

OLD ALRESFORD CRICKET CLUB - 1886 – 1986

By

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One Friday in May 1886, a group of gentlemen met in the schoolroom for the purpose of forming a cricket club in Old Alresford. The Rector, Sir F.L. Currie .fit. was elected President and offered his meadow for the club to play in. Mr. Cecil Currie was elected captain and Mr. W.H. Twine baker, brewer and owner of the village shop, undertook the offices of secretary and treasurer. Seven gentlemen were elected to the committee, including Mr. J.T. Mills, whose grandson farms at Bishops Sutton. The annual subscription and entrance fee was to be "not less than 1/6d'." (7Jp).

The following year, at the A.G.M. a decision was made to start a relief fund to help those players "who were not in a position to pay the necessary expenses of a match". It was also proposed that at all Home matches all players, umpires and scorers should pay 1/- (5p) in addition to the luncheon fee, for refreshments, consisting of a limited quantity of Ale, Ginger Beer and Lemonade, and this decision was to be explained by the secretary, to opposing clubs when he was arranging matches. The rules of the Club were quite strict, no member could play or use the club ground until his subscription was paid, in any dispute during practice or a match, the decision of the captain or his deputy was to be final, any member using bad language or otherwise misbehaving himself was to be reported to the committee and dealt with by them; and any non-parishioner could only join the club by consent of the committee, and could have no control in the management of the club.

By 1890, Joseph Fell Christy was residing at Upton, elected President of the Club in 1895, and as the old practice ground was no longer available, offered his meadow instead. This was the start of a presidency that lasted until 1911, and many benefits awarded to the club, including the use of a room for meetings and social evenings, when Mr. Christy often paid for refreshments supplied by Mr. Twine the grocer.

These social evenings, mainly smoking concerts, when members themselves entertained each other with songs and recitations, either followed the "wind up" or last match of the season when the members formed two teams "single men playing the married men", or the A.G.M. The popularity of these occasions is indicated by the following figures for one year - "married" 18 players, 141 runs scored, "single" 17 players, 61 and 18 for 7.

Mr. Christy offered a ball as prize for the best bowling average in 1905, and also provided caps for all playing members. Then in 1906 he donated £10. for the purchase of posts and chains to protect the pitch. There was enough money left after this purchase to settle an account that would have caused an adverse balance in the annual account.

Also in 1906, Percy Laming came to live at Old Alresford Place, and over the years was another benefactor of the club. He was Vice-President, Chairman, Captain, then President from 1915-1940. He provided a water- ballast roller in 1907, and on several occasions rescued the club accounts by paying bills and fees, and defraying the expenses of the smoking concerts.

When Mr. Christy died in 1911, his daughter carried on the tradition of the "wind up supper", and suggested the formation of a club for boys of the parish aged between 10 and 15. This was done, and they practised in a corner of the cricket field, Master E. Purchase being appointed captain and being responsible for their good behaviour. By 1913, the Christy Memorial Hall had been built, and used for future Annual General Meetings of Old Alresford Cricket Club. About this time, Mr.

Schwerdt of Old Alresford House became a Vice-President and provided two silver cigarette cases as prizes for the most runs scored and most wickets taken, and years later helped with donations of cash.

The committee was always looking out for local residents of substance to become Vice-Presidents of the club, and to give their support. The rectors of Old Alresford were always involved, indeed the man who inaugurated the club was the Incumbent of the time. Some names are well known in the district, members of the Mills, Dorey, Broad and Hunt families, W. Bulpett, C.F.G.R. Schwerdt, Col. Aubertin, T.A. Houghton, J.P. of Armsworth, Col. Onslow, of Upton (pre 1890), Miss Onslow, Rev. Jellicoe of N. Alresford, Mrs. Stratton-Bates, Mr. T.C. Hankin, Mr. J.A. Bevan and Sir Austin Hadow.

