

Eydon Cricket Club - Established 1877

The Early Years

In 1978 David Preece, then treasurer of the club, and Nick Seale, who was secretary, published a booklet called 'A Short History of Eydon Cricket Club', to commemorate one hundred years of cricket in the village. They gathered together details of early records, photographs and anecdotes, without which much history of those early years would have been lost. Thirty years later I make no excuses for drawing heavily on this booklet for information relating to those early years, in an attempt to compile as complete a record of Eydon Cricket Club as possible.

Cricket, in some form, has almost certainly been played in the village for a considerably longer period than formally documented. However, it appears that 1877 was not altogether a good year for the game, as England lost the first Test Match to Australia in Melbourne. Locally it also marked the closing of Eydon's second inn - The Black Moor's Head. It was also the first year in which official records were kept for Eydon Cricket Club, mainly owing to the efforts of the Reverend Mr. W. H. Chapman, who came to the village in 1868.

Rev. Chapman established the club and its rules. Colonel Cartwright MP, who leased Eydon Hall from Viscount Valentia, was made Chairman; J. Malsbury was secretary; Rev. Chapman was treasurer and Messrs J. Bromfield, W. Sumner, C.J. Thompson and M. Ivens Jnr. formed the committee.

Most important, Rev. Chapman provided the ground on which to play, next door to the Rectory. Known as The Rectory Ground, it was used as a recreation ground as well as for cricket; there were swings, football crossbars and jumping poles. He declared 'I have made (it) for the promotion of true religion, healthy recreation and cheerful and innocent amusement in this place.' (Seale & Preece 1978:4). In fact this is the same land that now we call Eydon Community Sports Field!

Rev. Chapman was a whirlwind of enthusiasm for and organisation of, many clubs and societies in the village and was, fortunately for historians, an excellent record-keeper. He started the parish Almanac and Register from which much early information was gleaned. As well as the cricket club it appears he was involved in The Horticultural and Industrial Society, Reading Room, Society of Ringers, Penny Readings and Penny Bank and he began the Working Men's Club, which was originally based at The Black Moor's Head. Needless to say he also had his normal church duties and involvement with the village's Church of England school. However, his enthusiasm does not seem to have been universally appreciated. Syd Tyrrell described him variously as a 'shrewd business man', a 'notorious bad payer' (Tyrrell 2001:303) and as 'a tartar, it's good to know he didn't always get his own way' (Tyrrell 2001:59).

Membership

In 1877 the club's subscription was 1/- (5p), a tidy sum in those days, as it represented almost a day's wage for a labourer, and must have meant most of the working men of the village were unable to join; certainly the married ones who formed the bulk of the population of Eydon and who would have had many, more pressing, demands on their wages. However, out of a total village population of around 500 people, 37 men managed to find the subscription money to join the club, 13 boys joined the Boys Sixpenny Cricket Club and a further 22 joined the Boys Penny Cricket Club. Ten years later the numbers had dropped to 25 men and 14 boys. One hundred years later the membership was back to 37 men!

However, the changing face of village life began to take its toll, there were few children and young people in the village and new members were few and far between. In the early 1990s the club was forced to appeal for more support, as there were only eleven playing members, a mere six of whom lived in Eydon. With work commitments and possible injuries this meant that it was almost impossible to field a full team even at the start of the season.

David Fisher, Bill Oakey and Jack Colton appeared in a photograph in the Banbury Guardian to accompany an article, and advertisements were also placed in the Guardian and the Daventry Weekly Express. Fortunately the recruitment drive was successful in that several new members joined the club and 1993 saw a new lease of life. In 1994 a full season of matches was arranged in the South Northants League Division One, but this proved to be Eydon's last full season in the South Northants. League. The following year Eydon tried merging with Culworth, in order to maintain a toe-hold at league cricket level, but this was not successful.

So the new lease of life was short-lived and various reasons have been cited. A high degree of commitment was required to play at league level and many potential players were unable to meet these requirements. The South Northants. League itself was changing; becoming more competitive, with a wider range of players in the game, as well as an increased number of venues, such as Wicken near Milton Keynes. Some of the more established players, concerned for the reputation of Eydon Cricket Club, were perhaps a little wary of newcomers' ability to maintain Eydon's high standards of play and were reluctant to allow them to play.

Whatever the combination of reasons it proved impossible to sustain a full team of competent players for the duration of a season. Sadly, having been described as the 'epitome of South Northants. Cricket League village cricket', by the Bodicote Cricket Club historian, this effectively marked the end of Eydon's involvement in the league. A meeting was held at the Royal Oak, at which David Fisher, then chairman, Pete Berry, then vice chairman, David (Dibber) Preece, Roy Steel and Ronnie (Biddle) Fairbrother came to the reluctant decision that the club was no longer viable. So the club was officially closed down at the beginning of 1996.

