



President – Robin Nicholls

General History of Bushey Cricket Club and personal memories from 1951 onwards

I first joined the Club in the latter part of the 1951 season, having just got into the Watford Grammar School 1st XI at the age of 15. In those days the school played a number of established clubs such as West Herts, Rickmansworth, Gents of Herts. MCC and Bushey.

It was playing for E.W.P. Dutton's schools XI against Bushey that I received my first invitation to play for the Club. Peter was at that time the secretary, as well as a local Headmaster.

It was not unusual to be approached by playing members of established clubs to join them. At that time many pupils of Watford Grammar School joined Bushey, even though the facilities were extremely poor. The original timber pavilion at the Moatfield ground in Bushey had been destroyed by a German incendiary bomb. Members had to make do with a four and a half metre by three and a half metre pre-cast concrete garage as a pavilion, with double doors, no electricity, gas or water, and no toilets! Twenty two men changed in this area and the ladies also made tea in this shed, having collected the water from the watering point for the square! I wonder whether current members realize how fortunate they are!

At that time I did not consider this to be abnormal because the War had had profound effects on every aspect of life. It was largely due to the efforts of Bill Bliss, Tom Chester, Peter Dutton, Peter Higgins, Doug Rousell, Ken Brockwell, Bill Steele, Henry Barry, and Peter Ransom that the club got back on its feet. Most, if not all, of these men had been away for many years in the armed services and many pre-war members of a strong Club were now too old or had since moved away from the area.

Prior to the outbreak of War Bushey had had a very good side and the club was a strong force in the County. Bob Simons in his superbly researched book entitled Hertfordshire Cricket poses the following question "**Which Club in Hertfordshire has provided four County Captains, two hon. County Secretaries, the batsman with the second highest aggregate of runs and the batsman with the highest batting average.**" He goes on to say "**It may come as a surprise to the reader to find out that that club is Bushey.**" I have listed below some relevant statistics by some of these members whose achievements with the county are second to none having gleaned these figures from Bob Simon's excellent book.

| Year | I | N/O | R | Ave. | O | R | W | Ave | |
|--------------|---------|-----|----|-------------|--------------|------|------|------------|--------------|
| S.R Ambrose | 1969-78 | 100 | 15 | 2168 | 25.51 | 164 | 4276 | 254 | 16.64 |
| F.E Collyer | 1967-87 | 272 | 48 | 4568 | 20.39 | | | | |
| A.J. Golding | 1897-14 | 302 | 20 | 8428 | 29.88 | 1015 | 2945 | 107 | 27.52 |
| J.S. Harford | 1904-06 | 18 | 2 | 139 | 8.69 | 264 | 866 | 36 | 24.06 |
| C.E. Keyser | 1876-84 | 90 | 20 | 584 | 8.34 | 336 | 653 | 31 | 21.06 |
| F.C.de Sarum | 1933-36 | 33 | 5 | 1959 | 69.82 | 199 | 618 | 31 | 19.94 |
| G.R. Walker | 1926-36 | 72 | 3 | 2083 | 30.19 | | | | |
| R.Watson | 1938-47 | 11 | 1 | 26 | 2.6 | 158 | 391 | 24 | 16.29 |

Besides being the most successful captain for 12 of his 20 years playing for the County Franks record behind the stumps is also worth recording:-

| Matches kept in | ct. | st. | total |
|-----------------|------------|-----------|------------|
| 160 | 294 | 54 | 348 |

I was approached by Ken Brockwell, the current 2nd XI captain and played my first game for the club against Old Centralians in the latter part of the 1951 season, a club that exists to this day, although, they now play on a different ground.

In 1952 I played for the 1st XI, under the captaincy of Archie Fulton, an Old Millhillian. There were some fine players representing the club at this time, amongst them were, Jim Denham a top class wicketkeeper and former Grammar school captain, Dennis Beard again a former Grammar school captain who also represented Hertfordshire at cricket and the R.A.F. at hockey. He was an all rounder who bowled intelligent off breaks, was a good batsman and a fine cover point fielder. Ray Millar was another all rounder who bowled medium pace. Andrew Quick, a pace bowler who in my view was the best I have ever seen during my sixty year membership. During National service Andrew opened the bowling for the R.A.F. with Fred Trueman of Yorkshire and England. Robin Leach was also a naggingly accurate off spin bowler.

Jim Denham kept wicket and was a very good Rugby player, playing at full back for Bristol and was good enough to have been selected for an England Trial. Unfortunately he suffered a severe knee injury before the game and was unable to ever play again. He went to New Zealand and played for Wanguni. On his return he settled in Somerset and played a number of games for Somerset 2nd XI. Other members included Peter Toghill, Clive Clarke, Iestyn Harris, Robin Leach, D.J.W. Field, and Laurie Cox, wicket keeper all former Grammar school boys.

