The Stragglers

An Overview

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Members of the Stragglers leaving the Sunday Service at St Cyrs before their game of Cricket

Approaching Stinchcombe along the A4060 from Dursley through the avenue of trees, the ‘Stragglers’ is located on the right hand side before the Village Hall. For approaching 100 years this has been associated with recreation. In the first 70 years it was the home of Stinchcombe Stragglers Cricket Club, from which the name for the area ‘The Stragglers’ was derived and, for the past 50 years, it has been the base of Dursley

Rugby Football Club. After a suspension of cricket for a period, the last few years has seen its return, and Dursley Running Club has also become part of the sporting scene based at the site.

The village cricket club was founded in 1921, then in 1924 the Stragglers Cricket Club (SSCC) was founded separate from the original Club. The SSCC rented the ground until 1954 when the owner Arthur Bennet, who was also the Hon Sec and Treasurer, sold the land to the Club. Until 1970 Stinchcombe Stragglers Cricket Club were the sole occupants. For a young Villager's perspective on Stinchcombe Stragglers in the 50's and 60's read ***Cheetham's Ramblings***. Richard Cheetham, who has lived in Stinchcombe for all of his youth and the greater part of his adult life recalls some past events at the Stragglers ground.

Dursley Rugby Club moved in and Stinchcombe Stragglers and Dursley Sports Club was established, overseeing the playing of both sports. The first Chairman was Clifford Hill who was also Chair of the District Council and long term resident of Stinchcombe. With the further demise of cricket the organisation was re-structured in 2002 and incorporated as Dursley Rugby Football Club Ltd. For several years the only cricket played was through the ground being rented out. Cam CC third team were frequent users. More land was acquired to meet the needs of rugby, new changing rooms built, and the social space of the clubhouse extended. In 2017 cricket was resurrected playing as the 'Old Stragglers CC' and around the same time Dursley Running Club became a part of the Stragglers scene, entering a partnership with the rugby club. The Stragglers represents a significant element in the sporting and social life of the community in the Dursley area. There are over fifteen hundred people participating in sport at the Club. This includes approaching five hundred mini, junior and adult rugby players (with one of the largest mini & junior sections in the County). The Running Club has a membership of

around four hundred and the numbers involved in cricket are increasing rapidly. For the last 10 years or so, the social scene has been highlighted during the first weekend in June with the Summer Ball, the Beer Festival and the Last Night at the Proms concerts. The links with the village community are to the benefit of everyone.

The Stragglers – A Brief History

The long history of the Stragglers was dominated for many years by the strength of Stinchcombe Stragglers Cricket Club (SSCC) which was established in 1924. For many years, County cricketers would play for local clubs on a Sunday including SSCC. England captains such as Percy Fender, Wally Hammond and Sam Cook played at the Stragglers. At the end of his County career, the latter captained the team for several seasons. Large crowds gathered to watch these matches with cars completely encircling the ground. Traditionally, the first ball was not bowled until the morning service in St Cyrs had finished.

On some Sundays the church service was held in front of the cricket pavilion conducted by the vicar of Stinchcombe. This attracted a large ‘congregation’ and also each season there was a ‘Cricketers Sunday’ when the players attended the service in St Cyrs in whites and blazers. The Saturday and Sunday captains would read the lessons.

The 1930s was the golden era of cricket at the Stragglers. Unusually for that era Sunday cricket was introduced and drew large crowds. The high standards maintained attracted many County players and also some England players. The Saturday fixtures were against strong opposition and the Stragglers were able to field players of a high standard. The Club had a strong reputation both for the playing surface and the standard of play.

In addition to the SSCC there was a village team which played

on a Saturday on the ground behind Coombe Gardens on the farm finally occupied by Joe Workman. There is little information on Village cricket but it seems that it had ceased by the 1950s.

The late 1950s and early 1960s saw radical change in the County Cricket scene and as a consequence of that, SSCC started to struggle for players as well as financially. Dursley Rugby Club, who at the time were playing at the Recreation Ground in Dursley, were seeking a ground and facilities and moved to the Stragglers in 1970, thus helping to solve the financial problems. Although the Rugby Club had been in existence in some form since the 1888 when rugby was played on Stinchcombe Hill, the present Club is a re-establishment which took place in 1953 when again the Club played in the Parish. This time on the 'Paddock' adjacent to the present Club car park and players changed in the Village Hall, before moving away. So things came a full circle with rugby and the Stragglers when the former returned in 1970.

From 1924 there was the 4.5 acres of the original cricket ground and the old wooden pavilion. Then in the 1960s the separate 'club room' with bar was built by Len Ford with the help of others (both on the site of the current rugby clubhouse). Since 1970 the 'Stragglers Estate' has grown considerably. Further land adjacent to Clingre Down was leased in 1972 from Stinchcombe United Charities for a second rugby pitch and floodlit training area. In 2007 a longer term development plan was drawn up which included the acquisition of land for a third rugby pitch, a training paddock and the car park. This was the start of fund raising activities in support of the plan. With the growth in numbers and the addition of ladies rugby, new changing rooms were a necessity. The old pavilion became additional social space and a gym. Then recently there was the acquisition of a further 6.4 acres of land to reduce the wear and tear on the existing ground from the large numbers playing rugby, and to provide more

space for the running club. With all the facilities refurbished, the playing surfaces made good, the Stragglers is now a sports centre of which everyone can be proud.



Stragglers ‘estate’ as it was in 2017

This drone photo shows the Stragglers ‘estate’ as it was in 2017. A further 6.4 acres was acquired in 2020 and this is to the left of the picture. In the foreground is the cricket ground with the ‘square’ clearly shown The land purchased in 2008 is beyond the tree line and includes a further rugby pitch, car park, training paddock and the changing rooms. The land leased since 1972 is at the top of the picture before Clingre Down and Taits Hill Road

The original pavilion is the brown roofed building. Then in the 1960s a separate clubhouse, the white structure, was built. In the 1970s a further extension joined these buildings. In 2017 the new changing rooms, with the green flat roof were completed meeting the needs of all the various rugby sections and other activities. Following this the Clubhouse was fully refurbished, the social space extended into the

original pavilion and the indoor and outdoor gym established.

A further photo shows the ground prepared for a cricket match in 2017. The ‘boundary’ is reduced from earlier times when cricket was played Even so it is an impressive sight



Further information on the history of the ***Rugby Club*** can be found on their website.

It should be appreciated that although the Village has a very long history, the Stragglers has a history which goes back much further than many of the newer parts of the village and has contributed significantly to the community over the years. It is the largest organisation in the District and the mini & junior rugby section is one of the largest in the South West of England. More than fifteen hundred people participate in the various activities at the Stragglers.

The Stragglers – some key events on the Timeline

There are many interesting events on the timeline of the Stragglers both regarding the ground & facilities and in the sports and the people involved. Some of more significant of these events are covered here.

As stated in the overview the archive of Stinchcombe Stragglers Cricket Club (SSCC) is very limited. There is no organised collection of records and most of what is produced here has come mainly from private sources. Since 1970, when Dursley Rugby Football Club moved to the Stragglers, the records are more comprehensive.

