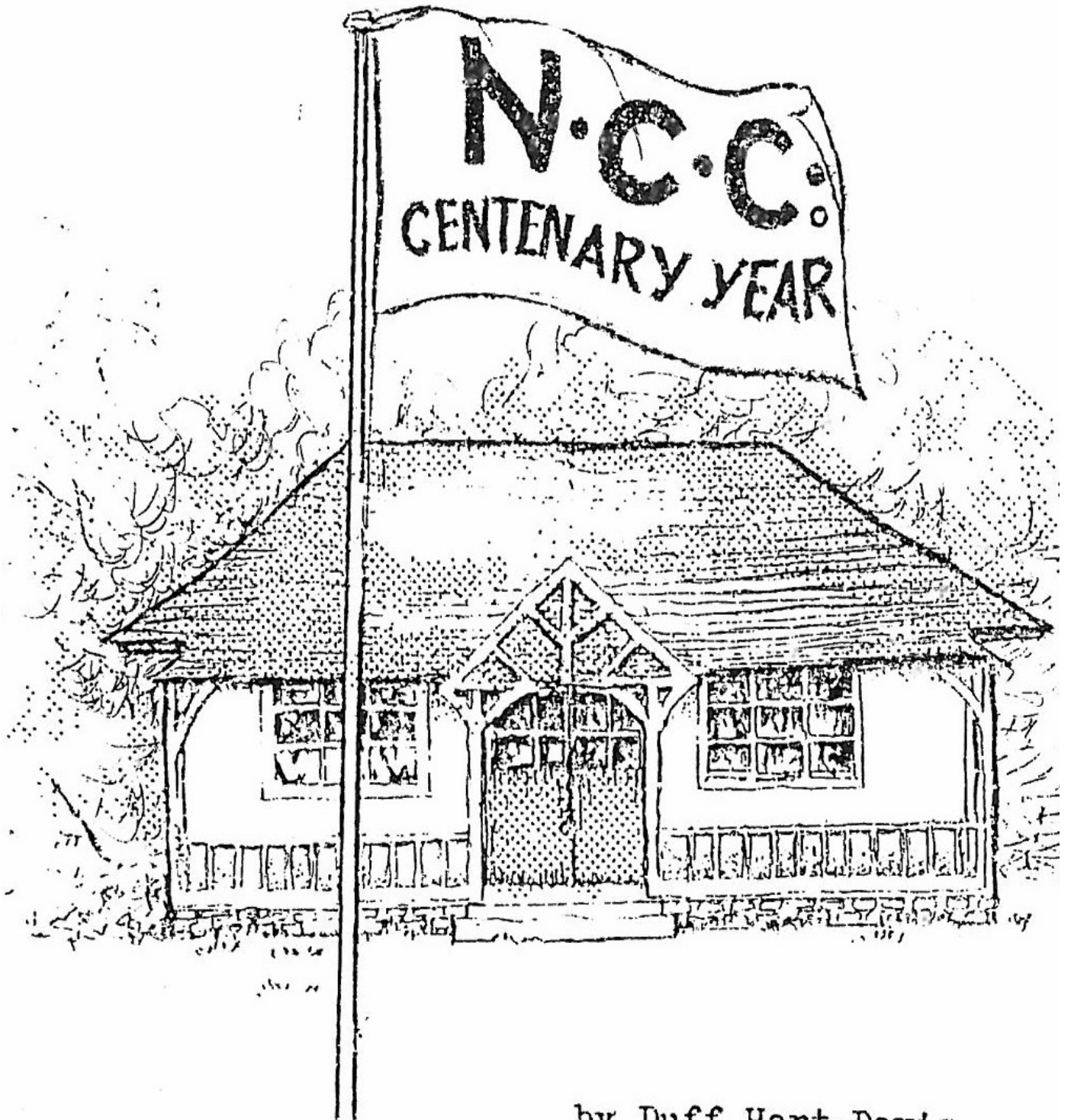


A Brief History of

THE NETTLEBED CRICKET CLUB

c1870 - 1981



by Duff Hart-Davis

Nettlebed Cricket Club

Officers 1981

President

Capt. Jack Broome RN

Chairman

Duff Hart-Davis

Secretary

Clive Vernon

Captain

Peter Leverett

Vice Presidents

P Baker Esq. - Lord Campbell of Eskan

Rev. S Dakin - R Hudd Esq. - J M Riley Esq.

Capt. M Ollivant RN - L G C Sims Esq.

J Brown Esq. - J Simon Esq. - L R Vines Esq.

D Weston Esq.