However, to ensure cricket would still be played in the village, a meeting was held in March of that year, also at The Royal Oak. Present were Bill and Jean Oakey, John Grindlay, Chris Yates and Bay Harper. As a result of this meeting the Eydon Occasionals was formed, to play friendly games on Sundays. Bay Harper agreed to be Captain and Chris Yates secretary of this new venture which proved to be very successful. Chris was secretary, scorer and treasurer as well as being charge of recruitment and the all-important cricket teas. From a position of no team, no money, no kit and no fixtures, it was remarkable that, just two months later, the Occasionals' first match was a friendly against Chacombe on 26th May.

Everyone was welcome to Eydon Occasionals. When a young Martin Fletcher asked to join a game he found himself placed straight in the first team, by an enthusiastic Chris Yates who accurately spotted his potential. By 2006 there were 53 children, both boys and girls, at the cricket festival, an amazing achievement.

Subscriptions

In 1939 the subscription stood at 3/- (15p) for men and 2/- (10p) for boys, and on resumption of cricket in the village after the war in 1946, this rose to 5/- (25p) for men and 2/6 (12 ½ p) for boys, although the boys' subscription was reduced to 2/- (10p) from 1948. The subscriptions remained at this level for the next 13 years, until 1961, when the men's doubled to 10/- (50p), non players - a new category - were charged 5/- (25p) and boys' remained at 2/- (10p). These rates were stable for the next seven years, and generally remained so, as after decimalisation in 1970 men's subscription was 60p, while non-players and youths (under 16s) was equalised at 25p.

In 1974 the subscriptions reflected the problems of unemployment and hardship that were being faced, with working members being charged £1.50 and non workers 25p. A category of 'Sundays only' at a rate of £1 was added to these in 1976. Three years later the categories changed again, adults were charged £2, schoolboys 25p, and by 1992 these had risen to £8 for adults and £1 for youths (under 17).

Fund raising became more of a problem as inflation hit the finances of the club. Efforts to raise money included an annual sponsored walk and in 1975 one of these was teamed with a sponsored weight loss. Match fees were introduced as well as the annual subscription, and by 1992 these were £2 for adults and £5 for youths.

Matches

The first recorded match was two innings, played in May 1877, between the married and single players of Eydon, and reported in the Banbury Guardian on 31st May. The ever-present clergyman top scored the first innings, but in spite of his valiant efforts the single men scored a six-wicket victory. This format was repeated the next year. On this occasion the 'marrieds' rose to the challenge and distinguished themselves by an eight-run win. The challenge was repeated

twenty five years later, on Coronation Day, 3rd July 1902 when the 'singles' were again victorious - by just one run. An attempt to even the score by the 'marrieds' was made at the centenary celebrations in 1977, but after 12 eight-ball overs, the match was declared a tie.

Eydon was one of the founders of the South Northants. Cricket League in 1920, and played in it regularly until 1994. One of the early league players was Eric (Eggy) Walker who was later much respected for his league umpiring in the 1950s. John Blower, who also knew him through his twenty year stint as the organist at Culworth Parish Church, described him as having 'a very likeable disposition' (Blower 1980:66).

Few records exist to cover the years between the World Wars but 1939 was a good year for the club and captain Eddie Wilks, as it was the first time it won the league, in a match spanning two weekends.

Having beaten Moreton Pinkney, Woodford Halse, Preston Capes, Byfield, Wardington, and Boddington at least once, and being top of their section of the league, the final against Culworth was arranged for 26th August at Woodford Halse, a ground which was judged good enough for a county match. Culworth managed 218 runs, batting against Ted Preece, Arthur Chapman and Doug Whitton. Eydon went in to bat and had scored 17 runs for one wicket when the brilliant sunshine which had begun the day deteriorated into a violent thunderstorm just after tea, stopping play for the day.

Play was resumed the following Saturday, with A. Hatton substituting for Arthur Cox, one of Culworth's best bowlers, who was not able to play as his son, Oswald, was being called to active service. John Blower reported that this had a 'great moral effect' on the players (Blower 1980:16). Teddy Kerby resumed batting at 15 not out and managed 129 before being caught out, the first century recorded in the final since the inauguration of the league in 1920, and the highest individual score on record for Eydon to this day. He was one of the league's most accomplished batsmen, appearing in both the 1938 and 1939 records with the best batting average per innings for the year, 20.75 and 26.1 per innings respectively. His achievement was vital as the next highest innings that day was a mere 26, scored by Doug Whitton. Eydon's innings was declared at 236 at 5.20 p.m.

At 11.15 a.m. on 3rd September, the day after the match was finally concluded, Churchill declared England was at war. This was considered a rather extreme reaction to Eydon's win. A memorable weekend for very different reasons.

