Cheetham's Ramblings

Estimated reading time: 8 minutes

Richard Cheetham has lived in Stinchcombe for all of his youth and the greater part of his adult life. In this episode of Cheetham's Ramblings he recalls some past events at the ***Stragglers ground***.

Richards Memories of Stinchcombe Stragglers. Late 50 to late 60's

I consider myself lucky to have had the Stragglers as an unofficial playground when I was young. Between the late 50's to the late 60's I spent a great deal of time there both officially and unofficially.

I would have been around 8 or 9 years of age and playing cricket with my friends when Mr Arthur Bennett, (who I learned later had bought the land with his brother for the cricket club) told us to help him cut the square. While we were doing this his dog took a liking to my calf and went in for a taste test. Mr Bennett was terribly upset, and he came to our house that night to see how I was. Typically, my father said "Oh he's alright, how's the dog? If there are any vets' bills don't send them to me". I suppose Mr Bennet was so relieved to not to be in trouble over the incident he was a nice as pie to me and my pals afterwards even though we were playing on private land.

My father Ben Cheetham was a member of the Stragglers cricket club and went to the odd social and fund-raising events. He loved telling the story of the time Arthur Bennett ran a draw one winter with the first prize being tickets for the cup final. It raised a large amount of money but there was uproar when the cup final tickets turned out to be for a local

amateur cup final match. His response was “well I never said which cup final”.

The standard of cricket was high, especially on Sunday’s. I made up the eleven when they were short and sometimes, I was the only person not to have played for the Glos 2nd eleven.

The cricket club had close links with the County side and most years hosted a testimonial match for that year’s beneficiary. I think it was the early 60’s when the benefit match was for David Young, their long-time County opening batsman.

David Young had wisely got the touring Aussies to sign a cricket bat which he put up for auction and on the day of the auction I was working the outdoor score board. The score board was above head height, which meant to operate it I had to be above head height too, which also meant I heard all the conversations between the adults beneath me. The talk consisted mostly of how high the biddings would go; many would like to own the bat.

Two members of the cricket team were professional auctioneers, so all went well until a voice from the back of the large crowd put in a bid several times higher than what seemed was about to become the winning bid and won. There was a lot of chatter and head turning and when the winning bidder from the back of the crowd was asked for his name, he replied “I am Maxwell Josephs butler “(***Maxwell Joseph*** lived at Melksham Court) the Butler then went on to ask for the bat to be put up for auction again. This must have made it a good fund-raising day indeed.

I saw all the County players of the 60’s plus many from other counties, mainly Worcestershire. Peter Richardson, Len Caldwell, and Jack Flavell were regular visitors, perhaps that was something to do with ***Tom Graveney*** who played for both counties.

Tom Graveney's brother Ken was another regular visitor to Stinchcombe. He was connected to a catering firm run by a Major Horton. Every year there was a large marquee where invited guests would dine but most importantly was the supply of unlimited free ice cream for the local children, you can guess how popular and how abused that was!!

It was at one of these matches that the son of Wally Hammond was introduced as the next great thing. Sir Percy Lister had invited him over from South Africa with the promise of a job and a place on the squad at Glos C.C. Sadly, I think the pressure of following such a famous father was all too much. However, he had all the pretty girls floating around him, so it was not all bad news for him.

One of the most unassuming players to come to Stinchcombe was ***Arthur Milton.*** Has the distinction of being the last person to represent England at both football and cricket. When he retired he became a postman in Bristol.

Many years ago, the Dursley Gazette printed a photograph sent in by a reader showing a local vicar preaching from the outside scoreboard in front of a mixture of cricketers in their whites along with spectators. The Gazette was asking for any information concerning the picture, as soon as my Father saw it. he said "the only way a game of cricket would be allowed on a Sunday at one time is if a church service was held first", so on this occasion it was held at the cricket ground. How things have changed.



For many years in the sixties, Gloucester Hockey Club used to play the odd match at Stinchcombe. This was great for us boys as the hockey goals with nets were left up all season and we made good use of them.

A member of a local family, Margaret Pearce, nee Pick, told me her Grandfather used to farm the land where the Stragglers held their matches. She can remember as a young girl walking alongside her Grandfather as they ploughed the land with Oxen, she always maintained there were Roman remains on the site. This is quite possible as Gloucester Museum have records of a Roman Villa on land between the Malt House and the sports grounds.

