

Memories of cricket at Reepham

The 1920 and 30s

The tradition of cricket around Reepham has been strong within living memory, though with gaps. So far, we have been able to go back 69 years to the time when the local ground was a pleasant meadow on the left hand side of Booton Road currently owned by our retired “veterinary”, Mr John Woods. Indeed the original pavilion is still standing, though I think not in its former condition. In the 1920s the field belonged to Mr Bircham, who lived in the Brewery House. The driving force behind the club around 1920 was Dr Perry who was usually seen wearing his frock coat when preparing the pitch on Friday evenings. The pitch and ground were well kept, the mowing was carried out with a mower pulled by a horse whose hooves were shod with special leather shoes.

Charlie Hall of Bartle Court can recall his old schoolmaster, Chute Thompson, playing; also Stanley Bird of Barney who was one of the great stalwarts of the team, he first played in 1919 when he was 14. Together with Ben Stimpson they remember some of those who came to play: batsmen and bowlers who arrived by motor-bike or bicycles: Fred and Stanley Bird; Billy Morris (a tailor with “Stitcher King”); Stanley Holah (of Rookery Farm); Albert Neal (chicken farmer) who was a left-arm fast bowler; Alan Moulton the wicket-keeper; and Walter (a Cawston postman), a batsman. Ted Williams from Wood Dalling; Stanley Watson (with Gibbs, the ironmongers); possibly Cliff Watson who kept The Sun public house; and Tom Long, who was a shoemaker with Mr Allen (now Gwen Hardesty’s fruit shop). Tom was known as “The Pessimist”; his cricket trousers were held in place securely with braces as well as a belt.

Stanley Bird and Alan Moulton were perhaps the outstanding players. The standard of the team’s cricket was something to be proud of. The first four or five batsmen were consistently successful, ball control was the mark of the bowlers and several of the fielders could throw the ball “a mile”.

Initially they played friendly matches, but around 1921 they entered the Norfolk Junior Cup and one year reached the final, losing to Hempnall. Stanley recalls a match at Booton; the teams were back in the pavilion, where a dividing curtain allowed the visitors changing space and a sense of privacy, when he heard the captain of the CEYMS XI arranging his strategy: “Fred, will you open with Jimmy, Derek you go number three. Then Cliff and George you’ll bat number five, tho’ I don’t suppose we’ll need you.” Out on the home field, Reepham’s slow left-arm spinner kept walking up to the wicket and helped by the slowness of the wicket and some good catches, he helped dismiss them for 35 runs. Reepham then went on to score 65.

When Reepham entered the Norfolk Senior League they were happy whenever they were drawn at home. Visitors were unused to a good slow wicket they were more used to playing on pitches treated with the new Nottinghamshire marl. The postmaster, Donald Chapman, managed to raise a second XI for a few years.

Sadly by 1927–28, Father Time had encouraged several to retire, some had moved away and generally there was not enough young blood to continue the club. Salle had a thriving club and the remaining Reepham players joined them. Their ground was in the field to the left of the road to Cawston (near Salle Patch), then part of Sir Dymock White's Salle Park estate. The vicar of Salle, Canon Parsons, was a great supporter; he used to buy all the equipment and he offered boundless enthusiasm.

Fred Laskey and his brother Herbert had played for Salle and Reepham respectively, but with the demise of the Reepham club by 1930 they both then played for Salle, as seen in the first photograph. This was taken by the *Norfolk Chronicle* in about 1938, when Salle won the Mid Norfolk Shield.



The team was: (back row) Mr Reeve (umpire), Charlie Smith, Geoffrey Tubby, Mrs Dack, Len Riseborough, Peter Tubby and Walter Jarvis; (front row) Marshall Stearman ("Smasher"), Billy Hagan, Fred Laskey, Stanley Dack, George Sowards (captain), Clem Stearman and Herbert Laskey.