The 1930s

This was the ‘golden era’ for cricket at Stinchcombe although the immediate post war era was a close second before County cricket on Sundays was introduced. Large crowds were drawn to the Sunday matches in particular. Cars were parked all around the ground and the spectators would be several rows deep. The largest crowd is said to have around 3000 for a Sunday match. The photos show such occasions.

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There is a very good description of cricket at the Stragglers in this era found in the ‘The Dursley Lantern’ from 2016. This

publication is by the Dursley and Cam Society (a local history society).
http://www.dursleyglos.org.uk/html/dursley/clubs/dncsociety/dncsociety.htm

An extract is below:

The Stinchcombe Stragglers Cricket Club

Pat Marshall

A Stinchcombe Village Cricket Club was first founded in 1921 but in 1924 local farmers and their friends formed the 'Stragglers' distinct from the original club. The club's colours of dark blue and gold claim their origin from the Berkeley and Beaufort Hunt. A picturesque ground, situated under the brow of Stinchcombe Hill was rented and provided a wicket and outfield unparalleled locally. A World War I wooden hut was bought and served as a pavilion. In 1931 Sunday cricket was first played at Stinchcombe - a pioneering innovation copied by clubs throughout the West Country.

Arthur E. Bennett was a Birmingham businessman who lived on Stinchcombe Hill. He had a passion for cricket. He owned the field rented by the Stragglers Cricket Club and revitalised the club in the 1930s when he became the prime mover in the introduction of Sunday cricket. From 1930-1954 he served as Hon. Secretary and Treasurer and he was instrumental in causing play to reach such high standards by providing first class wickets. B.O. Allen and Tom Graveney were both heard to wish that the wicket at the County Ground at Bristol was as good as Stinchcombe. The wickets and meticulously mown outfield were produced by 'Cole's Express', the motorised cutting machine and rollers driven by Mr Ted Cole, a gentleman who was employed by R.A. Lister but lived next to the cricket ground. Under Arthur's benevolent dictatorship the largest sight screens in the UK, seating all around the ground and catering facilities were installed. The club's fame grew along with the quality of its fixture list. Players from Gloucester, Bristol and Bath played with or against the Stragglers. Every season the star players of the international sides touring Britain received invitations to play as guests at Stinchcombe and usually accepted.

Sunday Cricket did not become established without opposition from the religious community and the Sunday Observance Society. In 1936 a service was conducted by the Rev. Page of Stinchcombe and Rev. Ernie Tucker, curate of Dursley, outside the club house. From 1932-1940 a feature at Stinchcombe was Sportsmans' Sunday when both Saturday and Sunday teams attended Divine Service at St. Cyr's in blazers and flannels and the two captains read the lessons. This began, no doubt, as another attempt to appease the Sunday cricket protest lobby.

During World War II games were played on every available Saturday and Sunday from 1939-1945 and older members fielded elevens against Service sides. Mr Harry Seaman, a Bristol solicitor, even rode his horse from Bristol to ensure he played his Sunday game. Charities, hospitals, benevolent funds, Spitfire and Hurricane funds all benefited from Sunday matches. One match of great significance to one Dursley son was played on 2nd August 1941. Douglas Marshall played for Stragglers pre-war but on this occasion he was part of the losing Royal Gloucester Hussars team. However Trooper Marshall triumphed personally against his old team taking 10 wickets for 64 runs.



J.A. Courtice leads the Stinchcombe Stragglers team out during a match in the 1950s

The Stinchcombe ground was ideal for Benefit matches for County cricketers. A post-war example was that awarded to H. Hazell in September 1949. A full Somerset County side turned out that day and Stragglers were joined by a

As recorded in ‘The Dursley Lantern’ there were close connections between the Cricket Club and St Cyrs Church in the village. The Cricketers Sunday mentioned earlier and the holding of the morning service on the ground being examples.



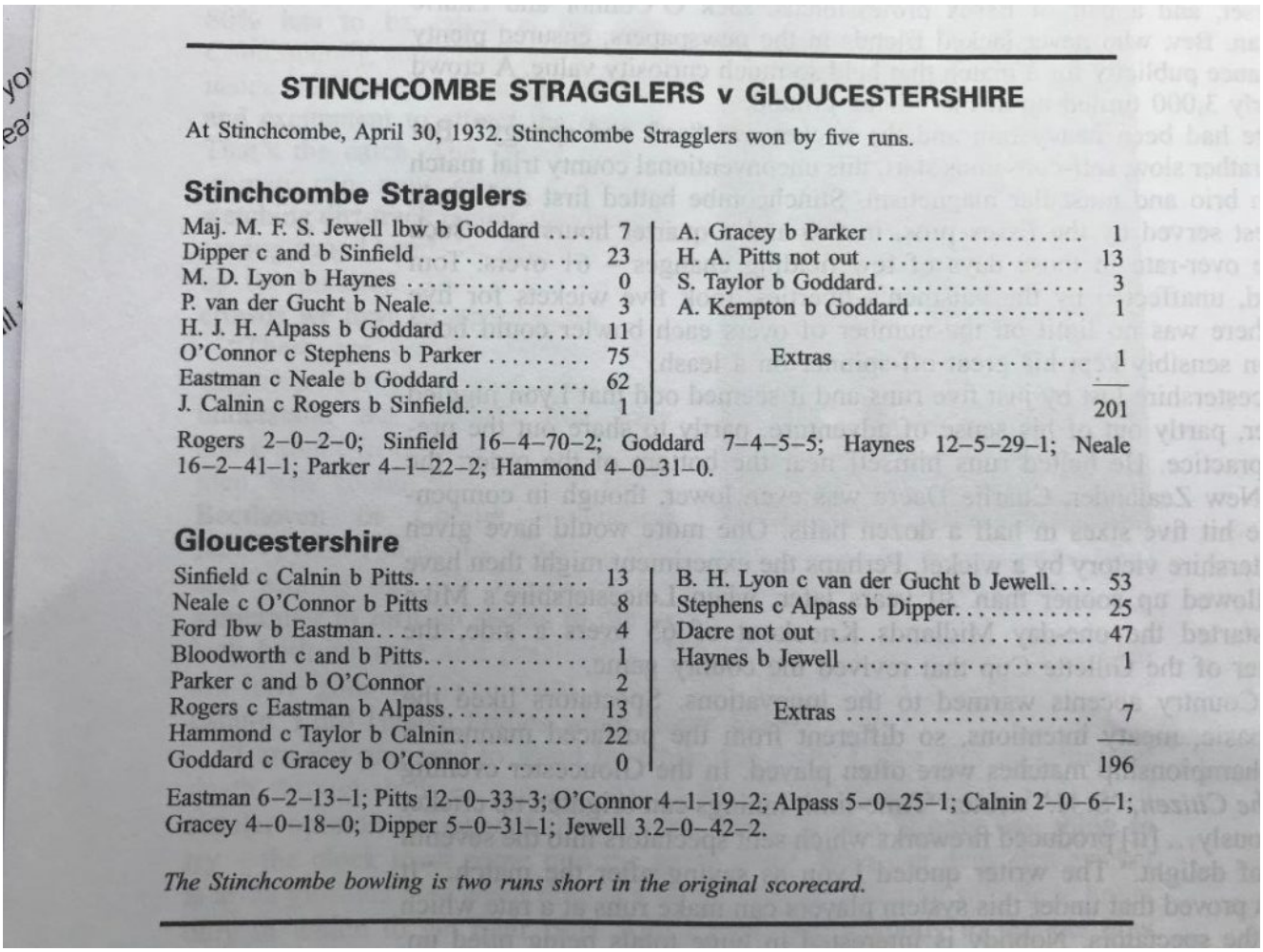
Further records confirming the importance of the Stragglers to cricket in the era are shown in Wisden Cricketers Almanac, which was then in its early days of publication. The following extract from the 2009 edition recalls a match played in 1932 between Glos. County and Stinchcombe Stragglers CC – David Foot reveals why the new Twenty20 tournaments (and Limited Overs Cricket) can trace their lineage back almost 80 years to Stinchcombe, in Gloucestershire