During these early years, considerable effort was made to bring the pitch up to peak condition for play, £4.10s0d being spent on new turf for a pitch 40 yards long and 10 yards wide, and Mr. Morris was employed at the rate of 2s6d (12Jp) per day until the ground was in good condition or the sum of 30/-d (£1.50p) allotted for his efforts, was exhausted. In 1897 grass seed was purchased and sown, the pitch swept and rolled by Mr. Morris at the same rates of pay. The club kept the room used for its meetings, cleaned by Mrs. Merritt at a cost of 5/-d per annum, and this arrangement lasted from 1895 until 1913.

Again, these early years were a drain on funds, for in addition to attending to the pitch, a great deal of tackle was bought and a house was built on the cricket field for general use of the club, at a cost of £4.15s0d plus 10/- for paint. Funds fluctuated greatly, and the club was kept in the black through the generosity of Mr. Christy and Mr. Laming.

Transport was always an expense for the club, particularly in the days before members had cars, and the cost of hiring a brake for the season was £1.5s0d in 1896, and rose steadily to £6.6s0d per season by 1915. To us now, it seems odd to see that water had to be carted to the pitch three times in 1914, at a total cost of 1/6d, (it was a glorious summer) and on the outbreak of war in August 1914, a 6d telegram was sent to Ropley, presumably to cancel a match. By now it was impossible to arrange fixtures with men going to serve their country, and at a meeting on March 30th 1916, officers and committee were re-elected en-bloc, and they decided to call a meeting whenever prospects of cricket became feasible again. To keep up the ground was an unjustifiable expense, and it was also discovered that the club could only play on the cricket ground by "courtesy and favour of the landlord and tenant for the time being of Upton".

The happy day when Old Alresford Cricket Club was revived fell on June 12th 1920, with Percy Laming again President, Mr. F. Hunt, Captain, and Mr. Jenner Secretary/Treasurer. Mr. T. Hunt gave permission for the use of the ground, and arrangements were made to play Bentworth on June 19th. Subs 2/-d per annum, 3/-d for outsiders.

Immediately, re-turfing of some ground was required, so entertainments were arranged for the winter months to swell funds. The old practice pitch was to be renovated and used, in order to keep the regular pitch in better condition for matches. Tea was to be served in Mr. Hunt's cartshed during wet weather, and a case with cups, plates etc. was provided. In 1921 on August Bank Holiday a dance was held in the Christy Hall at 2/6d per head, refreshments ordered were:- 2 slabs of cake, about 6-lb each, 12 dozen fancy cakes, 5 jars of lemonade, 6 dozen small glasses and 2 jugs.

Lord Templemore left Upton, to be succeeded by Colonel Paravicini who kept up the traditional support and interest until 1961, then after a short presidency for Hon. Rodney Berry in 1962, R/Admiral Morgan Giles came to Upton and although he could not attend many of the activities, as he was then M.P. for Winchester, he did allow water to be piped to the field. His son, Rodney fills the post at present.

During this time, early 60's, the club held its first Fete, with sideshows and stalls, pram-races, ankle competitions, and "bonny baby" features, but after some years at Upton, it was transferred to the village green in order to attract more public attention, and once again doubt was expressed as to whether the club could survive as membership was flagging. Yet again fortunes were revived, this time by cricket enthusiast, Chris Mallett, who whenever he could, organised coaching, played in the team and then formed his own XI who played the first match of the season with O.A.C.C. for several years.

Individual performers have been rewarded for their efforts over the years. For instance, in 1955 in a match against Twyford, B. Conway took all 10 wickets for 16 runs, in 1963, K. Pond took all 10 wickets against Hursley, and Oswald Merritt won prizes for highest batting and bowling averages with equal facility. In 1927, the scoring books mysteriously disappeared for a time, and prevented the averages being presented for the award of prizes.

From its inception in 1886, the club has enjoyed support from many well-known local families who gave generously of time, money and ideas, and luckily many still do. The most recent example of this loyalty was when a member discovered a disused cricket pavilion belonging to the Hampshire County Council, standing forlornly near a new road in , Odiham. It was purchased for the club and members went to the site, dismantled the pavilion, and after camping out overnight, transported it back to Old Alresford for re-erection on the cricket ground.

With this sort of enthusiastic membership, Old Alresford Cricket Club looks set for another 100 years.

P. McKERRACHER APRIL 1986.

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