game by one run. Waghorn was, apparently, so keen on cricket that he was already planning a match against Mr Foster, another septuagenarian. Needless to say, the games “caused much amusement locally”.

At the start of the 1851 cricket season, Goudhurst Cricket Club are reported as complaining that their opponents in Bearsted “adhered to the fashionable yet reprehensible practice of delaying commencement [of the match] until noon”. Before that, it had been usual to commence the match at 10am and follow it with dinner at 2pm, as noted in the match with Hawkhurst in June 1850. The after-match dinner in 1864 was interrupted during the early evening when “the players gladly interrupted” the proceedings to rush outside to get a glimpse of a hot-air balloon flown by Henry Coxwell, a well-known Victorian balloonist, as it passed overhead. Information is sketchy during the mid-nineteenth century - perhaps the club fortunes dipped or perhaps there was no “official” cricket club: although matches took place against Rolvenden in 1871 and against Cranbrook in 1880, the Maidstone Journal reported in 1881 that the club was to be “revived”.

Returning to the 20th century, the parish magazine of May 1956 reports the activities of an apparently thriving club with some promising young players, although there was still the need for older members’ help with the running of the club. Two years

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later in 1958 they were pleased to announce the opening of a new cricket pavilion described as a “substantial building designed to last a century or more”.

Local History Society

Email: info@goudhurstlocalhistorysociety.org
Website: www.goudhurstlocalhistorysociety.org