After the war Eydon enjoyed a run of successes. Between 1951 and 1955 the club reached six Cup Finals and in 1951 reached the league final, before losing there to Greatworth. Initially the league was organised regionally rather than on merit as in later years. In 1952 Eydon won the Bolton & Pollock Cup, also known as the Woodford Cup, beating Claydon by 36 runs, but it was in 1953 that the club really shone.

In that year Eydon won no less than three cups, the Banbury Advertiser, the Charlton and the Bolton & Pollock. Geoff Amos was captain; Sydney (Syd) Gooden was either top or second scorer in all three finals, and Fred Phipps and Fred Turner's (from Culworth) combined experience as bowlers all proved too much for the opposition. It was during the final for the Charlton Cup that Fred Phipps became the first bowler in Eydon's cricketing history to take over 100 wickets in a season, with a great total of 109.

Between 1955 and 1977 Eydon won only one other cup, this was the Peter Strong Memorial Cup, in its inaugural year of 1965. This cup was introduced to create opportunities for more cricket within the league, and was named after Peter Strong, a young man from Marston St. Lawrence, who had died following a road accident. The match was against Chipping Warden, with Richard Preece and Roy Steel the bowling stars, taking 8 wickets for a combined total of 73 runs. This, combined with an undefeated batting stand of 72 by Rex Anson (from Wardington) and Graham Stacey, gave Eydon a six wicket victory. This match also marked Richard Preece's achievement of 100 wickets in a season, although he failed to beat Fred Phipps' record, managing 101 wickets by the end of that year. When the victorious team returned to the village they found Annie Bricknell had decorated the windows and above the doors with Union Flags to welcome them home - it was reported that a great night was had by all.

Eydon did reach the finals of two other cups between 1955 and 1977, the Banbury Advertiser Cup in 1963, when Claydon won and the Perce Bradley Cup in 1976, when Culworth were the victors. Eydon's own single wicket cup was instituted in 1973, as a memorial to Anthony Walker, who died tragically that year. David Fisher described this as a 'hard day's cricket, you were glad to sit down and have a drink after'. However, he obviously relished the challenge as, in its first five years, he distinguished himself by winning the cup three times.

Records

The records of Eydon Cricket Club are by no means complete, but it is believed that Roy Steel holds the record for the greatest number of wickets, totalling over 1500 in his playing career. Ronnie (Biddle) Fairbrother is believed to be the record holder for the greatest number of runs, estimated between 8 to 9,000; in a cricketing career spanning around thirty years up to 1976.

The feat of taking all ten wickets in an innings has been achieved twice, first by Alan Preece at Flecknoe in 1969 and then by Jim Hawes against Syresham at Eydon in June 1977. After this match league secretary John Blower from Culworth described Jim as 'a good young fast bowler of great promise' (Blower 1980:58). Three players have taken over 100 wickets in a season, Fred Phipps with a massive 109 in 1953; Richard Preece with 101 in 1965 and the record holder to date Nigel Wakelin (from Banbury) with 110 in 1982.

David Preece scored the first century in the league since Teddy Kerby in 1939, with an impressive 119 not out against Middleton Cheney 'A' in 1984. The same

year he smashed the record for the most runs in a season with an impressive 1028 in all matches, beating by a wide margin the previous record of 713 by David Fisher in 1980.

Other centuries since 1939 have included Martin Nicholls who scored an undefeated 102 against Weedon Bec at Eydon in a friendly in 1982, and Paul Wills who scored 103 in a league match against Claydon in 1987. This was Eydon's third century and only the second in the league. It was also accomplished in the fastest time recorded, that is for the fewest number of balls bowled. David Preece was so impressed he wrote a special copy of the score sheet and presented it to Paul after the match. During this match Paul and David Preece scored an undefeated 136, from 62 balls. However, this record was broken by the partnership of David Fisher and Clive Jarrett, when they scored 142 against Hinton in the Hedges at Eydon in 1980, this remains an unbroken record.

This is in sharp contrast to the lowest ever score of three, all scored by Geoff Amos, when ten men played Bodicote on 26th August 1950. It is not hard to imagine the feelings of both sides on that memorable day. Another low point was noted in 1958, when Frank Parish topped the season's batting averages with a less than impressive 7.7 runs.

People

The players in the first match of the newly formed Eydon Cricket Club in 1877 included Henry (Harry) Peck, who was the first captain, John Coy the part-time constable and carpenter; George Golby the builder and Arnold Humphries the blacksmith, son of the man who shod Churchill's horse.