Credit for this article *goes to Wisden Cricketers’ Almanack 2009 © John Wisden & Co Ltd., used by permission.*

The First One Day County Match

A Lyon-hearted experiment

David Foot



STINCHCOMBE STRAGGLERS v GLOUCESTERSHIRE

At Stinchcombe, April 30, 1932. Stinchcombe Stragglers won by five runs.

Stinchcombe Stragglers

Maj. M. F. S. Jewell lbw b Goddard	7	A. Gracey b Parker	1
Dipper c and b Sinfield	23	H. A. Pitts not out	13
M. D. Lyon b Haynes	0	S. Taylor b Goddard	3
P. van der Gucht b Neale	3	A. Kempton b Goddard	1
H. J. H. Alpass b Goddard	11	Extras	1
O'Connor c Stephens b Parker	75		201
Eastman c Neale b Goddard	62		
J. Calnin c Rogers b Sinfield	1		

Rogers 2–0–2–0; Sinfield 16–4–70–2; Goddard 7–4–5–5; Haynes 12–5–29–1; Neale 16–2–41–1; Parker 4–1–22–2; Hammond 4–0–31–0.

Gloucestershire

Sinfield c Calnin b Pitts	13	B. H. Lyon c van der Gucht b Jewell	53
Neale c O'Connor b Pitts	8	Stephens c Alpass b Dipper	25
Ford lbw b Eastman	4	Dacre not out	47
Bloodworth c and b Pitts	1	Haynes b Jewell	1
Parker c and b O'Connor	2	Extras	7
Rogers c Eastman b Alpass	13		196
Hammond c Taylor b Calnin	22		
Goddard c Gracey b O'Connor	0		

Eastman 6–2–13–1; Pitts 12–0–33–3; O'Connor 4–1–19–2; Alpass 5–0–25–1; Calnin 2–0–6–1; Gracey 4–0–18–0; Dipper 5–0–31–1; Jewell 3.2–0–42–2.

The Stinchcombe bowling is two runs short in the original scorecard.

World War 2

The outbreak of WW2 in 1939 saw changes in activities at the Stragglers. For a while the fixtures were maintained but gradually the players were conscripted into the armed services or were engaged is essential work. Many of the players joined up in the Royal Gloucestershire Hussars and saw service during the war. There are many stories of cricketing exploits particularly when stationed in North Africa. The 'Gloucesters' always succeeded! Cricket continued to some extent at the Stragglers and was supported by those members of the forces stationed in the area. Games were played every Saturday

throughout this time sometimes seven-a-side with a team of older members. On Sundays there were charity matches. An Australian Airforce unit stationed locally, had a team which included Keith Miller a famous all-rounder who played many times for his country. In the late 1940s Miller returned to Gloucestershire with a touring team of Australian farmers. They played at Stinchcombe on two tours to the UK which was a big attraction and helped in the post war recovery of the Club. The Stragglers also hosted benefit matches for County Cricketers. Typical of the high standards returning was in the game in 1945 when Stinchcombe played The Combined Services. Wally Hammond, Captain of Gloucestershire and England was among the County players in the Stinchcombe team that day.

Roger, the son of Wally Hammond, subsequently played rugby for Dursley on the same ground in the early 1970s when the Rugby Club had moved to Stinchcombe.



STINCHCOMBE STRAGGLERS CRICKET CLUB
(W. R. Hammond and C. S. Dempster batting)
v.
COMBINED SERVICES
JULY 1st, 1945.

The 1950s

After the war it took the Stragglers a while to re-establish themselves again as a force in the cricketing world. The 1950s was the second golden era although the aftermath of the war meant it was not quite the scene of the 1930s. The social scene was changing, there were many other attractions available on a Sunday so less support. Nevertheless the standard of cricket at Stinchcombe returned to the high level of pre-war and attracted county players and top class fixtures.

Many touring sides visited Stinchcombe as well as games being played for the benefits of County players. On many occasions the full Gloucestershire or Somerset county team would turn out. Probably the most important season in the history of this period was 1953 the Coronation Year. The standing of the Club at this time is shown by the fixture card and the names of those involved.

STINCHCOMBE STRAGGLERS CRICKET CLUB

Season 1953

Patron:
HIS GRACE THE DUKE OF BEAUFORT, G.C.V.O.

President:
DR. T. P. LEIGHTON.
Lampert Court, Stinchcombe, Glos.

Captain:
H. E. HORTON.
Highcroft, Minchinhampton, Glos.

Vice-Captain:
W. H. LEWIS.
St. Station Road, Yate, Glos.