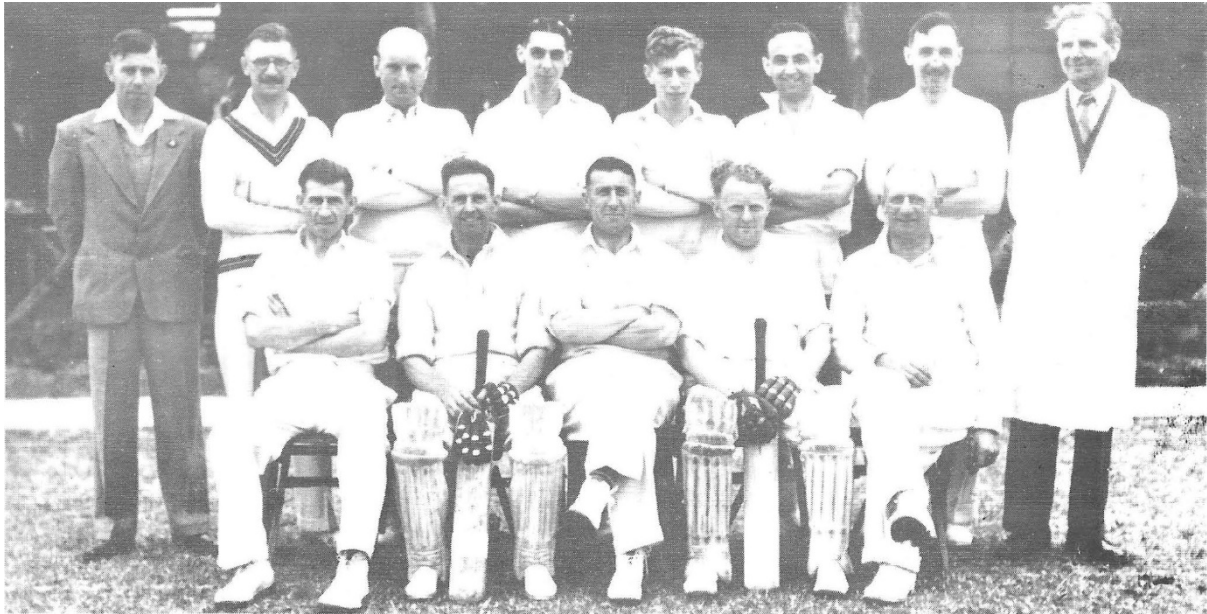
It is good to see Mrs Dack recorded with the team. She represents all those mothers, wives and girlfriends who have given such practical support during the years.

The 1950s and 60s

The post-war resurgence of Reepham cricket was largely thanks to the valuable acquisition of the present sports field, known as the "Stimpson's Piece". The

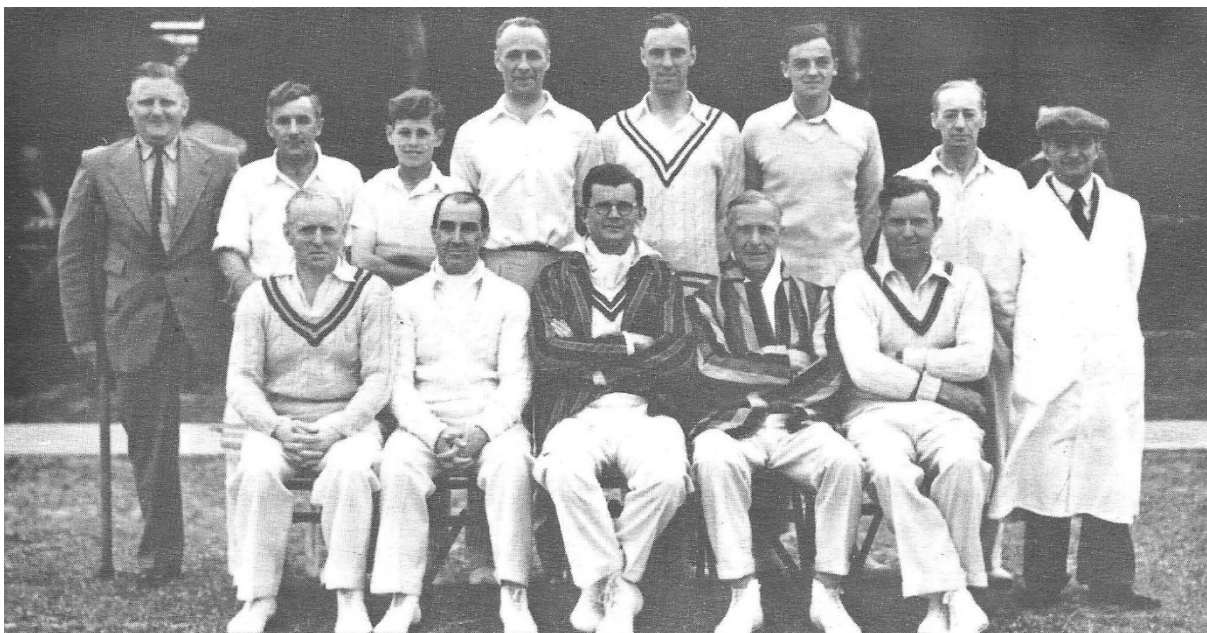
Stimpson family's generous lease ensured 99 years of sport near the town centre. (After only 39 of those years the field has now been permanently given and is managed by a committee of parish councillors and other representatives.)

The official opening match took place on June 17th, 1950 and was between a Reepham XI and a Norfolk XI. No one so far seems to recall any details of the match, not even the result. Perhaps refreshments cast too much of a rosy hue over the event. The next two photographs show firstly the Reepham team:



Back row: Fred Laskey, Charlie Case, Horace Jones, Norman Platten, Jim Underdown, Noel Bird, Kenneth Bird and George Swards (umpire). Front row: Herbert Laskey, Stanley Bird, Billy Howard (captain), Rex Hunt and Len Underdown.

And secondly, the Norfolk XI (which had one or two local players in):



Back row: Evan Simons (who as a boy just before the war, had played for Reepham), Malcolm Williamson, Bud Rose, Neville Laskey (wkt), Ben Stimpson, Tom Eaton, Jack Read and Billy Morris (umpire). Front row: Fred Low, Fred Bell, George Pilch (captain), Mike Falcon (Norfolk's captain) and Basil Rought-Rought.