The booklet describing the first 100 years of Eydon Cricket Club also mentioned farmers 'Malsberry, Dodd, Tomlin and Bromfield' (Seale & Preece 1978:3). The Malsburys appear in the 1881 census, living in the High Street. However, father James (56) and son John (19) were described as a baker and grocer and grocer respectively. By 1891, they were described as farmers, living in Main Street (now known as the High Street) with a total of 230 acres and employing six men and two boys between them. In the 1887 valuation of property showed John Malsbury occupying property and land owned by Colonel Cartwright and also Eydon Moor, which was owned by Lord Valentia. John Tomlin (38) was also in the 1881 census, living in Main Street, he was responsible for 31 acres and employed one boy.

Committee member and player J. Bromfield poses a small mystery. There was a Joseph living in Blacksmiths Lane, and a John living in Doctors Lane. However, both Joseph and John are described as agricultural labourers rather than farmers in the 1881 census. It is possible that they rented land and therefore did not own property themselves, as the 1887 valuation shows both cottages were owned by Lord Valentia. So at this stage it is not possible to say which Bromfield was in the cricket club.

Henry Peck was then coachman for Eydon Hall. Later he farmed from Home Farm and became quite a businessman as he subsequently bought two run-down cottages on the High Street, demolished them and built Jubilee Cottages from stone in 1897. He 'played a good game of cricket and kept on playing until well past middle age, when he declared his "gammy leg let him down" ' and he had to retire from the game (Tyrrell 1973:173).

Some labourers did manage to afford to play for the first 'singles' side, including the Higham brothers. One of them, Ted, was subsequently convicted, in 1883, of the manslaughter of his father. Ted was a hard worker, but drank heavily and was frequently involved in fights. He had returned home at closing time from The Royal Oak and, finding his father proposed to go to bed having left him no supper, embarked on a violent argument. His father sustained several broken ribs and died of pneumonia a week later, leading to the charge of manslaughter. Ted served a year in prison, quite a lenient sentence, but this followed the judge's recommendation for mercy (Tyrrell 1973).

Following the interruption caused by the Second World War, cricket was resumed in the village when the club was officially re-formed on 6th February 1946. Robert (the following year Lord) Brand was President and Eddie Wilks was elected, not only Chairman, but Treasurer and Captain, all positions he had held before the war. He remained Chairman and Treasurer until 1964 and in 1950 was presented with an engraved cigarette case on his 21 years' service as captain. Eddie farmed from Manor Farm, where he kept hunters and bought and sold horses. Just before the war he was commissioned to buy eight black horses for the Maharajah of Patiala, and during the war he was one of the officers in charge of the Home Guard unit in the village having many adventures when drilling the Eydon squad. Syd Tyrrell provides several amusing accounts of his trials and tribulations (Tyrrell 2001).

Members of the club tend to be loyal for a long period of time. Jack Hawes, manager of the Eydon Hall estate, was elected to the General Committee in the late 1940s. He went on to be Vice-Captain, Captain (for six years), Treasurer, Secretary and chairman in 1965. David Fisher said he was wonderful for the club. Appreciation for his involvement was shown twenty years later when he was awarded an illuminated scroll for his work as chairman and service to the club since 1949; and in 1985 he was made an Honorary Life Vice President.

Roy Steel was elected to the General Committee in 1957 and performed the invaluable, and often unsung, tasks of unpaid mechanic and assistant groundsman for most of those years. He was presented with an inscribed plate in 1985 upon his retirement as a player.

Peter (Pete) Berry proudly holds post-war records of consecutive years' service in various capacities. He was presented with an inscribed tankard on his retirement at the end of the 1987 season, which records an incredible 35 years as a player from 1953 to 1987; 27 years as a committee member; 18 years as a groundsman; and 15 years in the role of Captain. He was introduced to the

game as a schoolboy at Woodford School by Mr. Sibley, as was David Fisher. Pete first played cricket for Eydon at the tender age of twelve. He later trialled for county level cricket, bowling out a well known, but anonymous, county player at the Northampton ground three times during a youth trial when he was in his teens before that gentleman retired in disgust. Pete took up umpiring upon his retirement as a player, to continue his involvement with the game.

Frank Parish was Secretary between 1941 and 1965, and took the roles of Captain, Vice-Captain and Chairman on different occasions. In 1977 he held the distinction of being the second-longest serving member of the South Northants. League Committee. He took over the role of league chairman in 1972 and was described by league secretary John Blower as 'a very conscientious and forthright character of great promise to maintain the standards already set'. Frank instigated and ran the Cricket Club 'tote' for many years; it was drawn at the Royal Oak every Friday, and provided the club with its main source of income.

After his death, a tree was planted near the cricket ground in memory of Frank and his ashes were scattered on the wicket. Unfortunately they were not scattered very finely and after a shower of rain, Martin Fletcher had to be sent to sweep Frank off the wicket before the match the following Sunday. It was generally felt that Frank would not have minded one bit, and in fact would have approved of this practical solution.