Sunday Side Captains:
H. E. HORTON and W. H. LEWIS

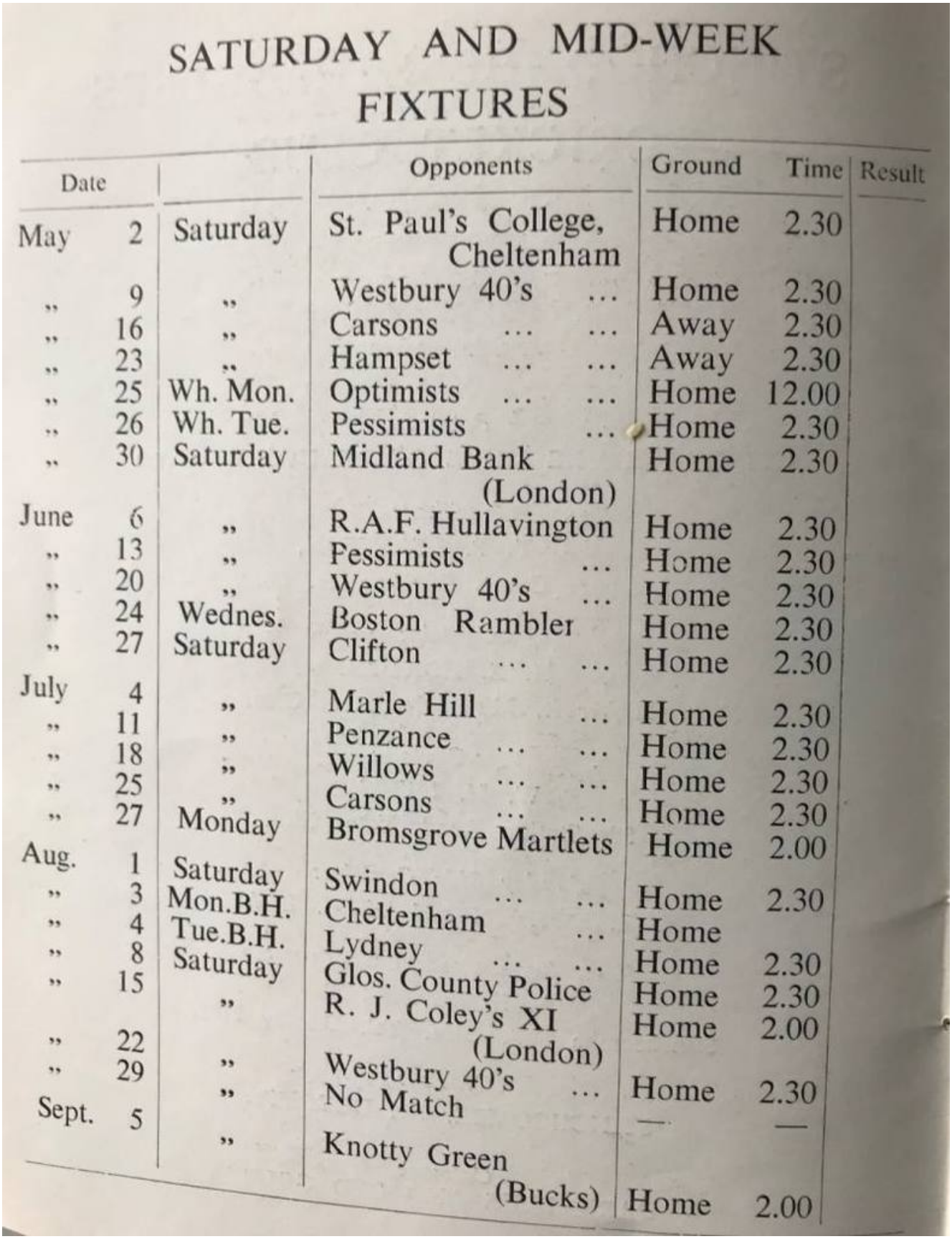
Hon. Secretary and Treasurer:
A. E. BENNETT.
Stinchcombe Hill, Glos. Tel. Dursley 2197.

Ground:
STINCHCOMBE, Nr. DURSLEY.

Colours:
DARK BLUE AND OLD GOLD

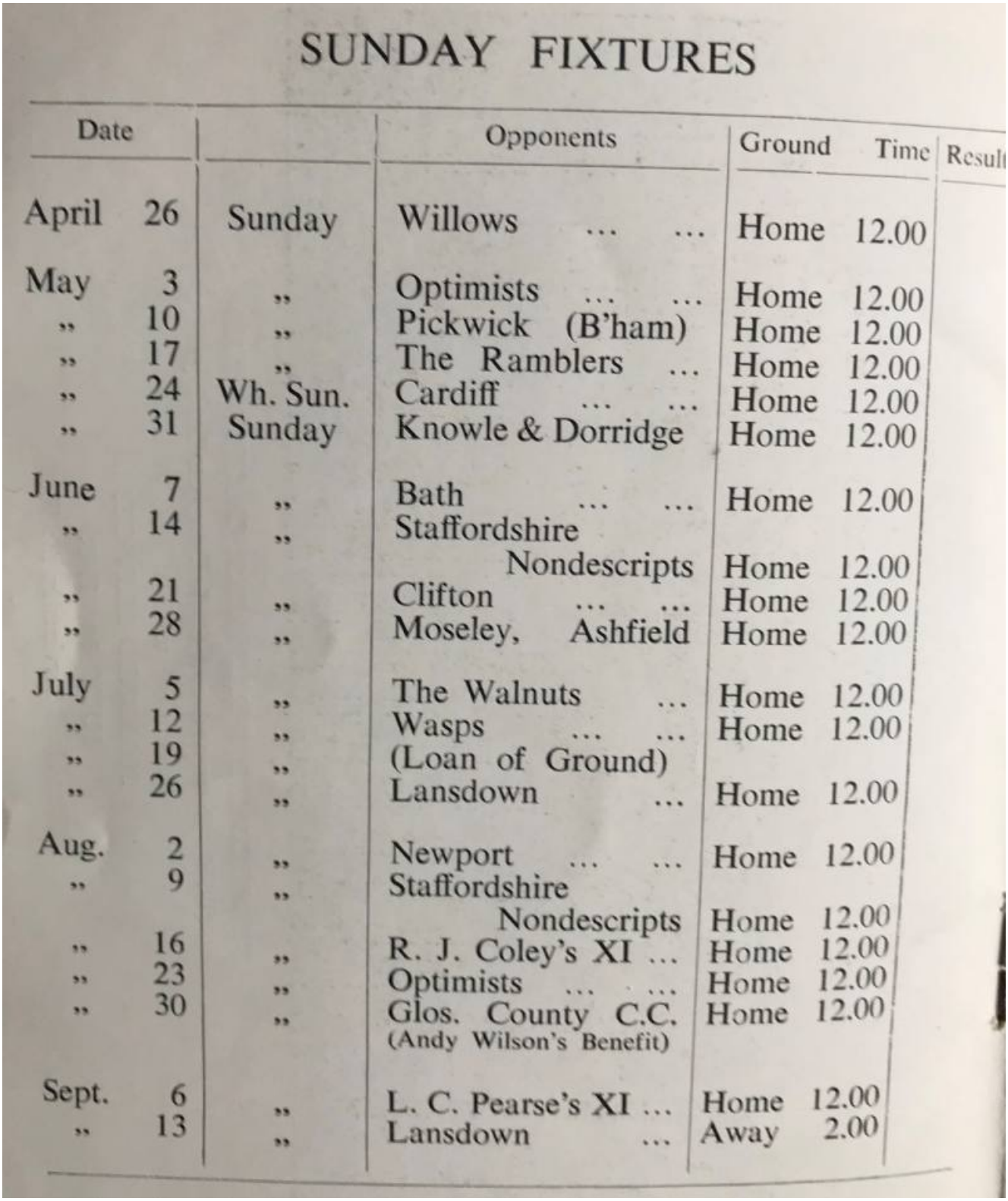
The fixture lists for the Saturday/Mid-week and Sunday matches were impressive and typical of several seasons in the 1950s. It is worth noting that only one away fixture was played in that season such was the attraction for teams to play at the Stragglers. Visiting teams travelled long distances even for Sunday games. Many of the fixtures were regularly played from