Life Member

L Pitcher Esq.

Umpire: C Ackerman Esq. **Scorer:** P Baker Esq.

CRICKET AT NETTLEBED

We decided to celebrate our centenary in 1981 because tradition in the village has it that the Club was founded in 1881. However, research has now shown that we are older than we thought: the earliest match of which we have been able to find a record was played in July 1870. Moreover, it is clear that cricket was already well established in Nettlebed at that date; so we can say with confidence that the age of the Club is 111 +. Thus we are celebrating in the knowledge that cricket has been played in the village for well over a century. And yet, oddly enough, if one subtracts the years not completed or lost on account of the two world wars - five in the first and six in the second - one arrives at the fact that 1981 is Nettlebed's 100th recorded season,

The first known match of the Nettlebed team - reported in Kinch's Henley Advertiser forerunner of the Henley Standard - took place at Stonor on Tuesday, 20 July 1870, when the home team won by three wickets. As usual in those days, each side had two innings, and the scores were as follows:

Nettlebed First Innings 74	Second 70
Stonor First Innings 81	Second 64 for 7

It is pleasant to find in Nettlebed's team several names that are still common in the neighbourhood today. Apart from Tom and Albert Saunders, there were Chas Silver, J. Shurey, J. Powell, W. Eustace and A. Stratford, besides a Jarvis, a Benwell and a Gill. Stonor also fielded one Saunders and one Brown.

The scores in that first match were unusually high. It seems unlikely that the Club had any form of mechanical mower and the wickets were probably cut by hand, with scythe or shears. No doubt the pitches were pretty rough, and in consequence the scores were usually very low. It was common for a side to total only 20 or 30. A score of 100 was exceptional and it was rare for any individual to get 50. Another factor which must have kept scores down was the length of the outfield: almost certainly it was never mown, except by sheep or cattle, so that boundaries were hard to come by. The general rule was that each side had two innings in the course of a single afternoon. In the event of rain, or if the second innings was inconclusive, the match was decided on the score in the first. Draws were thus almost unknown.



The Battle of the Bands

The scores were more typical in a match which took place at Nettlebed in August 1870 and was enthusiastically reported by the local paper:

"A very pleasant and friendly game or cricket was played here between the Lane End and Nettlebed brass bands on Monday last. Owing to the excellent bowling of the Nettlebed players, they proved victorious by 19 runs. The following is the score:
Nettlebed, first innings 42, second 12. Lane End first innings 19, second 16.

After the game both sides united together and played a suitable selection of music, paraded the main streets and afterwards repaired to the Red Lion Inn, where a very substantial dinner was provided by host Benwell. After the cloth had been cleared, the "Health of the Nettlebed Band" was proposed and drunk with musical honours; then followed the "Health of the Lane End Orpheus Band" in the same manner and a vote of thanks to Mr. Benwell for the excellent style in which the dinner was provided."

The Red Lion Inn was the first house on the left as one entered the village from the Henley direction - the building now occupied by Harvey Ferry's antiques business. The fact that the Cricket Club patronised it was no doubt connected with its proximity to the field, which then lay beside the main Oxford road, just short of the village on the southern side.

Today most of the area is taken up by the trees in the garden of Joyce Grove and only a small area of common is left out side the garden railings. But in the earliest surviving photograph, taken in the 1890's, one can see that the ground used to go back close the old house. There was no pavilion and the small tent visible in the photograph was put up and taken down for every match. The transfer of the cricket pitch to what we now know as the Recreation Ground provoked great controversy in the village and will be described presently.

In the matter of pubs, the old-time cricketers were much better off than their successors today. Apart from the Red Lion, the Sun, the Bull and the White Hart, they could also choose from the Fox & Hounds, on the corner of Watlington Street, and the Nag's Head and the Cross Keys further down the High Street. Beer was marvelously cheap in those days too: Harvest Ale, advertised by the Greys Brewery, cost. 9d.(about 4p.) a gallon.

Day of the Horse

Late Victorian Nettlebed was a much more peaceful place than the village we know today. With no cars and few bicycles, life was a leisurely business. Reading was a good hour away by horse-drawn brake, Oxford two hours at least; even a trip to play cricket at Stonor must have been a major excursion.

Horse-hire, rather than car-hire, was the order of the day.

J. Pickernell of the White Hart, Henley, let on hire "Wagonettes, Phaetons, Dog Carts etc., with or without driver". Yet life, though slow-paced, was tough as well: in July 1870 a seven year old boy was sentenced to six strokes with a birch rod for stealing two eggs, and a Mongewell man got six weeks' hard labour for stealing "three spokes and a quantity of firewood."