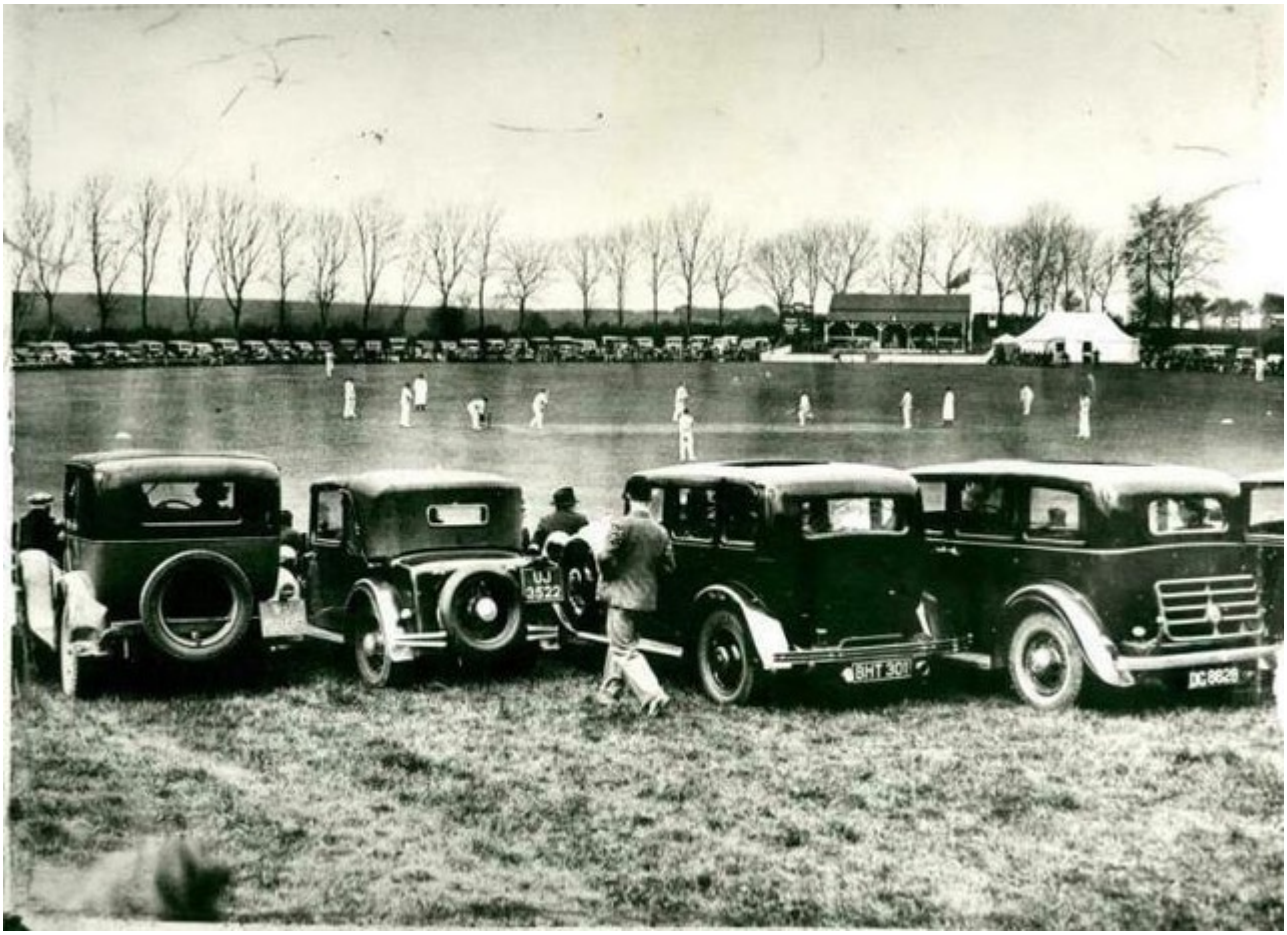
I am not sure exactly when cricket started at Stinchcombe Stragglers ground but as a young boy I can remember being told that the villagers used to play at Stancombe, looking down from Drakestone point on Stinchcombe Hill, the old cricket ground is quite evident, a small but flat area of land

abutting the main rd. I was told that for away matches in local villages the team were transported by horse and cart. I expect they found room for the odd dog and plenty of rough cider.

The days before local leagues and limited overs matches, every year various touring sides would come to Stinchcombe bringing with them wives and children. Most of the visiting mothers and children would walk up on to Stinchcombe Hill. I suppose it may have been as foreign to them as a big city was to us, but they loved it. The one touring member I recall most clearly was a scrap metal dealer who used to treat his entire staff and family to a holiday in the Cotswolds.

I think it was in the 1960's that the semi-permanent marquee that was used for invited guests to dine was lifted off the ground by a very localised Tornado. It was a good size marquee and if my memory is correct it ended up in somewhere just over the border in Cam. Speaking to Margaret Powell nee Tallboys who lived in the Swedish Houses as a child, she remembers the Tornado very clearly as it happened on her birthday in 1962 or 63. Her mother was trying to set up her party in the village hall when the Tornado struck.

I have seen lots of photographs of the stragglers ground which I guess would be in the thirties with lots of black similar make of cars surrounding the playing area. I have never seen any photographs from the 60's but the view would be slightly different, especially on a Sunday, the cars would be double banked on the Pavilion side – this side being members only.



Watching the Crickets at Stinchcombe

On the other side the cars would have been just as numerous but along with lots of rough benches for people who travelled to the match on foot. Most visitors bought Sunday Teas with them and made a real day of it. We got to know lots of the regulars and they used to come from as far away as Bristol or the other side of Gloucester, they thought it was a lovely day out.

Even though there were hordes of vehicles in the ground, luckily damage to them from the big hitters was minimal.

I do remember a when player called Claude Helliwell came on the scene, I have never seen a ball hit further at Stinchcombe, I can still see the ball disappearing over the top of the houses at Northfields, none was safe when he was batting.

Dedicated cricket fans might be interested in ***this article from Wisden's***, it tells of the first known one day county

match. In the report it states a crowd of nearly 3000 turned up to watch. I wonder if that was the largest crowd to gather at the Stragglers.

Hope these memories are of some interest, most of them from my time working at the score board where I had to stand on three beer crates to reach the total, all for free and the love of the game.