Syd Gooden was a Yorkshireman. He came to the area through his work on the railway at Woodford Halse in January 1949, he was a fireman and later a driver. He became friendly with Frank Parish and also Edwin (Teddy) Hogg, who lived at Home Farm in Eydon. Syd remembers there were 55 paid up members of the cricket club at the time, and two thriving cricket elevens. Although he had played for the Yorkshire Colts in his home county, he was only allowed to play in Eydon's second eleven when he joined the club in 1950. There was quite a row between George Isham, captain of the first eleven and Teddy Hogg, captain of the second eleven, when George wanted Syd to move to the first eleven from his position in the second.

Syd lodged with Teddy at Home Farm for a while, and later he married Teddy's daughter, Phyllis in Eydon church. They bought Sheen Cottage in Blacksmiths Lane, and Syd remembers Syd Tyrrell cleared the garden of all the vegetables, before they moved in, and sold them in his shop. Sadly the marriage did not work out and Syd later married Carol, Peter Strong's widow, and they moved to Long Buckby.

Ladies in Cricket

No mention of tea is made in the booklet which provides information on the first 100 years of Eydon's Cricket Club, yet without the traditional tea village cricket would not be the same. A large pot, sandwiches of various types and home-made cakes are essential items for a welcome break in the middle of a match. These are traditionally provided by those unsung heroes, the long-

suffering wives, or girlfriends of the players and Eydon was well known and appreciated for its fantastic teas.

The minutes of Eydon Cricket Club, of which we have copies from 1939 to 1987, provide all-important information on which ladies were 'manning' the teapots. In February 1939 Mrs. Pearler was in charge, no doubt with a selection of willing helpers. There was then a long 'tea break' during the early war years of 1940 and 1941, when rationing may have made its provision more difficult, and then no formal cricket was played until 1946 for which season Mrs. Bricknell organised the teas.

The following year Mrs. Tomalin and Miss (Sara Ann) Fairbrother took over the reins and worked together until 1952 when Miss Fairbrother remained in sole charge for the next 18 years, until she was joined by Mrs. Delia (Deelie) Merry. A presentation was made to Miss Fairbrother in 1967, for her twenty year stint behind the teapot. Mrs. Joan Walker added her considerable talents for cake making to the team in 1972, after which she and Mrs Merry worked together for a while. Joan was in charge with Rosemary (Rosie) Berry from 1976 to 1987, with the additional help of Mrs Marion Bunting for five years from 1980. On Rosie and Joan's 'retirement' from the post Penny Fisher took over and had sole responsibility for the teas until the demise of the club.

Ladies' contributions to cricket were, however, not limited to tea provision. In 1963 Mrs. A. Preece (Laura) was asked to stand in as scorer, when necessary, for the ailing Mr. Parish. For the next two years she remained in that role, until in 1966 Miss Janet Flatters began the task. She continued this in 1968, but under her married name of Mrs Richard Preece! The Preece ladies kept the scores, with occasional help from Mrs. Berry, until 1974, at which point any mention of the scorer mysteriously disappears from the minutes.

Eydon Cricket Club may also have played a part in the marriage of Jean Tyrrell, Syd Tyrrell's daughter, and Ken Charles. Jean, who went to train as a nurse at the Horton Hospital in Banbury in 1934, met Ken when he was admitted to the hospital after an injury to his hand turned septic. It had been caused by a cricket ball during a match, which may have been one played by his Middleton team against Eydon. While he was in hospital she found he was difficult to wake in the mornings. The nurses at the time had a strict regime and had to start waking patients around 5 - 5.30 am to wash and dress them ready for breakfast. Jean was so exasperated by Ken's refusal to wake up that she threw a bowl of water over him! It obviously made a big impression on him and they married in 1940.

However, possibly the most unusual contribution by a lady to village cricket was the introduction of Catherine (Kate) Hawes to bolster the side as a player in the odd league game in the early 1990's, and later as a stalwart of the Eydon Occasionals. Anthony (Sid) Wright was heard to remark 'I reckon that's a lass out there', on one occasion when she was fielding against Chipping Warden. Kate was already an experienced and competent hockey player and found the

transfer of her skills to cricket relatively easy. Daughter of Jack Hawes and sister of Jim, there was already a long history of involvement with cricket in the family. She is currently continuing her interest and involvement in the game by playing for the Ladies section of the Towcestrians Cricket Club and is secretary of Brackley Cricket Club.

The Game

Early cricket matches were always two innings and other local villages were generally played, as most had their own teams, and away matches has to be close enough for players and supporters to walk, cycle or travel by horse and cart. Pitches were rather rough and ready, not like today's carefully tended ones, so the ball must have bounced considerably. Equipment was sparse. Gloves were worn, but not pads, and certainly not protectors or protective headgear. There are no records of injuries sustained during matches, but there must certainly have been quite a number in the course of a season. There were many shouts of 'lost ball' according to David Fisher, and 'lots of trips' from Eydon to the Horton Hospital in Banbury for treatment to injuries sustained.

