

# Memories of Village Green Cricket

By  
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Cricket was first played on Brockham Green around 1875. My involvement, first as a very interested young spectator and later as a player, spanned the years between 1946 and 1973. This is how I recall those years.

Sometime in April the Dorking Council would send a bloke out to cut the grass and place a few green bench seats (taken out of winter storage) in strategic positions around the Green - usually one or two along the church wall, a couple along the hedge in front of North/South Lodge, one by the bus stop, another under the elm trees that used to stand between the two pubs.

The cricket club had an honorary grounds man in those days and he, with a few helpers to pull the heavy roller, would prepare and mark out the pitch for the weekend match. I wonder what became of that roller; it used to be kept behind The Dukes Head.

The first match was usually at the end of April, unless the Green was covered in snow which did happen on at least one occasion, and the season would run through until the end of September.

Brockham had some useful players in those days. A longtime captain was Joe Smith who opened the batting and was a reasonable bowler (his sons followed in his footsteps, John as a fast bowler, Len a batsman). George Chitty, Len Jordan, Don Horton did most of the bowling as I recall. Percy Balchin and his brothers, Doug and Norman were regulars, as were the Budd boys - Ted, Arthur and Sid. Alec Chitty, Ernie Chitty, 'Obby' Moore and Tich Bowry, were among the blokes I used to watch in the late 40's and early 50's.

Favorite viewing spots were by the Village Hall (which served as 'cricket pavilion' in those days) or under the elm trees. Sometimes we lads would climb to the top of the elm closest to the Royal Oak (the only one possible to climb if I remember correctly) for a birds eye view of the action.

Watching was all very well, but I wanted to be out there playing. I still had a few years to wait!

Cricket on Brockham Green was unique. Surely no other ground had 2 roads, 3 large elm trees and patches of long grass all within the boundaries! The batsman had to 'look both ways' before going out to bat, and again on his return, the fielder had to be careful of traffic when chasing a ball hit across the roads. I remember George Chitty being caught by a fielder's one handed leap in the middle of the road in front of the Village Hall - George was on 92 - funny how

these things stick in your mind. Another situation peculiar to Brockham cricket was that play was always stopped temporarily to allow safe passage for the double-decker buses as they crossed the Green.

The boundaries were 'a bit rubbery' in those days. As far as I remember the boundary ran from the Dukes Head, along the hedge in front of North/South Lodge, past Vicarage Cottage to the church wall, across to Harry Stent's village shop, along the fences past the Village Hall and followed the fence line in the general direction of the Pump before leaving a grey area and re-appearing to follow the walls between the Royal Oak and the Dukes Head. Stories were told of batsmen continuing to run 4, 5, 6 as a fielder haplessly chased the ball down the road towards the Borough Bridge or searched in the long grass by the elm trees or in front of Vicarage Cottage - or conversely - of the fielder who 'pretended' the ball was lost only to magically find it, as the batsmen attempted a second run, and try for the run out! Folklore? Maybe! In later years boundary markers were placed at the south end of the Green, some distance from the church wall, and at the north end, in front of the Pump across to the Royal Oak.



Cricket on Brockham Green

(Copied from postcard, probably early 1960s)

That's me - red hair, hands on hips, at backward point.

Two regular spectators, Olly West and Dave Weller, under the Elms.

Oliver West was a real Brockham 'character' He lived in Strood Green and used to cycle to the village on his 28 inch wheel push bike (that's it behind the tree).

He always wore a hat which was raised politely to anyone he knew. He lived into his 90s.

So to my first game of cricket on Brockham Green. In 1955 Arthur Budd suggested that we should get a boys team together with the view that this would be good training for future Brockham players. The cricket club agreed and supported the idea by preparing a wicket for us and allowing us to use their kit. We played 9 or 10 games over the next 2 years against Leigh, South Holmwood, Sondes Place School, etc. and never lost a game. We 'push-biked' to the away fixtures, each carrying bits and pieces of kit. Many of these boys did indeed go on to be very good village cricketers. Thanks Arthur.

July 1956 marked my debut as a 'real' Brockham cricketer. Just after lunch on that Saturday, Len Smith, then captain of the 2nds, raced around to our house on his motor bike - "we're playing at South Merstham, we're one short, can you play?" Could I play??? It took a nanosecond for me to get my kit together, get on the back of Len's bike to meet the rest of the team at the Village Hall to board our transport to Merstham (more on that later).