year to year including against touring sides



SATURDAY AND MID-WEEK FIXTURES

Date			Opponents	Ground	Time	Result
May	2	Saturday	St. Paul's College, Cheltenham	Home	2.30	
„	9	„	Westbury 40's ...	Home	2.30	
„	16	„	Carsons	Away	2.30	
„	23	„	Hampset	Away	2.30	
„	25	Wh. Mon.	Optimists	Home	12.00	
„	26	Wh. Tue.	Pessimists ...	Home	2.30	
„	30	Saturday	Midland Bank (London)	Home	2.30	
June	6	„	R.A.F. Hullavington	Home	2.30	
„	13	„	Pessimists ...	Home	2.30	
„	20	„	Westbury 40's ...	Home	2.30	
„	24	Wednes.	Boston Rambler	Home	2.30	
„	27	Saturday	Clifton	Home	2.30	
July	4	„	Marle Hill ...	Home	2.30	
„	11	„	Penzance	Home	2.30	
„	18	„	Willows	Home	2.30	
„	25	„	Carsons	Home	2.30	
„	27	Monday	Bromsgrove Martlets	Home	2.00	
Aug.	1	Saturday	Swindon	Home	2.30	
„	3	Mon.B.H.	Cheltenham ...	Home		
„	4	Tue.B.H.	Lydney	Home	2.30	
„	8	Saturday	Glos. County Police	Home	2.30	
„	15	„	R. J. Coley's XI (London)	Home	2.00	
„	22	„	Westbury 40's ...	Home	2.30	
„	29	„	No Match	—	—	
Sept.	5	„	Knotty Green (Bucks)	Home	2.00	



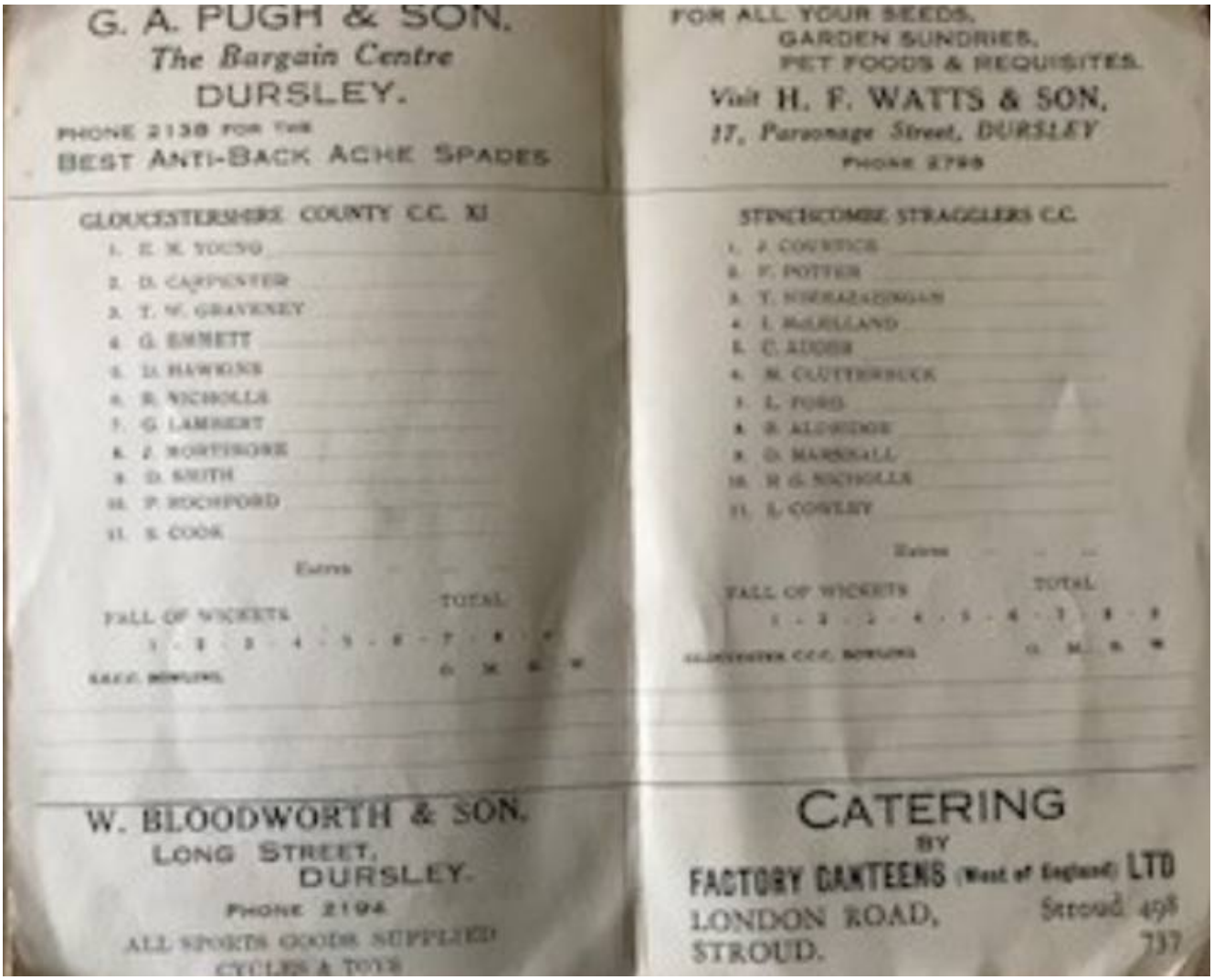
SUNDAY FIXTURES

Date		Opponents	Ground	Time	Result
April 26	Sunday	Willows	Home	12.00	
May 3	„	Optimists	Home	12.00	
„ 10	„	Pickwick (B'ham)	Home	12.00	
„ 17	„	The Ramblers ...	Home	12.00	
„ 24	Wh. Sun.	Cardiff	Home	12.00	
„ 31	Sunday	Knowle & Dorridge	Home	12.00	
June 7	„	Bath	Home	12.00	
„ 14	„	Staffordshire Nondescripts	Home	12.00	
„ 21	„	Clifton	Home	12.00	
„ 28	„	Moseley, Ashfield	Home	12.00	
July 5	„	The Walnuts ...	Home	12.00	
„ 12	„	Wasps	Home	12.00	
„ 19	„	(Loan of Ground)			
„ 26	„	Lansdown ...	Home	12.00	
Aug. 2	„	Newport	Home	12.00	
„ 9	„	Staffordshire Nondescripts	Home	12.00	
„ 16	„	R. J. Coley's XI ...	Home	12.00	
„ 23	„	Optimists	Home	12.00	
„ 30	„	Glos. County C.C. (Andy Wilson's Benefit)	Home	12.00	
Sept. 6	„	L. C. Pearse's XI ...	Home	12.00	
„ 13	„	Lansdown ...	Away	2.00	

Many cricketers of note played at Stinchcombe both for the Stragglers and/or for County sides. This was particularly so in the case of Benefit games when the beneficiary would be given full support by County team mates. Among the notable cricketers have been Keith Miller (Australia), Percy Fender, Sam Cook, 'Bomber' Wells, Wally Hammond, Pat Considine, Arthur Milton, Tom and Ken Graveney, Peter Richardson and Basil

D’Olivera. A very impressive list?