Cricket was not just a dangerous game for players. There have been several occasions when spectators' cars parked on the Culworth Road, have been hit by a hearty six. Anthony (Sid) Wright, who played for Chipping Warden, managed to hit two cars in the course of one match in the early 1990s, both of them belonging to 'Chippy' supporters. We have no record of the comments he received!

Venues

The Rectory ground was used for cricket for at least thirty years from the formal beginning of the club. However, a field was laid out in the front of Eydon Hall in the second park, probably some time between 1892 and 1910, while Mr. Thomas Wilkinson Holland was a tenant there.. He was Managing Director of the Hunt Edmunds Brewery in Banbury. There is evidence that at least two of his sons, Ernest and Tom, who both became directors of the brewery, were keen cricketers who played for the village. Another son, Lancelot, became a Vice Admiral in the Royal Navy. During the Second World War he was in command of the Home Fleet the flagship of which, H.M.S Hood - with him on board - was sunk by the German battleship Bismarck in May 1941. This led Churchill to issue the now-legendary order to sink the Bismarck, which was achieved two days later.

It is likely that cricket was played in both locations during this period. After the death of the Rev. Chapman, and the interruption to normal life caused by the First World War, cricket moved from The Rectory Ground to the field known as Bufton, not returning to The Rectory Ground until the mid 1920s, although some cricket was still played at the Hall.

At some time before the war, David Fisher remembers the club was given the opportunity to purchase the The Rectory Ground, presumably from the church,

for the sum of £150. This offer was refused by Eddie Wilks, the chairman, who said 'why bother, it will be there for ever'. Jack Colton was quite angry that the offer was not taken up.

In 1955 William (Bill) Oakey, from Aynho, bought the Rectory which was placed on the market as Eydon had to share a rector with Culworth and the building was no longer required for a resident rector in the village. Bill was an enthusiastic cricketer and a real gentleman, who took great interest in the club. In 1957 he was elected president, replacing the Hon. Robert (later Lord) Brand of Eydon Hall who had been in office since 1939, a position he retained until his death.

Bill proved to be an ideal landlord, charging a nominal rent, giving permission to have water laid on to the field and endeavouring to retain its use for the club into the future. He instituted the 'President's Trophy' in 1971, which he awarded to the person he thought had done most for the club in the course of the season. Ten years later he was presented with an award to mark 25 years as President and landlord. Marking his invaluable contribution The Rectory Ground became known as Oakey's Field and following his death in 1998, his ashes were interred by the pavilion on 16th May 1999, continuing his association with both cricket and Eydon.

There has been a steady programme of work to add to the facilities on the field and well as improve the quality of the pitch. In 1954 the Chairman found it necessary to stress the importance of rolling the pitch before the season commenced. David Fisher was so often up at the field at this time that he called the tractor he used his 'mistress'. This was a Fordson Major, which had been donated by Eydon Hall, and used originally as a muck scraper for the cattle cubicles on the estate. David remembers it was 'quite difficult to start, it was quite an art'.

Pavilion repair was an annual chore in the 1950s until the decision was made in 1957 to purchase a new one. This was ordered from Warwickshire company Wigfield and Pluck for the sum of £140 plus £2 for treatment with brown wood preservative (exterior only), and erected by Messrs Kench their material costs being £28 14s. (£28.70).

The original site of the pavilion was at the southern side of the pitch, near to Bill and Jean Oakey's bungalow. However, after about four years it was decided that a better location would be towards the rear of the ground, the site of the current pavilion. Jack Hawes, at that time captain, arranged with Sir Edward Ford that Pete Berry could dig the footings and arrange the blocks. He did this making his mark on them in March 1963. One weekend, following the groundwork preparation, all the cricketers banded together to move the pavilion bit by bit. While this was going on a fox ran across the cricket field with the hounds in full cry, everyone dropped what they were holding; Charlie Tomalin was particularly shocked.

Other expenditure included the purchase of a tractor for field work in 1974, this was sourced by Roy Steel from a local coal merchant, but David Fisher said it 'wasn't a patch on the Eydon Hall one'. Work was also done to lay a concrete practice pitch in April 1978 at the cost of £78.82; new 'facilities' for the ladies in 1981 at a cost of £36.50; new gang mowers in 1982 and a motorised roller in 1986 for the princely sum of £140. However, not all expenditure was greeted with enthusiasm. In 1983 the treasurer was criticised for spending £76 on two bats.

The preparation of the ground for the season was a matter of great pride, the highlight being on 16th September 1979, when Eydon had the honour of hosting the league final, much to Bill Oakey and Pete Berry's delight. The final was played between Deanshanger and Middleton Cheney. The ground was highly praised. John Blower (from Culworth) then the South Northants League secretary described it as 'a very good wicket, and the outfield looking a picture. All credit must be given to the Eydon Cricket Club, for putting so much excellent work to have the ground looking so well.' (Blower 1980: 86).