The photograph below was taken at South Merstham on that Saturday - a pure coincidence not, I hasten to add, to mark my debut!



Brockham Green 2<sup>nd</sup> Eleven July 1956

Standing: George Sutton (umpire) Roy Woodroffe, Tony Ford, Arthur Budd, Jim Constable, Dave Glanfield, Ian McKinnon, Sth. Merstham umpire  
Sitting: Fred Pearce, Jock Arneil, Len Smith (capt.), Bert Hall, Bill Farmer

I played one or two more games that year. The 1957 season saw me (and a few of the lads of similar age) in and out of both 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> elevens. I loved playing for the 1<sup>st</sup> eleven - I was making up the number - batting #11 and fielding at fine leg - but I was playing with the blokes I had looked up to in previous years. They looked after me and I was learning from them. I was always pretty quiet in the dressing room, but one day, Capel I think it was, I noticed Len Jordan had his kit in an attaché case with the initials - W G B - printed on the side. "What does W G B mean, Mr. Jordan?" I ventured. "Wonderful good bowler" he replied with a huge smile and a hand over his ear in a gesture that anyone who has known Len would recognize. "Sometimes wonderful good batsman" he added. I later learned that in fact the case had belonged to his wife, Freda, and WGB were her initials before marrying Len. A lovely bloke was Len.

I think now is the time to give a description of what cricket in Brockham was all about in those days. All fixtures were 'friendlies', no points or league positions to worry about. We played for the fun of it.

The club used to run 2 teams and it usually worked out that one team played on the Green and the other was away. Cricket on the Green was always played on Saturday- no Sunday games were allowed because of the proximity of the church and chapel. The only exceptions being Bank Holiday Mondays and mid week evening Aarvold Cup games.

The Aarvold Cup was an 18 over a side knock-out competition between local clubs - who said limited over cricket was new? The matches were played on mid-week evenings starting around 6pm. English summer evenings being what they are some of these matches finished in near darkness with batsmen, fielders and spectators having little idea where the ball was! Great fun.

On what used to be the Whitsun Bank Holiday the 2<sup>nd</sup> eleven played host for an all day game against Grove Park, a team from south London. They used the fixture as a day in the country and turned up in a bus with wives, girlfriends and families. The same players turned up year after year so we got to know them fairly well. A very good spin bowler - Stan Axford - used to cause us a lot of grief!

The big match of the year was the all day 'local derby' against Betchworth on the Green on August Bank Holiday Monday. This game used to draw a crowd of spectators to the Dukes Head around lunch time, and in the early evening, and was usually a fast bowling contest, (some short-pitched, an ego thing!) between John Smith (Brockham) and Charlie Harding (Betchworth). Cries of 'pitch it up'

echoed around the Green. This fixture was always very competitive with a fair bit of 'needle' involved.

Now back to Saturday cricket. As I mentioned before the Village Hall served as cricket pavilion, the Brockham players used what was then the Reading Room as their changing room. The opposition was sent to the back of the Hall to change in the rooms next to the stage. Matches started at 2.30, but before play began much preparation was required. The chains and wooden posts which 'protected' the 'hallowed square' had to be removed and dragged to the boundary and the post holes plugged with specially made wooden blocks. A net was always erected to protect the windows of Surrey House at the request of the owner at that time - Captain Ionides. The scoreboard and scorers tables were set up on the verandah (which used to have a roof - very handy on the many occasions when rain stopped play!) Now we were ready for play.

It was generally accepted that the team batting first would declare, unless they were bowled out of course, at tea-time which was 5 o'clock.

A long time 'tea-lady' was Mrs. Finch, who always provided a wonderful spread of sandwiches, cakes and huge pots of tea. Eventually her place was taken, on a roster system, by wives, mothers and girlfriends who continued the tradition of serving the best cricket teas on the circuit!

The run chase would begin at 5.30 and stumps were drawn at 7.30 unless a result was achieved beforehand.

