

OE Cricket – celebrating a half-century

A reunion lunch was held in June at the College to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the launch of the OE Cricket Week. Here's the speech given by Tony Beadles (Headmaster 1994-2000 and Forest 1954-59)

Fifty years ago, in June 1961, the Old Epsomian Cricket Week was founded. I was in my final year at Oxford University with little idea of what I wanted to do, and Mike Ribeiro (Carr 1953-58) was at Guy's Hospital qualifying to be a dentist. We had both played some good club cricket – Mike in Hampshire and for London University and myself in Sussex and for the Authentics at Oxford. We had enjoyed our cricket at Epsom College greatly, being fortunate to be in some very good teams with lovely people.

We were sad that there was only the two-day match against the school for the Old Epsomians, and so, with the naivety and optimism of youth, proposed to set up a cricket week. The College were happy to offer the ground after term.

I agreed to be the secretary and get the fixtures and contact players and Mike agreed to captain the teams. It was easy in those flourishing days of club cricket, before league cricket and certainly before limited overs cricket. Six matches were arranged, all 11.30 am starts – on Tuesday, the Incogniti; on Wednesday, the Buccaneers; on Thursday, The Romany; on Friday, the Old Georgians; on Saturday, the Grasshoppers; and on Sunday, the Old Johnnians. The fixtures remained like this for over 20 years.

The teams were drawn mainly from the 1957 to 1960 sides that had some very good cricketers. Five are here today – Mike and myself, John Thomas (Hart-Smith and

Fayrer 1953-60), the captain in 1958 and 1959, Robin Weare (Rosebery 1954-58) and Ron Stern (Crawfurd 1954-60). The sides had stars – Ali Jinnah (Holman 1954-58), elegant bat, excellent off-spinner, quiet and cool, and his cousin, Maurice Manasseh (Holman 1956-61) – not as quiet, but a wonderful schoolboy cricketer, scoring six centuries in his last season, and making 95 at Lord's for the Public Schools to follow 6/28 for the Southern Schools – and 100 in the Varsity match later. We had two splendid quick bowlers – Ron Stern and Pete McAndrew (Crawfurd 1955-60).

The fixtures were good: the Buccaneers run by the remarkable Geoffrey Moore; The Romany by Ken Rankin, owner of many trees and most generous; the Old Georgians by the dedicated Brian O'Gorman; the Grasshoppers by Dick Farmiloe, our own most charming Master in charge of cricket.

On Sunday in the first week we made a very satisfying score of over 300 against the Old Johnnians.

Mike and I stepped aside after a while. John Collier (Propert 1955-60) nobly took up the secretarial work and contributed splendidly for a number of years. Some good cricketers played. Graham Fyson, an adept bat from Cheam, captained sides for a few years. Derek Fenner, returning as Master in charge of cricket, was a fabulous left-arm spinner. Indeed in the two years that Gavin Lane (Propert 1961-65) and Gerry Wells-Cole (Wilson 1957-63) played,

both in the Combined Services team, we were unbeaten.

There were characters, of course. Tim Wallace (Hart-Smith & Holman 1946-51) was a most loyal and enthusiastic member, and a forceful and loquacious, opening bat. Robin Crawford (Rosebery 1959-65), given to unusual deeds of derring-do, was a useful all-rounder, and looked after the catering for some years.

Members of the teaching staff came to play: Neil Laing, who sadly died in 2006, John Davidson-Kelly, here today, Mike Hobbs and Paul Williams. We even had Arthur Wellard, coach at the College and the legendary Somerset and England player, playing for us occasionally.

He always asked me: "Tony, what ball are we using today?" I would show him. "Oh! I think we might try one of mine," getting a special one from his bag. And then, with an action that would not by then have passed Darrell Hair, he made the ball move in all directions.

I once batted with him in a great stand. He came in No 11 against the Old Georgian. We needed 40 more to win, and I was the other end having made something of a score. The great six-hitter came in whirling his bat and surveyed the far boundaries. Some fielders fell back, and Arthur came down the wicket to me and said: "Back up." He got into line, nudged it into a gap at square leg and said "one." He did this every time that he was on strike, but practised extravagant hits and eyed the boundary between. We collected the 40

runs, Arthur getting seven singles all to square leg! "I don't why they put all those fielders out," he said. "I can't hit it off the square now!"

Inevitably times change. Wandering club cricket became less fashionable as league cricket dominated. It was more difficult to get Old Epsomians to commit to a week or even three or four days. So the Club evolved, as good clubs do. It became the PLOES – Platypods (the Common Room Cricket team) and Old Epsomians for some years, and Mike Hobbs and Paul Williams did wonderful work in organising the cricket.

Now it has sensibly evolved further, with the idea of a week abandoned and some fixtures at weekends. The school cricket, as we have seen, is in good shape.

A new pavilion is promised to replace the grand, but in its interior planning highly inconvenient, pavilion that now stands. Girls will be playing more cricket, for we saw a very good girl cricketer taking wickets and making runs in the 1st XI victory over Eastbourne today.

It is worth celebrating the 50 years since the Old Epsomian Cricket Week was founded, and giving thanks for much companionship, friendship and good cricket. Let us toast the past and give all good wishes to Epsom and Old Epsomian cricket for the future.

■ **For photos of the reunion, go to: www.epsomcollege.org.uk/news/50-years-of-oe-cricket**