At this time all men, subject to a medical examination and being pronounced fit, had to do 2 years National Service, which could be done immediately on leaving school or after completing their studies at either Technical College or University. This had a further effect that many players because of this disruption often left the area.

In these early years as I recall the then President of the Club was the redoubtable Rollo Walker a former player for the County, and a former Hon. Secretary of the County Club. It was Rollo who decided that the Club should build a Pavilion and with the help of Fred Bevis who was an Architect, and opening bat for the Club, and various trade benefactors who supplied goods free of charge, the building was completed and opened in 1954. I can remember playing in that celebration game.

The next President was Wilf Sobey a former captain of the Club and very fine Rugby player. Wilf was also an Old Millhillian and played Rugby for them as a scrumhalf. He also played for England and partnered Roger Spong at fly half. He was a British Lion and went on tour to New Zealand. Wilf was a Headmaster of a preparatory school in Eastbury Road, known as Kingsfield School.

Quite the best known personality who was a member of the Club was Frank Chester a world renowned Umpire. Frank started his cricketing career at the age of 12 with the club. Sometime during that year he scored a century against a very strong M.C.C. side. So impressed were they that they had a collection for him and presented him with £8, a considerable sum in those days equivalent today to something over £250 by today's standards. By the age of 16 he had signed up for Worcestershire and one year later he had scored three centuries. Wisden at that time confidently predicted that the young Chester would play for England in the near future. Sadly that was not to be as he signed up for the War and lost an arm at Salonika. His love of the game persuaded him to take up umpiring. In Ritchie Benauds book "My spin on Cricket" he writes...." but I'm quite prepared to accept Bradman's opinion that Chester was the best he ever saw".

I can remember seeing him on Friday evenings at the "One Bell" in the village recounting the week's events with a number of members in attendance, including his son Tom, who opened the batting for the Club and was a most accomplished player, and a fine fielder.

Another internationally known member was Jack Young, who after the Second World War played for one season for the Club prior to signing for Middlesex. Jack was a slow left arm bowler who played 12 times for England.

Long after his playing days were over he would come to the ground with Nick Birch and watch wearing his club tie, and drink the odd neat Gin sitting on the veranda.

In the 1920's there appeared at the nets one evening a Sri Lankan, a certain F.C. de Sarum who asked if he could have a net. A somewhat diffident Rollo Walker, so the story goes, agreed reluctantly and towards the end of the practice session he was told he could have a bat. In short order he dispatched both of the Clubs fast bowlers to all parts of the ground, and when Rollo asked where he had played he was told that he had played at Oxford. He had also represented Ceylon as it was then called at the age of 19. Rollo enquired which College had he played for and was told that he had played for the University and had scored a lot of runs against Bradmans tourists! He set some incredible records in his two years with the Club. In 1935 he had a batting average for the Club of 150, and in the same year in a matter of a few days of cricket he scored 1200 runs, a phenomenal achievement, and his lowest score in those few days being 75. Sometime later he went back to Sri Lanka and eventually became the Chief of Police and finished up in goal himself, having tried to overthrow Mrs. Bandaranaike's Government.

Other good sportsmen who represented this club were Charlie Townsend who played for Harrow and Wealdstone and played for England amateurs over 70 times, Bobby Howfield who played football professionally for Watford, Charlton, and Luton. Bobby was a more than useful fast bowler but could be unreliable. Nick Stringer who was on the ground staff at Lords played his main cricket for Chorleywood but played for us on Sundays. Nick played Rugby for Wasps and England.

The 1st XI was captained by firstly Archie Fulton in the 1950's and then by Bill Bliss followed by Dennis Beard. The two openers were Fred Bevis and Tom Chester followed by the likes of Ray Miller, Dennis Beard, Peter Toghill with either Laurie Cox, Claude Dollimore or Jim Denham behind the stumps all of them were top class wicket keepers. The bowling was in the hands of Andrew Quick, Ray Miller, Dennis Beard and Robin Leach.

Our regular umpire then was Alfred Woodhouse who always reminded me of a former B.B.C. reporter named Fyffe Robertson. Sometime later he was succeeded by "Mac" McDonald, both of them gave up their time on behalf of the Club for many years and were both good umpires.

The 2nd XI was captained in the 1950's by Peter Higgins and Ken Brockwell. When playing away public transport was used as few people had cars. Peter invested in an old London taxi and took more than half the team with him with some of the members standing on the running boards. Key members of the team were, Doug Russell (opening bowler), Bill Steel (batsman), Peter Hewitt (all rounder), Peter Dutton (leg break bowler), Peter Ransom (batsman), Barry Surie (batsman), Dennis Wells (bowler), Johnny Horwood (batsman), and Michael Hewett.