The scorecard from May 1957 for Sam Cook’s benefit match makes interesting reading. The Stragglers was captained by Mervyn Clutterbuck, a well known local business man, and included two very young players in Les Cowley and Bruce Aldridge whose wife lives in the Village. Doug Marshall was also in the team and is noted for taking ten wickets for 64 runs in a twelve a side game in 1941 as described in the ‘Lantern Journal’ and reported at the time in the national press. He died in 2020 a few days short of 100 years.



The sponsorship support from local businesses seems to have been a feature of the scorecards. In addition there was significant support from some officers and members of the Club such as Sir Percy Lister.

1969 Onwards with Cricket

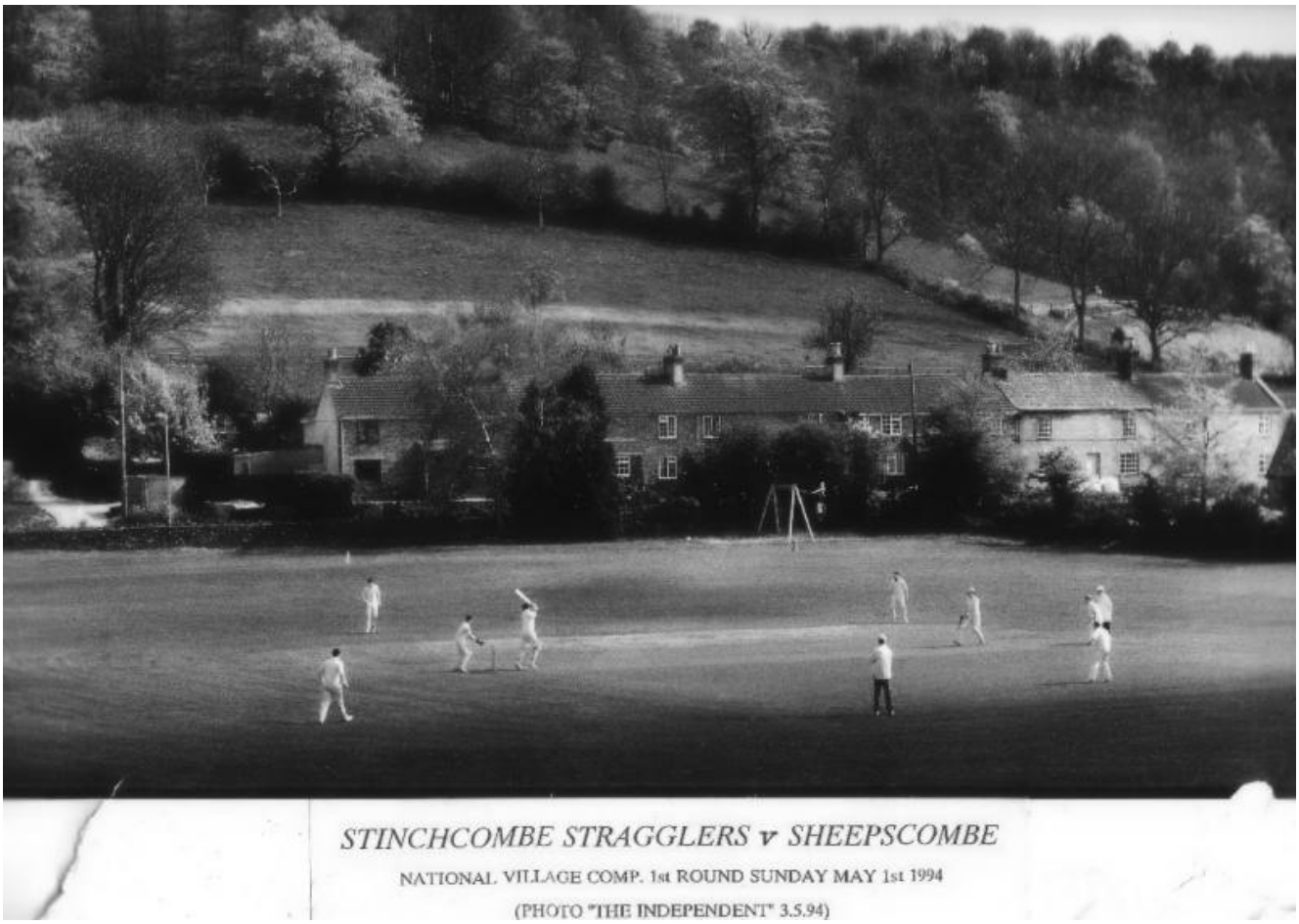
In 1969 the John Player Limited overs Cricket started for the County teams. This was played on a Sunday and as a consequence top class players were no longer available to teams such as the Stragglers. In fact the change had started to occur in the seasons leading up to this. As a result Saturday matches in the Western Counties League were the important fixtures and Sunday matches became increasingly social occasions but still of a relatively high standard.

By 1970 the Stragglers were struggling both on and off the field and the scene changed considerably. The financial situation and the lack of local players required a radical rethink. At this time Dursley Rugby Club had three teams, they played on the Dursley Recreation Ground and used the Kings Head Inn as their HQ. The Club was expanding fast and was looking for a ground and facilities. A deal was struck with The Cricket Club and Stinchcombe Stragglers and Dursley Sports Club was established. Further information on the history of the Rugby Club is given on the website https://www.dursleyrfc.co.uk/about_history.

During the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s there was a gradual demise of cricket. Fewer high profile players turned out, and it was equally a struggle to recruit local players, although the junior sides were successful. The level of Saturday cricket fell, and by 1990 the Saturday team were no longer in the Western Counties League but in the County Leagues. Still a reasonably good standard but well short of that of the 'golden eras'. By this time the junior cricket under Claude Helliwell, Les Cowley and Brian Meakins was producing some very good cricketers who graduated into the League side. This was the golden era of Junior cricket. There was Scott Pegler who played for the County schools and England U18s, Simon Darlaston and Kevin Russell who both played for the County Schools and captained the County in successive years, Chris

Pritchard and David Darlaston who were among others who played for the County schools Unfortunately for the cricket club many of these players went off to University so their contribution was short lived.

In 1994 the Stragglers received considerable publicity when the Independent newspaper ‘adopted’ the team and followed their progress through the National Village Competition. They made it through five rounds but unfortunately lost to Frocester CC so did not make it to the final at Lords. A full account can be found in ‘From Stinchcombe to Lords’ by Norman Harris of the Independent Newspaper.



Fewer players and administrators were prepared to participate in the Club. The better players in some cases moved to Frocester CC which had advanced to the Western Counties league. Less cricket was being played at Rednock School, resulting in a reducing feed of young local players. Other local clubs also increasingly dominated the junior cricket scene (eg Cam CC). Gradually the league commitments could not

be met and cricket disappeared from the scene at the Stragglers soon after the turn of the century. From time to time some of the old players got together and played a social game but this was the only activity of the once famous Stinchcombe Stragglers CC.