Vice Presidents

The position of Vice President was created in 1951, the first nomination going to Mr. P.W. Maybury (known as Maybury), from Crockwell Farm. It seems he made an annual presentation of a bat to the player with the top batting average during his five year tenure. The tradition, which also included the presentation of a ball to the bowler with the best bowling average, continued after 'Maybury' ceased to be a vice president. It was funded by the club for another ten years or so, but was then deemed too expensive. It was also a little divisive as some players won the awards year after year, and this led to a degree of resentment.

Major (later Sir Edward) Ford was also a vice president in 1956 and then Lord Brand was nominated until his death in 1963. Sir Edward and Lady Ford were made Honorary Life Vice Presidents of the club in 1986.

Over time more invitations to the position of vice president were extended. This enabled both ex-players to maintain their involvement in the club, and keen non-players to retain an interest. The exclusive band included Clarrie Bricknell, David Kench, Ronnie Pettifer, Eddie Wilks, both Robert (Bobby) and John Polk, Fred Phipps, William Buckley, Richard Preece, John Grindlay and Stan Platt.

Even ladies were included. Mrs Merry and Joan Walker joined the men in 1975, in appreciation for their work in providing teas, and, following the deaths of their husbands John Turbett in 2006, and Iain Bishop in 2007, both Carmen Turbett and Gwen Bishop were delighted to retain involvement in the club by accepting vice presidencies. Joan Walker was later made an Honorary Life Vice President.

Anecdotes and Adventures

Around the turn of the 20th century, when the Hollands were at the Hall, a game was arranged at Badby, with the Hall organising horse and cart transport. While the 'match' was ending in one of the local pubs the horse strayed, and at three in the morning Mr. Holland had to send two more carts to retrieve the team. History does not relate whether they remained in the pub for the duration, or had started the long walk home.

In the 1950s Eydon played a league game away against Lower Boddington. The cricket field was then behind the old wooden village hall, which has now been demolished to make way for two houses. It wasn't the best of grounds, and 50 runs were considered a good score. Pete Berry described it as a 'tough old field, with lots of thistles'. Roy Steel batted and to everyone's astonishment, sent the ball flying into the hen-sized doorway of a nearby coop. No-one could reach the ball inside and the players had to wait over half an hour before anyone could be found to unlock the hen house and allow play to continue. It is taken as read that there was only one ball available that day.

In 1966 Eydon won the third division of the League and reached the final for the second (and last) time - losing by an innings and six runs to Middleton Cheney. However, undeterred by their resounding defeat certain of Eydon's players, including Rex Anson, Alan Preece and Roy Steel, with Pete Berry causing a diversion, stole the cup from under the noses of their opponents. It was at least two hours before the Middleton team realised their prize was missing and they 'sent the heavy mob over,' according to David Fisher, to regain it!

In the 1970s John (Johnnie) Polk arranged a series of friendly matches against his college - New College, Oxford. There were about five or so of these games, which were held both at home and away. Pete Berry remembers it was the first time anyone scored 100 runs against Eydon and the team was a little surprised at the standard.

Most of the team, and their supporters went on a Geoff Amos bus, which subsequently took the ladies to Bournemouth for the day, but David Fisher recalls some of the more 'high-spirited' players taking their own cars. It's remarkable that they reached home safely after some of the celebrations, which all went on to Johnnie Polk's student account!

After one of these matches the teams went to a student pub and Pete, who fancied himself as a bit of a singer, took to the floor with a rendition of 'Batchelor Boy'. He was a bit disconcerted when a man told him to 'have a fag and get off' when he thought he'd been doing rather well. On another occasion several of the Eydon players, including Dave Merry and Rex Anson, found themselves spending a night at Her Majesty's Pleasure, following a mix-up over cars to take them home. David Fisher remembers 'prankster' Rex lying in the road and directing traffic prior to his arrest!

There were quite a number of one-off fixtures. One friendly was played at Downton near Bournemouth. One of Mr. Maybury's sons, who founded a bus company, offered transport to the match, at which Downton batted first and made over 150 runs. When Eydon came to bat they found themselves faced by two excellent fast bowlers. They were faced with some alarm; David Fisher wondered 'when they were going to stop walking back'. However, after a while the home team sportingly sent them back to the pavilion and Eydon managed to come through. Pete Berry described them as lovely hosts, some of whom were Hampshire second eleven players.