Probably the best cricket post war was played in the late 60's and early 70's. Captains during this period were "Buster" Brown, Stuart Ambrose, Robin Nicholls, Andrew Bliss, and inevitably Frank Collier. The openers were formed from "Buster" Brown, Ian McDonald and Frank Collier John Carvaell and later with Colin Casemore, with Stewart Ambrose, Chris Tomkin and any permutation of Tony Reid, Andrew Bliss, Colin Clare and Robin Nicholls to follow. Colin Casemore modestly failed to tell the Club when he joined that he opened the batting for Berkshire. He also was a very accomplished batsman and excellent fielder. Another player who joined the Club for a two year period was Dave Stephen a South African who had played in South Africa with the legendary Pollock brothers, Peter and Graeme. During these years the Club could bank on the likes of Stewart Ambrose and Frank Collier scoring 4 or 5 centuries a season with a number of the lower order contributing another four or five. The bowling was in the hands of John Matthews, Peter Harrison, Mike Rose, Peter Marsden and Bill Elliott. We were fortunate to be able to call on the services of the Royal Masonic school for members and they included "Buster" Brown, Peter Marsden, Chris Tompkin, Tony Reid, Peter Sutcliffe and Colin Beames.

In the mid seventies the then Bushey Urban District Council offered the Club the opportunity to play at the newly developed Hartspring Leisure Centre, now since demolished and replaced by the David Lloyd tennis centre. It was suggested to the Club that they hoped to stage County Cricket at the Centre. This move although warmly welcomed by the Club at the time turned out to be a disaster. Bushey U.D.C. became Hertsmere a year or so later and the familiar previous councilors were no longer on the scene. Admission was charged to our visitors which we had to refund. Teas had to be provided by the centre and to say the least they were meager and expensive. Soon after the move Frank told the Club he was moving from the area and was soon followed by Stewart Ambrose, Peter Harrison Colin Clare and others.

After 7 years at the Centre our current ground became available. Bill Bliss had now become President and had heard that the Colne Valley Water Company was prepared to let out their ground due to too few employees using the facility. After extensive discussions we were offered the use of the ground on a ten year lease. The Colne Valley Water Company was absorbed into Three Valleys Water Company, and more recently they too have been absorbed into Veolia Water Company. The lease was recently extended to a 28 year period expiring in 2034.

The breakup of the side from the 1960's to 1970's had a profound effect on the playing strength of both teams.

Significantly those remaining players had moved on or retired and some of the good young players moved away from the area and they included Andrew Bliss, Stewart Ambrose, Colin Clare, Mike Rose, Simon Dare, Graham Dare, Dave Shirley, Graham Fisher, Richard Nicholls, Andy Simpson, Paul Wright, Nigel Hussey et al.

After a long period of "bouncing on the bottom" slowly but surely the Club is progressing in the right direction. Junior cricket was single handedly resurrected by James McCall five years ago but he has now moved on. The membership has seen the value of a thriving youth section.

Six of the Club members have since become ECB qualified coaches. We have also taken on a number of interested fathers for each age group as Team Managers, based largely on the Junior Football model. We formed a youth Committee to ensure that the Juniors have a voice. Thanks to the pioneering work of James McCall and the determination of Sagheer Ahmed most recently not to let the Club fail we achieved ECB "Club Mark Accreditation" eighteen months ago. Besides ensuring that club members who will come into contact with Juniors are CRB cleared the Club has produced as it is required to do a "Five Year Development Plan" That plan is achievable with the whole hearted support of every Club Member. The first stage was to build a new two lane net facility which was completed and paid for a year or so ago. It was money well spent and it has been well used.

The next major improvement will be to the ground itself. The intention is to turn the square through ninety degrees to prevent batsman at the pavilion end being blinded by the late evening sun's rays. We intend to increase the size of the square so that it provides 15 strips. Finally we intend to re-grade the outfield so that it is flat. Once this is completed we may offer the use of the ground to the County for either youth team games and maybe to the full County Team. In order to do this significant funding will have to be applied for some from the Club and hopefully the bulk from the ECB.

The acid test would be to complete this work in time for the clubs 150th anniversary.

I hope that some of the promising younger members will show their loyalty to the Club and it is not difficult to imagine that a number of them could be playing in the celebration games that I am sure will be organized during that summer. Of the slightly older youth members I think of Chris Sleeman, who scored a magnificent 192 against Harrow and Wealdstone last summer as well as other good performances in the league has a bright future. Two more than useful bowlers emerged this year in the guise of Nabeel Khan and James Lyons and Tahmoor Hussein showed himself to be a sensible and competent batsman. I also expect good things in the future with Chris Dunsby, and Humzah Wahid as they gain more confidence.

In short the future looks bright especially when you look at some of the even younger players.