By this time the rugby club had taken over the running of the whole sporting estate from the Sports Club, and they fortunately decided to maintain the cricket square and encourage use by outside clubs. For several seasons the Renishaw cricket team played mid-week in the evenings and Cam Cricket Club 3rd team played on a Saturday. Then in 2017 the rugby club was approached by a number of local cricketers who were keen to re-establish a club based at the Stragglers, and so senior cricket based at the ground was resurrected. To avoid any conflict the cricket section was named 'The Old Stragglers'. This is now well established with the senior men playing in the Stroud League, senior ladies, and several junior sides. A game in progress in recent times, at the imposing location of 'The Stragglers'.



Sport for juniors has always been a major feature of the activities at ‘The Stragglers’. With the resurgence of senior cricket it was important that junior cricket was established again. By 2020 several age groups for cricket had been established. This is in addition to rugby for Minis and Junior which attracts over 450 youngsters along with the strong contingent of juniors in the Running Club. As shown in the photos below ‘you are never too young to participate’!





Dursley Rugby Club and the Village

Rugby has a long association with Stinchcombe. The first games of rugby for the Dursley Club were in 1888 on Stinchcombe Hill. Many years later in 1953 the re-established Dursley Rugby Club played on the land close to the current ‘paddock’ and the teams changed in the Village Hall. The first game was against Cainscross on 17 September of that year. The following season the Club moved to the Dursley Recreation Ground before returning to Stinchcombe in 1970 as explained previously.



A team photo from 1898 Note the ‘boots’

There have been many long family associations within the Club. The gentleman on the right was the Club Secretary and Treasurer, W. Heaven. Seventy five years later, his Nephew, Jack Heaven became the Club President who held the post from 1973 to 2000.



Before moving to the Stragglers in 1970, the Rugby Club played on the Dursley Recreation Ground. The photo shows a game in 1966.

The lineout jumper is Russ Holloway a longstanding resident of the village.

Further information of the history of the rugby Club can be found on the DRC ***website***.

1970 Onwards with Rugby

In 1970 Dursley Rugby Club achieved its aim to have its own ground and facilities by moving to The Stragglers. This represented a significant change for both SSCC and DRFC and Stinchcombe Stragglers and Dursley Sport Club was established with sub-sections of cricket and rugby. Sharing facilities

required compromise for both parties particularly at the start and end of the sporting seasons with the rugby pitch occupying part of the cricket outfield. In 1972 the issue was minimised when the Taits Hill ground was leased providing another rugby pitch and a floodlit training area.

The team to play in one of the first rugby games after the move to The Stragglers in 1970 is pictured below.



Seated second from left: Andrew Hill son of Clifford Hill. The family lived for many years at Old Hill Lane, Taits Hill

The first major change to the facilities was the construction of an extension, joining the old pavilion/changing rooms to the clubhouse. The interior of the Clubhouse was modified and the bar re-positioned. To meet the needs of the growth in rugby, the land behind Coombe Gardens was leased from Joe Workman. A problem soon arose when one of the occupiers of the houses nearby objected and refused to return any rugby balls! Eventually the situation became impossible and the ground was given up.

[It is interesting to note that the field behind the Village

Hall had been used for Village Sport for many years and long before the development of Coombe Gardens. This field is now part of the 6.4 acres acquired by the rugby club at the end of 2020.]

As rugby continued to grow, negotiations with Rednock School provided use of a much needed further pitch for several seasons during the 1990s at Norman Hill. This coincided in 1993 with Mini & Youth rugby becoming re-established having been first started in 1978, and over the next several years this resulted in around four hundred players participating. The Dursley mini festivals and the hosting of County tournaments became a regular feature.



By the early 2000s, the Club had grown substantially and the demand on the ground and the facilities was considerable. The Club Management Committee drew up a plan to meet the needs of the Club and to carry it forward. This required a well thought out business plan and considerable funding achieved

through grants, loans and donations.

The first stage in 2008 was the purchase from the County Council of approximately eight acres of land behind the original ground to provide a further rugby pitch, a training paddock and car park. The conversion of farmland to accommodate these changes required considerable ground works and surface preparation which was completed the following year. The new ground was opened by Geoff Davies the GRFU Chairman.

The Clubhouse was refurbished in 2014 to improve facilities and furnishings and this followed the previous installation of a decking overlooking the rugby and cricket pitches. Subsequently, and to meet the need of the players, spectators and those attending social events, the kitchen was completely restructured to commercial standards.

For some time the Club had been struggling adequately to accommodate the large number of players, particularly with mini and junior rugby, ladies rugby alongside men's rugby, and top of the priority list were new changing rooms.



Senior Ladies 2017-18

Following consultation with members as well as careful

consideration of the Club’s needs by the Committee, plans were developed. These were submitted to the Rugby Football Union for approval, and provided for six changing rooms with integral showers and toilets (thus serving 6 teams / 3 matches), rooms for referees, medical room and storage facilities.

Planning permission was obtained, and was then followed by a mammoth fund-raising effort involving members as well as successful applications to various grant-giving bodies.

This was successful, and allowed the construction of state-of-the-art changing rooms that can be configured such that male, female and juniors can be using them at the same time, and yet be separated from each other. The whole design is environmentally friendly, and financially represented the largest project embarked upon by the Club to date.

There was a grand opening in April 2017 in the presence of members and funders together with the local community and dignitaries.



The Opening of the new changing rooms in 2017

The next stage was to re-utilise what were previously the four old changing rooms which were in the original wooden cricket pavilion dating back to 1924, plus the shower block added in 1972. This space was completely restructured to provide more social space for the clubhouse, new toilets and a gym. More recently, the area between the main building and the new changing room block has been fitted out as an outside gym.



As mentioned, implementing the business plan and raising the funding was a major task and involved many people. In total over the last 15 years, close to £1million has been invested in the ground and facilities, this in addition to the enormous time and effort given by the various volunteers leading this work for the club.

In December 2019 and just prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Club acquired a further 6.4 acres of land adjacent to the existing land, and located behind the Village Hall and Coombe Gardens. This was purchased to provide additional space so that the significant footfall from mini and youth rugby as well as the Running Club, and resultant wear and tear on the existing land, could be reduced and rotated. There is also an aspiration for the installation of a running track together with long jump and high jump pits for the Running Club.

The Stragglers Estate now covers approximately 24 acres.

The Rugby Club has produced many quality players over the

years, with probably the most notable being Oliver Winterbottom who played for England Age Grade, Ben Morgan - Gloucester & England and Charlie Sharples – Gloucester & England. In addition, a number of players have moved on to play semi-professional rugby at various clubs, including Cinderford, Llanelli, Pontypridd, Richmond and Newcastle. Also of note is that the Club's current President John Darlaston (pictured speaking in the first of the changing room photos above), served as President of the Gloucestershire Rugby Football Union 1999-2001 and also as Chairman 1999-2008.