Eydon Occasionals had more than their share of adventures. Shortly after the formation of the team, Jose Rowling asked if ten year old Rupert would be useful. 'Does he know which end of the bat to hold?' asked Chris Yates. Jose replied that he was deemed quite a good player by his school, and so he and a couple of friends played in the next match; not even flinching when faced with adult fast bowling. He also made a big impression on Mr, Mellon, a wealthy businessman from Moors Farm, who, to his immense surprise was bowled out first ball. Rupert was 'just too good' he was heard to mutter on his way back to the pavilion. However, Rupert still had one or two things to learn. Chris Yates was in the slips with Rupert at point, when as the bowling began, Rupert started to run to the wicket. Chris yelled, 'go back you're not meant to be there, go back where your captain put you'. Now Rupert is captain of the Occasionals and has the same job of putting and keeping players in their place.

Eydon Occasionals resorted to the press in April 1999, following the breakdown of the old Ransomes gang mower just a week before the first match of the season. John Grindlay was pictured on the front page of the Banbury Guardian with a cricket bat and his flock of Jacob sheep, which had been 'drafted in' to tackle the problem, until a more conventional mowing arrangement could be made.

In the early 2000's at a return match away against Hertfordshire Freemasons, supported only by the stalwart Martin and Jose Rowling, Eydon was able to field only six players. The side was invited to lunch at the home of the Provincial Grand Secretary and during the meal it became apparent that a teenage member of the team, who will remain anonymous to spare his blushes, was a little worse for wear, having had a rather late, and liquid, evening out the previous night. The wife of the Provincial Grand Secretary, having a son of her own, was quite sympathetic - even when the lad was rather unwell in her herbaceous border. 'You'll feel better now,' she said with a big smile.

After lunch a man walking his dog round the boundary commented on the six sided Eydon team. 'I notice you don't have eleven men' he said, 'Give me time to take the dog home and I'll come and play for you'. In the end he replaced the still under-the-weather teenager, and it transpired he was the Hertfordshire second eleven's wicket keeper. It was reported that he thoroughly enjoyed his afternoon's game, which Eydon won.

Famous Opponents

Eydon has faced some well known opponents outside the league. In 1975 a Showbiz team was put together by Nick Seale, which contained no less than Bob Wilson, former Arsenal and Scotland goalkeeper, and television sports presenter, and described as a 'true sportsman' by David Fisher. Alan Watson remembers the game clearly, as he was cut on the eye by an errant ball flying from Wilson's bat. Also on the Showbiz team was actor Christopher Neame, who was well known in the early 1970s for his role in television's drama series Colditz in which he starred with Jack Hedley, Robert Wagner and David McCallum.

In the early 1990's Barry McRoberts arranged an annual series one day cricket matches between Eydon and his colleagues at the F1 racing team Benetton. While Eydon cannot claim to have won a victory over Michael Schumacher, one of their opponents was the legendary South African racing car designer Rory Byrne. He retired from Benetton, after a long and successful design career, in 1996 when the team won the Formula One Constructors' crown, before being lured out of retirement after long negotiations with Scuderia Ferrari.

Eydon Occasionals also played against Yorkshire Ladies' Team, one of whom was an international player, who had competed against India. This had to be kept from the Press, so the team was known as the Kate Hawes' XI. Eydon Occasionals opened the batting and Anthony Powell, then aged around 15, scored a four then a six. Captain Paul Wills was heard to mutter 'I told him not to do that....' History does not relate whether he subsequently listened to his captain.

The Future

It is clear that, in a village with a long history, village cricket has been a quintessential part of the summer, and those involved are prepared to give an enormous amount of time and effort in order to preserve and maintain that tradition. Even the outbreak of two World Wars has only been an interlude rather than an end to the game. It has been apparent, when talking to people who have been involved in Eydon Cricket Club, that while the game of cricket has been taken very seriously, with a strong urge to win, one of the most important aspects is that those involved have had fun.

The involvement in the league gave focus and purpose to the players. They were either fighting relegation or in with a chance of winning. Teamwork was vital, and the captain knew his players' weaknesses and strengths, as well as that of the opposition. He also knew how to set the field for best effect. It was not a solitary game, if someone played cricket their whole family was involved. Anecdotes have been told with a wonderful mix of nostalgia, huge smiles and chuckles. Eydon may no longer be fielding a league side, but that enthusiasm remains.

Nowadays both interest and enthusiasm continue to be maintained, together with improvements to the facilities. In 2007, after protracted negotiations between the owner and John Grindlay, in conjunction with several others, Oakey's Field was purchased for use by the villagers as a sports field, mainly through the generosity of the Leigh and Stamper families.

In 2008 a new pavilion, with double glazed windows and a veranda, was erected thanks to the support of Tim Bishop and an army of willing helpers who spent many weekends preparing the ground, erecting and finishing the building to a very high standard. More plans are afoot for the development of Eydon Community Sports Field as a recreational facility for all ages as well as its vital role as the home of Eydon Cricket Club. Most important of all, the team has developed into an excellent Sunday side, one which is proving to be almost unbeatable.

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