Not many local villages seem to have had teams at that date. Apart from Henley and Stonor, only Turville Heath features in the reports. But in the next few years Stoke Row and Greys Green begin to appear. For one match in 1873 no fewer than four of the Greys team were called Saunders - Solomon, Samuel, Silas and Tom.

In August 1873 a team calling itself the Nettlebed Blue Star Cricket Club played the Reading Hornet CC at Nettlebed. Whether this was the village team or some rival organisation, it is impossible to tell.

In those days, before the Working Men's Club was built, Cricket Club meetings were generally held in the Reading Room at No. 8 Watlington Street, the house now occupied by Mrs. Clements . The establishment which included a library, was run by the Trendell family, who lived in the house next door.

Exactly a hundred years ago, the team was evidently flourishing. On 23 April 1881 the Henley Advertiser reported:

"The opening match of the season was played on the Nettlebed on Easter Monday. There was a good attendance and, for a starting game, some good play. As usual Mr .W .Woodward, Bull Inn, catered to satisfaction. The Nettlebed Cricket Club proved victorious by 40 runs. Scores:

Nettlebed first innings	80	Reading Butterfly CC first Innings	44
Nettlebed second innings	53	Reading Butterfly CC second innings	49

Among local teams playing by then were Bix, Pyrton, Hambleden Vale, Friar Park and Medmenham. The Bix team included several names still familiar today: H. Jarvis, F. Froud and T. Sessions. One noticeable feature is that the good cricketers of the day played for several different teams. On 10 October 1881 for instance, in the final game of the season, the Stonor team included G .and J , Eustace , A. Saunders and E.J. Vernon - all regular Nettlebed players.

Nettlebed seem to have won most of their matches that season. Many were against the servants teams from Oxford colleges, and the Village beat them all: Christ Church, University College, Merton, Exeter, Magdalen - all went down to the home team at the Grove. The Village also fielded a strong boys' team, which also won most of its matches.

No doubt the wickets were fiery in 1893, for the spring and summer were exceptionally hot. A field of beans was reported to be in bloom at Culham during April, and by the middle of May the drought had forced the Henley Water Company to issue a circular calling for economy. On August 18, under the headline THE EXCESSIVE HEAT, the local paper reported that a Thame man had died in a hayfield, where he was "working; for amusement."

In those days the village was regarded as a health resort, almost as a spa.

"Nettlebed, famed for its lofty elevation and beautiful surroundings of never-ending beech-woods, has been busier than ever this summer and from early spring all available houses have been full of lodgers," said the Henley Standard, in August 1893. Visitors came from far and wide, and lists of the principal guests at the Bull Hotel were published regularly in the local press.

The Henley papers also gave details of the weather in Nettlebed - as though the place were hundreds of miles away. "Notwithstanding the bitter winds, Nettlebed has experienced bright sunshine most days," said a typical report, "and for pedestrians the weather has been lovely for long walks."

From an old Minute Book and an Account Book, both meticulously kept, many fascinating details can be gleaned of how the Cricket Club was run in the early days of this century. In 1906 the highest subscription - two guineas - was paid by the President Robert Fleming. His son Val - the Member of Parliament for Henley and South Oxfordshire - paid one guinea;

The Vicar, the Rev H. A. Baumgartner, half a guinea, and ordinary members 2 shillings. A man, often one of the players, was paid 5 shillings "to prepare ground and fix tent" for each match.

The Secretary was paid 10 per cent of the total which he collected in subscriptions: no doubt goaded by this incentive, he managed, in 1906, to dun a total of 61 people. Yet even then people were obviously slow to pay, for the Committee passed a resolution that everyone was to pay his subscription "before coming to play with the Club's tackle."

The Club's entire budget for 1906 amounted to £16, and of this no less than half went on transport to away matches: for each game Mr. A. Stovold's two-horse brake was hired at a charge of £1 a time. The arrangement reflects the fact that, with the exception of the President and possibly of the Vicar, no member of the team would at that time have had a motor-car of his own. And yet, even though internal combustion engines were in their infancy, cars were already thought to be a menace. In August 1907, at a meeting of the newly-founded Parish Council, Mr. A. Brown "brought forward the question of motor traffic, which was dangerous to the public", and suggested that cautionary signs should be placed at each end of the village. His idea was adopted unanimously.

The absence of telephones is clearly shown by the occasional charge for a telegram - presumably cancelling a match at the last minute because of the weather. For the Captain of the team to make quick contact with any player living outside the village must have been quite a problem.

