

## Village Cricket in Victorian Times

### Ewelme News, June-July 2010

The 1878 and 1879 copies of the Ewelme Recorder continue to shed fascinating insights into the lifestyle and activities of Victorian villagers. From the seasonal monthly reports, it is clear there was keen rivalry between villages and also in Ewelme itself. There were so many local players available that Mr Orpwood maintained his own Eleven to field against Ewelme CC, (a match played in August 1879 was won by Ewelme CC by 55 runs). Marrieds versus Singles matches were also played. (Mr Robert T Franklin of Fords Farm, a Married man, *'triumphantly carried his bat for 76 runs!'*)

Despite the difficulties in transporting a team to away games, which could only be accomplished by a combination of foot, horse-drawn vehicles and utilising the local Wallingford/Watlington train services, the Club competed with Wallingford and Abingdon towns, and the villages of Streatley, Bloxham (near Banbury) and Wheatfield (near Tetsworth).

Ewelme CC seems to have been a handy team, as the August 1878 issue reports that they did not suffer their first defeat until July 11<sup>th</sup> when playing Abingdon at home. On July 17<sup>th</sup> they were victorious over Wallingford – the writer commenting on the weather - *'It is said that it can never be too hot for cricket, but those who took part in the match found that it was almost possible to have too much of a good thing'*.

Unfortunately, the following year, 1879 was a particularly miserable summer and the editor mourns the loss of many abandoned or shortened games. The opening game with Abingdon on May 28<sup>th</sup> could not commence due to the downpour. The following home (June 2<sup>nd</sup>) and away (June 11<sup>th</sup>) matches with Wheatfield were started but then abandoned, the writer bewailing the storm on the 11<sup>th</sup> which *'...swamped many parts of Ewelme travelled also across to the Wheatfield country and proved too much for the most enthusiastic lover of the game.'*

Whether there was a permanent cricket pitch or where the games were played is not stated, except for a match played on the Common in 1878 against the National Schoolmasters of the District. The clearance of pitches on agricultural land without the benefit of sophisticated equipment must have ranked equally with the difficulties of transportation to away games. With the limited leisure time at their disposal, it is a tribute to the Victorian enthusiasm that Ewelme CC flourished.

In the last century, the late Herbie Winfield, a keen sportsman, related that every village, however small, had its own cricket team. Herbie played in the Ewelme cricket team from 12 years of age and would open the batting with Fred Winfield (Cynthia's father). Playing a match at Warborough, Fred took the first ball and was bowled for a duck, but as he passed young Herbie he said reassuringly – *'No need to worry about the bowling, boy, there's nothing in it!'* Games were played on Saturdays, but if there was a Sunday match, (and Rector Jenkins was a player) it had to be over by 6.0 pm to fit in the church service. There was even a Ewelme Ladies team, captained at one time by Amy Reeves from the Shepherds Hut. Herbie said they *'were never very good'* although Mrs Nowell-Smith from Hill House was a formidable bowler and received the accolade that she *'played like a man.'*

Between the wars and up until 1958 Ewelme had no permanent cricket ground, and five sites around the village were utilised for football and cricket games. The fields were loaned by local farmers, and usually had to be cleared of livestock before play could commence. (Sites included Orpwood farmland above the New Rectory; by the Shepherds Hut, and along The Pightles - Cottesmore Lane). Some pitches were so rough (at Stoke Talmage), that the stumps were bloodstained! After decades of lobbying and legal complications in getting the Common de-requisitioned, at last in 1958, a portion of the Common was fenced off and prepared by Grundons as a sports field.

Herbie's opinion was that the making of the recreation ground was one of the two most important events in the village - the other being the building of the Village Hall. However, even with the luxury of a permanent pitch, with the change in leisure pursuits and the scattering of families, it had become harder to make up teams of Ewelme men and some had to be 'borrowed' from other villages, a state of affairs that exists today. What would the enthusiastic Victorian cricketers have said about that?

*Ewelme Archive*