After the home players had completed their tidying up they would join the visitors in The Dukes Head. The rivalry usually continued on the darts board and a few 'whip-rounds' were made to buy jugs of beer to share between the teams as they 're-lived' the game. During the course of the evening some of the 'away' team would return and stories would be swapped as to who had won, who got the runs, wickets, etc. Some very enjoyable and memorable evenings were spent in 'the Duke' after cricket. Some visitors stayed around longer than others - the Jolly Rogers were usually good for a long evening! After one particularly good evening, in the late-fifties, Bill Farmer (a very good fast bowler and hard hitting batsman) set off home walking through Court Lodge. Unfortunately Bill fell asleep and missed the right turn in the path which leads to the bridge over the river, he walked straight on and finished up in the Mole! For this adventure he was presented with a tankard inscribed 'MMBC' (Midnight Mole Bathers Club) In later years Bill would take fish and chip orders from the later stayers at the Duke, drive to Dorking's favorite fish shop and return with a load of Cod or Rock and six-pen'th. Nothing better than fish and chips out of newspaper on warm summers evening, particularly after a couple of ales!

Now to the away team. Up until the early sixties very few, if any, of the cricketers had cars, so other transport to away fixtures had to be arranged. Brockham teams were taken to away games in the back of Harding's lorry (the

beginnings of what is now Harding's Coaches) The team would meet at the Village Hall at 1.30-ish. The lorry had a tarpaulin cover and a bench seat on each side for the team, kit in the middle. The driver was usually Doug or Charlie Harding who were both playing for Betchworth at the time so they would drop the team off at where ever they were playing then race off to join there own team. After the match they would return to pick up the players from whichever pub the home team used as a 'watering hole'. A sing-song always took place on the way home. Favorites were 'Green grow the rushes-o' together with 'One man went to mow' and '10 green bottles'?? - no, surely not! The 'most sung' was the slightly risqué 'Fol-de-rol' the lyrics of which have surely been lost in the mists of time. Many an eyebrow was raised by the locals of Dorking or Reigate as a lorry-load of happy, singing cricketers passed through their town! As we moved into the mid-60s more and more of us had cars and so 3 or 4 cars did the job of Doug and Charlie's lorry. Sing-songs were a thing of the past.

By now the wheel had turned full-circle. The blokes that we watched as kids now came out to watch us. Don Horton, Ted and Sid Budd, Bill Glanfield and Arthur Warren used to set up their deck-chairs in front of Vicarage Cottage and watch proceedings. Us 'young blokes' christened them Critics Corner!

I left Brockham in late August 1966 and moved overseas. On returning in 1971 it was obvious that the days of cricket on the Green were numbered because of increased traffic flow, parked cars, etc. And so it was, after almost 100 years of cricket on Brockham Green, the club moved to the Recreation Ground on Middle Street at the end of the 1973 season. I played for one season on the new ground before leaving the village, but it was never quite the same as playing on the Green.

So, I have many memories of my cricketing days on the Green. Memories of hard fought victories, of disappointing defeats, of fine individual performances by both Brockham and visiting players. On a personal note one 'low' and one 'high' stick in my mind. The 'low' was being out LBW first-ball against Leigh on my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday! Not the only 'first-baller' of my career! I had to wait 10 years for the 'high' when I managed to reach the 'magic three figures'. Obviously not everyone was as pleased as me by the feat because when I put my boots back on after tea I discovered that some 'kind person' had filled them with water!!

Of course as well as playing on the Green we visited some lovely grounds. Coldharbour was a tiny ground surrounded by heather and scrub - many lost balls there. Chipstead was always a favorite of mine, as were Tadworth and Walton Heath. Betchworth had a pretty ground behind The Dolphin. Is it still there? Leigh was a nice place to play cricket. Before moving on to the heath, South Holmwood played opposite the Holly and Laurel next to what was then a

very busy A24. I have happy memories of North Holmwood. I first played there as a 10 year old for the NH school team. In later years North Holmwood became my 'Sunday club'.

Playing cricket at Brockham meant a lot to me and I hope this will bring back a few memories to any of my old team mates who might read this piece.

Footnote. There was one more game played on the Green. It was late in the hot, dry summer of 1976. Robert Fleming was producing the documentary TV series 'This Sporting Land' and wanted some cricket action for one particular episode. He brought a team down to play the locals. I happened to be in Brockham at the time and it was the only time I played on the Green on a Sunday. I don't know if the series was ever shown.



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