The roughness of the cricket field is indicated by a resolution passed at a meeting in 1907 "that bushes be cleared off pitch and same be swept and rolled." That summer the Committee decided to buy one set of stumps "with revolving tops" and two "single right-handed batting gloves for right-handed batsmen ."

One leading character in the village at that time was H. (Jock) Messenger, who kept a combined news agency and cycle shop in the High Street. He often challenged all-comers to races - a typical course was from Red Lion Corner to the Fox at Bix and back - and he used to insert advertisements in the Henley Standard, couched in the form of terrible poems:

"A cyclist's free wheel did lock Says he, I'll take it to Jock,
Where lots of cyclists flock
His repairs stand firm like a rock."

Undoubtedly the most contentious event in the history of the Club was the transfer of the cricket field from Joyce Grove to the present recreation ground. The move was precipitated by the arrival in the neighbourhood of the merchant banker Robert Fleming who bought the Nettlebed Estate in 1903, and in the same year acquired Joyce Grove from the Havers family. Almost at once the new squire decided that the house was not big enough or grand enough, so he promptly had it demolished and set about building the monster that stands to this day. An integral part of his plan was to extend the grounds of Joyce Grove and to do this as he wanted he needed to take in more than half the existing cricket field.

Therefore, towards the end of 1903, he offered to make the Club a new field, if they would give up their old one. The proposal caused great offence in the village, and at first was not taken seriously. When the matter was raised at the AGM held in February 1904 and someone asked why Mr. Fleming's offer of a new field had not been discussed at the latest Committee Meeting or mentioned in the minutes, another member, Mr. Mansbridge, said the whole thing "was only a waste of time and talk. He could see there was nothing meant by it, and proposed the minutes be signed as read and get on with the business ."

Mansbridge was wrong: Robert Fleming had meant his offer seriously, and in due course he carried the project through at his own expense. The site chosen for the new ground was then a derelict area of humps and hollows known as "The Puddles", from which sand and clay had been dug for the manufacture of bricks. A narrow-gauge railway, built to carry the raw materials to the kiln in the centre of the village, still ran round the outside of it.

The work of levelling the site - all done by hand - was begun in 1907, and no doubt most, if not all of it, was carried out by men from the Nettlebed Estate. Tradition recounts that a layer of brushwood was laid over the levelled clay and sand to help the new field drain - and it is the gradual sinking of the brushwood that has caused the unevenness in the outfield today. A substantial amount of topsoil must have been brought in to make the new playing surface, but no record survives of where it came from.

The principal work was completed by the autumn of 1907. In the speeches at the Club's annual dinner in October reference was made to the fact that the new ground was then being turfed. The Deputy Chairman said he hoped that the Club would "go on and flourish as in former years," especially as the team would soon be able to play on the new ground, which "if properly looked after, should be the best ground in Oxfordshire." Evidently nobody realised that a serious mistake had been made in laying-out the field perfectly level: if the makers had given it a fall of a couple of feet, matching the natural slope from the common towards the village, their descendants would have been saved a great deal of trouble with the drainage .

Meanwhile, cricket had continued on the old field at the Grove, and it is clear from the records that the team included some pretty useful players. A typical Nettlebed side of 1907 consisted of Albert and Tom Saunders, Albert and Fred Goodall, H. Trendall, J. Jones, F. Johnson, Jack Coker, F. Willgoss, M. Clark and Dr. Pooley .

In September 1907 Nettlebed dismissed Henley Town for 9 - although it was said that only two of Henley's regular performers were playing. The Nettlebed School team was also exceptionally strong: one day in June 1907 they put Harpsden Boys out twice, for 8 and 7, themselves making 118.

In May 1908 the village again thrashed Henley Town at home, Nettlebed making 161 and getting the visitors out for 16. Tom Saunders was clearly an outstanding batsman, for in June that year, playing for the Three Counties Asylum (where, the report does not say) he made 113, 115 and 92 in consecutive matches. In the second of the three matches the Asylum team made 394 for five, at a rate of 163 runs per hour. As the local paper remarked, "the little village of Nettlebed has some reason to be proud of a batsman who is such a prolific scorer."

The Club had obviously hoped to use its new ground in 1908, but it seems that the new turf did not settle down very well, and the players had to wait another season. On Saturday July 1908 when Nettlebed played (and beat) Sonning Common at the Grove, Mr. Val Fleming "provided refreshments in the afternoon and also a capital tea on the lawn. Mr. Fleming hoped that next time Sonning were visitors to Nettlebed next season they would be able to play on the new ground."