Other Activities Past and Present

In the post war era up to the late 1970s, Gloucester Hockey Club played occasionally at the Stragglers. It is not clear why this was so, but the thought is that hockey was increasing in popularity, and it was used for the lower teams in the Club. Many of the SSCC players came from Gloucester so that could be the connection.

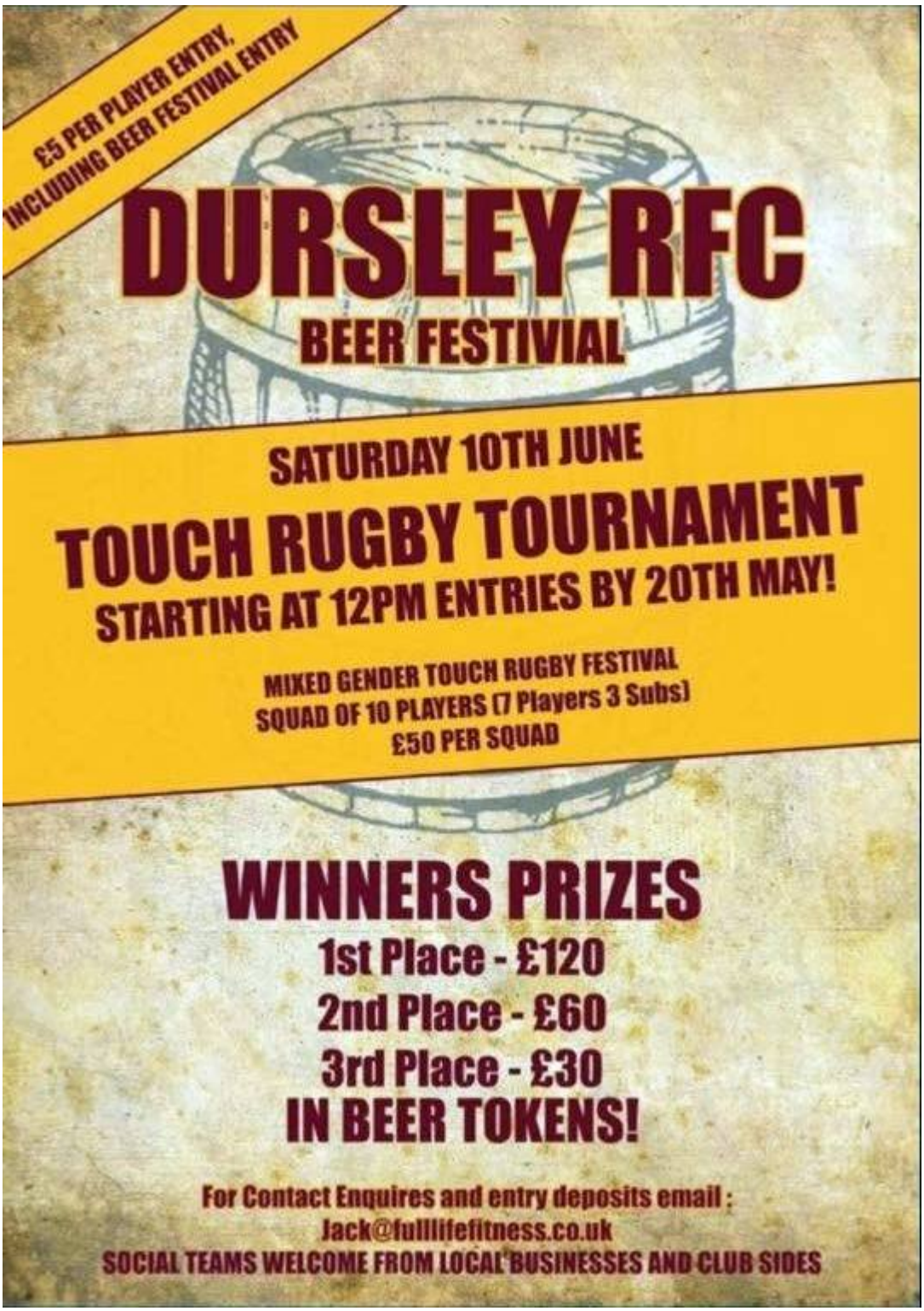
Since 2008 the Stragglers has been the base for Dursley Running Club with whom the Rugby Club has entered into a Partnership, making it a truly multi-sports centre.

There are many social activities at the Stragglers, the most significant of which usually takes place each year over the first weekend in June. On the Friday evening the Summer Ball sees around four hundred and fifty people at a 'black tie' event in a large marquee. This has now become a marker in the calendar of the community. On the Saturday, the 'Beer Festival' attracts a large crowd with family entertainment followed in the evening by several music groups. On the Sunday there is a traditional 'Last Night at the Proms' concert featuring a number of local performers, and often including Wotton Silver Band. This has raised money over the years for local causes including for St Cyr's Church. The weekend also provides a major source of income for the Rugby Club, which is

then invested back into the facilities.



The Beer Festival on the Saturday, as advertised below, includes entertainment for the whole family and sometimes featuring a 7-a-side rugby tournament which attracts a large gathering. With a vast selection of beers and ciders available, the experts in ‘real ales’ come from miles around



Recently on a Friday evening, typically once each month, the Club has been opened as a ‘pub’ to offer village residents the opportunity to gather for a social exchange. This has proved popular and has strengthened the links between village and club.

Current Status, Organisation, Management and Contacts

The Stragglers ‘estate’ is owned by Dursley Rugby Football Club Ltd, which was Incorporated in 2002 under the Industrial and Provident Societies Act. The Club is affiliated to the Rugby Football Union, The Gloucestershire Rugby Football Union and the Stroud and District Rugby Football Combination. It is also registered as a Community Amateur Sports Club (CASC).

The Management Committee of the Rugby Club has, since 2010, been led Simon Bilous as Chairman of the Club, ably supported by many others across the club and as members of the committee.



The Club has been most fortunate over its lifetime to have benefitted from having volunteers involved in running it who between them have had the skills, experience, vision and commitment to move it to where it is now.

In addition there have been numerous others who have offered their services. With its ground, facilities, management and playing strength, it is the envy of many sporting organisations.

As President of the Club I would encourage anyone reading

this, who has not already done so, to visit the Club and see for themselves the impressive sporting facility situated in the village.

Further information and contact details can be found on the Club ***web site***

John Darlaston

23 May 2021

Acknowledgements

My thanks go the many people who, over the years, have provided information, memorabilia and photos on The Stragglers which I have added to the archives of the Rugby Club. Many individuals, some in the Village, hold parts of the history of The Stragglers from the golden days of cricket. These obviously represent treasured memories but it would be nice if they could be brought together in an archive or collection at the Club for all to appreciate. The archives of the Rugby Club since are reasonably comprehensive but additions are always welcome. Efforts are underway to establish a structured display in the Clubhouse of the many photos from all the sections of activity.

I would like to thank those who have supported me in the preparation of this record in particular Roger Batty and the Club Chairman Simon Bilous

JD