

Round and About in the Parish...

In the heart of the Ashdown Forest, well away from roads, is the Chelwood Gate cricket green. The Ashdown Forest Cricket Club started in 1864 when Mr Chatterton of Birch Grove Lodge applied for permission to make a pitch for his garden boys. These garden boys would come to the country looking for work, some of whom were orphans. Permission was granted and the boys began playing cricket. The employer's friends were invited and from these beginnings the Ashdown Forest Cricket Club grew.

A newspaper report from September 1877 notes "Merry Doings at Birch Grove" where Mr Chatterton gave his annual Harvest Home to the labourers and others employed on the estate and over 40 sat down to a 'capital' dinner consisting of roast and boiled beef and plum pudding etc supplied by Mr Meads of the Red Lion Inn. They then adjourned to play cricket, which ended in a tie at 5 pm. The wives were treated to a tea in The Lodge.

In September 1885, eleven young gentlemen chosen by Mr Hardy of Danehurst and eleven boys from Birch Grove played cricket on Mr Chatterton's green and in July a cricket match was held between Sheffield Park and Mr Chatterton's Eleven when the former won by 31 runs after a good game. Mr Chatterton presided at the luncheon supported by Lord Sheffield. Several matches were played during the 1914-18 war and the opponents were often recuperating soldiers from Chapelwood Manor.

The former Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. Harold Macmillan was President of Ashdown Forest Cricket Club for around 40 years, and he was one of several distinguished personalities connected with the Club, which included Lord Ashdown [not Paddy Ashdown] (created Baron Ashdown of Chelwood in 1975) and Tufton Beamish (Lord Chelwood) who were vice-presidents.

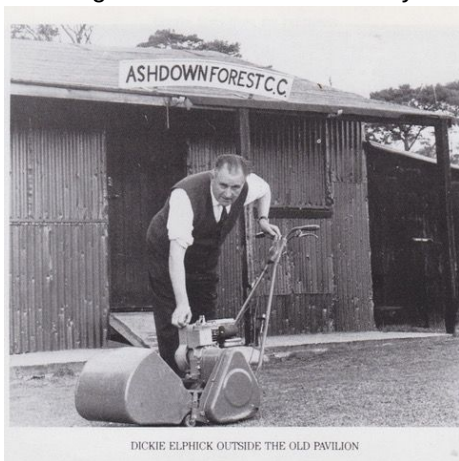
Harold Macmillan took a keen interest in the Ashdown Forest Cricket Club as the ground was on his doorstep but as far as is known there was not a team from the Birch Grove Estate whilst he lived there. However, there were staff from Birch Grove who liked cricket. Harold Macmillan had a personal batsman - Bob Cooper, who was a typical ex-RAF man, (moustache etc). He was very interested and observed all the line markings which the groundsmen were doing and complemented them on their work. Unfortunately, he also had a lurcher dog which delighted in charging up and down making a mess of the white lines that they had carefully set out.

Harold Macmillan made a voluntary subscription of 1 guinea (which was not a playing subscription) and this figure remained the same for many years until Dickie Elphick (who was the treasurer) hinted to him that it had been at that rate for many years, and reminded him that there had been inflation etc. Harold Macmillan immediately increased his subscription to 5 guineas per year, and this



continued until his death. When the Club needed extra funds Harold Macmillan provided these, and on one occasion he paid for all the fencing to stop the rabbits getting in and damaging the pitch. It is known that Harold Macmillan liked to have a link to the club and his name appeared on all the letter heading as President.

The secretary in 1977 was Harry Elphick, known as "Dickie" to his many friends, who had then been with the club 25 years in that office and 24 years as treasurer as well. Dickie (below) played for Ashdown Forest until he was 59 and also umpired as well as performing countless other task. In 1977 he was presented with a gold watch to mark his 25 years service as secretary.



"The Forest" as it was affectionately known, was essentially a family club with a long tradition of brothers playing in the side. The Wood family had a lengthy association with the Club. Ron and Jim Wood were both captains. On one occasion the side had no fewer than seven Woods playing on the team - five from the same family. This prompted talk of renaming the club the Chelwood Timber Company.

Alfred Baxter, who in 1977 was the oldest member at 85, still walked to watch Forest play. (He had been the publican at the

Stone Quarry pub for 22 years and he was a keen sportsman).

In this photo the players were known by nicknames, some of which were Lord Lucan, Ten Bellies, Turnips, Trigger, Dorrers, Slash, Only One, Chicken, Flag Knicker, Bill, Left Hooke.



In 1927 Dallyn Lucas of Streeters Rough, Chelwood Gate gave the club a new pavilion. Inevitably this became dilapidated and by the 1990's it was decided that a new pavilion was needed.



In about 1988 Sheikh Sultan Al-Qasami, ruler of Sharajah, one of the seven States of the United Arab Emirates became the new owner of Wych Cross Place. and he very generously provided funds of around £35,000 to enable a new pavilion to be constructed. In view of his donation he was asked to be the honoured guest for the opening day and it fell to Roy Emmerson to entertain him.



The Sheikh was asked to bowl the first ball. Roy told his team not to hit a 4 or anything like that, and if they got caught out, not to worry as it wouldn't count against them.

The Sheikh approached and threw the ball - it only went a few yards. Never mind. He approached again and threw another ball, this too only went a few yards. Never mind. The third time he approached and threw the ball, same thing again, still Never mind. But now Roy gave the instruction **“run forward to meet the ball!!”** to the next batsman, who did exactly that. Everyone's honour was intact.

Whilst Roy was entertaining the Sheikh he asked Roy if there was anything else that was needed, and Roy, on the spur of the moment quickly said “well, we could do with some electricity”. The Sheikh said “go ahead, get it done, and I'll pay for it.”

My thanks to Graeme Baxter and to Roy Emmerson.

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