By then the question of teas was beginning to worry the locals. "By the way," said a report in the Henley Standard:

"the players of the Nettlebed Cricket Club would be very pleased if some of the ladies of Nettlebed would be so kind as to provide visiting cricketers to the village with tea. They say in the Saturday afternoon matches the players do not require any provision for themselves, but they consider that as they are so well treated when they are away from home, it would be pleasant to have their visitors made at home in this way."

At the 1908 Annual Dinner, attended by 70 people, one of the speakers said that he considered the Club an excellent one, and very well managed. It played the game as it should be played, he said, "with good feeling among the players ."

The year 1909 opened with an upset when A. Jarvis, the Club's secretary, resigned because he, together with six other young men from the village, was emigrating to Canada in search of work (unemployment was serious, even then). The members presented him with a handsome travelling bag, and said goodbye regretfully, but at last the new Recreation Ground was fit for use, and the scores soon reflected the improvement in the wicket; beating Wallingford in May, Nettlebed scored 155 and got their opponents out for 120, forty-five of the village runs were made by the new Vicar, the Rev. P. Armitage, and as the local paper remarked, "it is the first time for a great number of years that the Club has had assistance with the bat from the Vicar, who should prove a much-needed acquisition."

The Rev. Philip Armitage did indeed prove a great asset to the Village team. A man of 66, he could hit harder than most, and whenever he got into partnership with Dr. Pooley - himself, no mean striker - the ball often had to be retrieved from Wanbourne Pond. He and the doctor made it an unwritten rule that if either of them reached 50, he would retire in favour of the next batsman. (The Vicar's son Commander Selby Armitage still lives at Port Hill, and has for many years been a staunch supporter of the Club, as well as one of its wittiest after-dinner speakers).

The new Pavilion

Still the new ground had no pavilion, and during the 1909 season members of the committee met Robert Fleming and his estate agent on the field to decide on the best site. The building which went up in 1910 was, in its essentials, the one we have now; but at first it was little more than a square box, devoid of amenities. It contained one partitioned-off changing room (the visitors' changing room of today), but no lavatory and no running water. For a lavatory, the players used to put up a canvas screen somewhere behind the building, and the only water on the ground was that in a rainwater tank (which still exists) between the pavilion and the flagpole, If the tank ran dry, and water was needed for the wicket, it had to be carted from the Sea Pond or Wanbourne Pond.

The fact that the pavilion which we still use was already in existence might make one think that village life then was much as it is today. But in fact there were still substantial differences. In 1910 a local woman was fined £30 for betting (the equivalent of perhaps £500 in today's values), and on Boxing Day a "substantial public dinner" was served to the aged poor of the parish at the White Hart Hotel.

During the First World War the Club suspended operations, and - so far as can be discovered - no organised cricket was played in the village from 1915 to 1918 inclusive. The Club was resuscitated at a general meeting held in the Village Hall on 30 April 1919, when "it was unanimously decided to form the Club again as in previous years," and Dr. Pooley was elected Captain.

In the early 1920's the Club went from strength to strength. In 1921 and 1922 Nettlebed were champions of the Reading and District League, winning a cup and individual medals. Their success seems to have gone to their heads a bit, for at a meeting held on 9 March 1922 it was decided that the Village should field two teams that season - an A XI and a B XI, each with its own captain and vice-captain. The ring-leader of the scheme may have been Major Riches, whose proposals "for better class cricket" were discussed at a meeting in October 1922. As a result "Major Riches and his friends" were invited to join the Club and asked to arrange fixtures for the following season. A fixture card preserved from 1923 shows how ambitious the Club had become. The A Side's fixtures included matches against Oxford City, the Berkshire Gentlemen, the Free Foresters and the M.C.C and six of the games were all-day matches.

Behind this rather grand facade, however, things seem to have been much as usual. The Club's finances were usually at a low ebb, and many fund raising events were held - whist-drives, dances and concerts. Even so, Robert Fleming was sometimes called on to settle the Club's debts, which he always seems to have done with good grace. In 1923 - no doubt at the suggestion of Major Riches - a rather desperate-sounding proposal was carried that all playing members who come from outside a five-mile radius should pay subscriptions of not less than three guineas - a considerable sum in those days, and nearly twenty times the normal subscription of 3s.6d.

In 1924 the Club reverted to a single team, and continued to flourish on this more modest level. Even so there were often rows behind the scenes. At the AGM held in April 1925, K. Bowditch was appointed "groundsmen" for the season, but a month later he resigned after a row with the Secretary. In the words of the Minute Book:

Complaint lodged by Secretary against K. Bowditch ground man over Lawn Mower through taking same to be repaired without orders from either Committee or Secretary. K. Bowditch resigned because he said he should not take orders from the Secretary, so it was left in the Secretary's hands to appoint another ground man

Many people still alive in the Village still remember the giants of the inter-war teams, not least the fast bowler "Chalkey" Summerfield, who slung the ball down round-arm so that it came "like hell in the night."

"You might as well be shot at" disgusted batsmen said as they came out bruised and defeated by Chalkey's thunderbolts.

Another well-known player, with exceptionally long service, was Charlie Phipps, the butler at Swyncombe House, whose language was so appalling that mothers would keep their children indoors if they thought he was likely to pass by. Albie Goodall, opening bat, could stay in all day for ten runs; and among the big hitters, none was more violent than Joe Richardson, who worked for the Pottery Yard (the Brickworks in the Village) and once sent a ball so far out of the field that it landed on the roof of the house now occupied by Bill Lloyd.

In 1933 Robert Fleming died. His son Val had been killed in the First World War, and so the connection between the Club and the Fleming family was temporarily broken. Philip Armitage became President for a year, but then Mrs .Fleming, Robert's widow, was elected in his place, and after her death in 1936, she was succeeded by her grandson Michael.

In the late 1930's the cricket field fell into bad condition, mainly because football was played on it in the winter, and there were frequent discussions about the possibility of the .footballers finding another field somewhere else. At a committee meeting in November 1936, for instance, it was discussed to some length and finally agreed that the secretary should write to the Football Club Committee, explaining the very bad condition of the Recreation Ground for cricket, and asking them if they would help the Cricket Club in this matter by finding another ground, the Cricket Club to go fifty-fifty with any rent that they may have to pay.

The Second World War

During the Second World War the Club once again suspended operations for the duration of hostilities, It was revived, after a six-year interval, at a meeting held at the Sun Inn on 15 April 1946 . "There was a large attendance," reported the minutes, "and Colonel P Fleming very kindly consented to be chairman" (of the meeting).

His first action was to ask all to stand in silence in memory of those members who had lost their lives in the war, his own brother Michael, Messrs W Lloyd, G. Smith, J. Venables, R. Austin, E. Coker and Dr. Pooley as well as the honorary members Clarke and Ollivant. The meeting then voted unanimously for the revival of the Club, and Col. Fleming was elected President - a post he held for a quarter of a century, until his death in 1971.

The first match played after the war was a trial game, married v Single, held on May 4, and 18 other fixtures were arranged for the season, one of them the Whit Monday game against the President 's XI which became a regular feature. The first post-war dinner and AGM were held at the Sun Inn on Friday 13 December 1946, but because of food-rationing a special permit had to be obtained, and Colonel Fleming contributed four pheasants to help with the provisioning. Thanks partly to his assistance, the menu consisted of thick Soup, roast pheasant and roast chicken, Christmas pudding, apple tart and blancmange .

One problem of the early post-war years was that the Polish troops who had been billeted in the camp south of Joyce Grove played football on the Recreation Ground so much that they damaged the pitch. Already there was a feeling that the field should be extended, so that the soccer pitch could lie clear of the cricket square, and it was suggested that the various clubs should join together to form a village sports association - an idea that was finally put into practice more than twenty years later.

During the 1940s the Cricket Club was well-equipped in some ways but badly off in others. They bought new bats, pads, gloves and balls, and they still had the pre-war sight-screens; on the other hand, the Pavilion still had no lavatory, and no water was laid on to the ground.

Improvements to the Ground

Early in the 1950's the much talked about extension of the Rec. was finally carried out thanks largely to the generosity of "Tupp" Lewis, a London stockbroker who lived in the White House, now owned by Mrs Middleton. A great supporter of the Club - though not himself a player - Lewis paid for a bit more of the Common to be levelled and brought into the field, and also for new drains to be laid.

Not long afterwards, badly-needed improvements were made in the Pavilion. The original cladding of weatherboard, which had needed increasingly-frequent repairs, was removed and replaced with expanding metal panels, which were then covered with rendering, giving the whole building a much lighter appearance. Inside, a second dressing room was partitioned-off, as was the kitchen/bar area. At the back a lean-to extension was built to house showers and lavatories, and the building was plumbed with running water for the first time. Most of the work was done by members of the Club, principally Jim Hutton, the outstanding bowler of the day, who in 1950, had made the national Press by taking all ten wickets for ten runs against Malmesbury, and Freddie Leverett, who had already established himself as batsman and bowler.

Other notable batsmen of the era were Sid Goodall and Les Pitcher, both excellent cutters of the ball, and Ron Cummins, whose powerful driving, cutting and hooking won him the bat for the first time in 1953.

The Sims Matches

One regular and much-enjoyed feature of the 1940's and 1950's was the annual match against the team brought by Lawrence Sims. The fixture had its origins in the games played before the war between the side from Brown's, the builders, and the team got up by Malcolm Bond of Halfridge, Lawrence Sims' father-in-law.

The Sims matches were always positive occasions, not least because the host used to invite both teams and their supporters home to supper afterwards. The matches also brought some famous cricketers to Nettlebed and none more famous than the great Percy Fender. It is said that Sid Goodall, the Nettlebed captain, once deliberately allowed Fender to bowl him so that the immortal line: "F S Goodall b.P G H Fender" would go down in the scorebook and into history!

Another England player who bowled at Nettlebed was Jim Laker, who used to turn out for Harold Long's side against the village. A good-natured feud carried on for years between Harold Long and Jack Brown, the Nettlebed Wicket Keeper (and later the Club's Chairman), each ribbing the other relentlessly. It was during one of the Long matches that the "Look at Life" film about village cricket, with a commentary by Richie Benaud was shot on the rec featuring among other local phenomena the sight of Peter Fleming riding up to the Pavilion on his horse.

When Colonel Fleming died in 1971, the Club was lucky to secure as its next President Captain Jack Broome, the distinguished former submarine captain and well-known naval author. For the past ten years Captain Broome had presided over the Club's affairs with his unique blend of good sense and humour, and his witty drawings have been used to decorate many a menu and poster.

A more recent recruit has been Peter Baker, who not only acts as the Club's regular scorer, but also has the great advantage of living on the edge of the Recreation Ground in Zion Cottage, from which he exercises invaluable supervision of the pitch and the Pavilion. Thus for the first time the ground has an almost-full-time custodian.

The Nettlebed Sports Association - so often discussed was eventually formed in 1969 and registered as an official charity. With the help of a loan from the National Playing Fields Association, the Bowls Club (a founder-member of the NSA) built themselves a handsome new pavilion, and the Recreation Ground was again extended to make more room for football. At last it became possible for the football pitch to be marked out clear of the cricket square, and relations between the cricket and football clubs have been much easier ever since.

The Haig Photograph

In 1977 the Club came by a useful windfall of £250 - the fee paid by the Haig whisky company, original sponsors of the national knockout village cricket competition, to take a Publicity photograph of the Nettlebed team on the verandah of the Pavilion. The picture was shot on a bitterly cold day in April which was transformed, by crafty lighting and exposure settings, into a golden summer evening.

Even though the sitters were constantly revived by tumblers of Haig, rigor mortis threatened to set in - especially as it was suddenly realised that no vicar was present, and (the Nettlebed vicar not being on hand) a long wait ensued while a substitute divine was drummed up from Swyncombe. But the photographs that resulted contrived to make everyone look happy and relaxed, and they were used in Haig advertisements all over the country.

Although Nettlebed has never had any great success in the knock-out competition, the Village did break several records in 1976 with its score of 276 for 2 against Dorchester. Trevor Jones, from H.M. Borstal, Huntercombe, scored 120 not out, and Roger Pitcher 106 not out. Their unfinished stand of 240 was a record partnership for the third wicket in the Haig competition at that date, and also the first occasion in the championship on which two centuries had been made during the same innings. Roger Pitcher, who took six wickets for 43 in the match, was later named in the Haig records as All-Rounder of the Year.

Recent Stars

The last two decades have produced many fine players, but it is safe wager that no better all-rounder than Roger Pitcher has ever taken the field for Nettlebed. His record of winning bat and ball - printed below - speaks for itself: suffice it to say here that his aggressive batting, leg-spin bowling, agile fielding and generally sharp cricketing intelligence have made him the scourge of teams for miles around.

A player to whom the bare records do less than justice is Peter Leverett, the present captain. The most stylish batsman to play for the village for many years, he is also one of the most effective. In 1976, even though he did not win the bat, he scored 1,002 runs, while still only 18.

That same season Roger Ackerman took 109 wickets with his awkward off-spin. No record survives of anyone else making 1,000 runs or taking 100 wickets for the village before or since. It is particularly pleasant to record that all these three outstanding performers are the sons of cricketers (Les Pitcher, Freddie Leverett and Cyril Ackerman) who also served the village team nobly in their day.

The Centenary Season

The Club's Centenary Season opened disastrously, with appalling weather and the Pavilion standing in a lake of water nearly a foot deep. After a prolonged and expensive struggle with the drains, the source of the flood was found to be a burst water main. Once that was mended, the trouble disappeared, and the ground is almost back to normal .

It is sad to have to record the recent death of one of the Club's staunchest members, Bill Murphy. He first played for Nettlebed as a boy of fourteen, and was associated with the Club, as player, Secretary and elder statesman, for more than fifty years. He is, and will be, much missed.

Over the years the Club's meetings have been held in many different places. Most gatherings - including the Annual Dinner - now take place in Working Men's Club, As to pubs - the team's patronage has settled firmly on the Sun Inn, whose landlord, Brian Goodall, has been player, Secretary , Bar Secretary and heavyweight supporter, to the Club's great benefit.

One fact for which we should perhaps all be grateful is that, in spite of its drawbacks, we do have our present Recreation Ground, rather than the old field at Joyce Grove. To be playing beside the main Oxford road in 1981, with its present volume of traffic, would be a nightmare . Unpopular though Robert Fleming 's original transfer may have been, there is no doubt that we are better off where we are.

TROPHIES FOR BATTING AND BOWLING

So far as can be ascertained from the records, which are incomplete, the practice of presenting awards to the season's best batsman and bowler was instituted in 1930. Usually a bat and ball have been presented, but sometimes, as in recent years, token trophies have been given to keep down the cost. Team captains, and all the trophy winners who can be recalled are given below:

YEAR	TEAM CAPTAIN	BEST BATSMAN	BEST BOWLER
1930	J. Butler	R. A. J. Bennet	J. Butler
1931	J. Butler	S. Goodall	J. Butler
1932	J. Butler	J. Butler	J. Butler
1933	J. Butler	T. J. Cobb	R. A. J. Bennett
1934	J. Butler	A. D. Brown	A. West
1935	W. Smith	A. D. Brown	S. Goodall
1936	W. Smith	E. Clark	L. Pitcher
1937	A. D. Brown	S. Goodall	E. Vockins
1938	A. D. Brown	E. Clark	L. Pitcher
1939	A. D. Brown	*	*
*	*	*	*
1946	F. Summerfield	*	*
1947	F. Summerfield	W. Leverett	F. Summerfield
1948	S. Goodall	J. Hutton	F. Summerfield
1949	S. Goodall	S. Goodall	J. Hutton
1950	S. Goodall	L. Pitcher	J. Hutton
1951	S. Goodall	W. Leverett	L. Pitcher
1952	S. Goodall	S. Goodall	J. Hutton
1953	S. Goodall	R. Cummins	J. Martin
1954	S. Goodall	J. Hutton	D. Hutton
1955	S. Goodall	*	J. Hutton
1956	S. Goodall	*	J. Hutton
1957	R. Cummins	*	*
1958	R. Cummins	*	*
1959	R. Cummins	*	K. Pitcher
1960	R. Cummins	*	*
1961	R. Cummins	R. Cummins	F. Leverett
1962	R. Cummins	S. R. Jarvis	C. Ackerman
1963	K. Pitcher	S. R. Jarvis	G. Coker
1964	K. Pitcher	T. Bathurst	G. Coker
1965	K. Pitcher	R. Cummins	R. Ackerman
1966	K. Pitcher	P. Teasdale	K. Pitcher
1967	K. Pitcher	R. Cummins	T. Brown
1968	G. Coker	R. J. Pitcher	R. J. Pitcher
1969	G. Coker	R. J. Pitcher	R. J. Pitcher

YEAR	TEAM CAPTAIN	BEST BATSMAN	BEST BOWLER
1970	G. Coker	R. J. Pitcher	R. J. Pitcher
1971	R. Ackerman	R. J. Pitcher	R. J. Pitcher
1972	R. Ackerman	*	D. Hart-Davis
1973	R. Ackerman	R. J. Pitcher	D. Hart-Davis
1974	R. Ackerman	R. J. Pitcher	D. Hart-Davis
1975	R. Ackerman	R. J. Pitcher	*
1976	R. Ackerman	R. J. Pitcher	R. Ackerman
1977	R. Ackerman	R. J. Pitcher	D. Hart-Davis
1978	P. Brown	P. Leverett	R. Ackerman
1979	P. Leverett	P. Leverett	R. J. Pitcher
1980	P. Leverett	C. Vernon	R. Ackerman

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The Club would also like to
Celebrate its long association
with
W. H. BRAKSPEAR
and to thank the Henley Brewery for so generously
contributing a barrel of bitter
to the Centenary Lunch
on 31 August 1981.