The new "Edrich-Compton concrete wicket" was deemed a success and once the bowlers and batsmen adapted to it, some good cricket developed. This was the era of two of Norfolk's great cricketing families, the Edriches of Ingham and the Partitts of Foxley and Billington. Alec, Bob, Hugh, John, Richard and Peter Partitt all played at times for Reepham. Peter, when younger, once took all ten wickets in a game against the Electricity Board. Not long after he was playing for Middlesex and England.

Another young Reepham player, Evan Hall, played for the county, scoring several half-centuries before moving to Middlesex, where he served on the Lord's ground staff for four years. After a year with Leicestershire he was available again but the Norfolk County [Cricket] Club somehow failed to make use of him again.

This period of the 1950s was probably the height of the club's history. They played friendlies only on Saturdays and selected strong opponents like Norwich Union, Mallards, Thorpe Hospital, Bradfield, Cromer and Sheringham. If scorebooks came to light, one golden memory at least could be checked: is it possible they beat Cromer one season, dismissing them for four runs?

Around 1964 cricket in Reepham ceased when the supply of players dried up again; some retired, younger ones may not have had great encouragement watching the leading batsmen and bowlers doing so well, and others moved away. (While one family who are quoted as "moving away" went to New Zealand, another had moved as far as Wood Dalling.) The concrete wicket had been taken up in the early 60s, perhaps on account of the cost of replacing the coconut matting every three or four years or to concede more space for the thriving football club.

Salle Cricket Club, however, kept the game alive locally, as current residents recall, notably with Jim Tuddenham, Keith Pask, Jim Miller, John Tubby, several Stearmans, (Marshall, Farmer and Peter), David Downing, Henry West, Cliff Nurse and Reverend Dickinson. Dr McFarquhar, a geneticist with Bernard Matthews, played often and was usually successful in contributing a half-century.

As the decade came to an end, teams became harder to raise and the end was heralded when horses were put into the field to graze. So ended an era of Salle sport, where not only cricket was played, tennis courts shared the field and badminton had been played in the nearby Lynton White Institute.

The 1970s and 80s

Surviving enthusiasts then joined with others for cricket in Reepham to restart in 1971. The club was called the Reepham and Salle Cricket Club for two seasons. Salle's sight-screens were towed up to Stimpson's Piece, where they still serve. A list of first members included Mr Crane, I Walbyoff, P Hardwick, Jim Morris, Brian Wright, P Horner, C Reeve, N and J Tubby, D Roberts, B Dennis, R Howard, D Norris, A Hunt and C Pratt. Billy Howard was president and Ben Stimpson vice-president.

Matches were played also on Sundays and by 1978 they had joined the Norfolk League. They achieved promotion as high as Division 2, but they are now in Division 3. In 1983 they won the Norfolk League Knock-Out Cup, beating Norwich Casuals by seven wickets.

These leagues seem to go back a long way in Norfolk's history as one of the two cups that Reepham won in 1988 was initially dated 1911. With the growth of Reepham within the past 15 years, the local game is in a healthy state, although shades of manpower problems from the past may sometimes hover in the background. There are however promising signs. Peter Hardwick, with the help now of his son, continues to do sterling work on the wicket. Recent improvements include the purchase of a motorised roller and upgrading of the pavilion facilities – the new bar adds greatly to the availability of the sports clubs that use the ground and there are now prospects of the development alongside of a larger sports and social hall.

A good number of youngsters have played for Reepham in recent seasons; for three seasons there were summer holiday matches for 14 and 15 year olds. The high school is fortunate in having Mike Rowson as a PE teacher who has for several years also been selector of the England Under 15 XI; a boy with talent and enthusiasm has every chance of getting on in the game from that start.

Since the mid-1970s pupils from the high school have played for the county including Peter Williamson, Darren Gooderum (now captain of Horsford), Stephen Framlingham, Nigel Ellis (Reepham Cricket Club) and Mark Brown (Witchingham). Carl Rogers is a bright hope now playing with Ingham. Currently there are four young players who play for the club: Glen Chipperfield, Mark Willis, Louis Grandjean (1989's captain of the Norfolk Under 14 XI) and Alistair Bailey.

Is enthusiasm as great as in the past?

With Saturday League matches followed by the slightly less serious Sunday Cup games, every weekend one can hear the familiar sound of leather on willow. Limited-over matches seems to hold complete sway in Norfolk, whether this is for better or worse depends on how much of a cricket purist you are. A result is assured and this in turn has increased the level of excitement; to achieve this, aggressive batting

tends to be necessary. (Did any local player hit the ball further than Alex Parfitt, when at Hellesdon Hospital the ball went clear over one of the wings and into the courtyard?)

Did earlier teams ever go on tour? In recent seasons, Reepham has played a 4–5 day tour around Braintree, enjoyably and successfully. How many local teams have boasted an overseas player? In 1989 Tony Sheahan was imported from Australia and made a good contribution. In his spare time he did exchange teaching at Hellesdon School.

To demonstrate that the love of the game has by no means diminished, here are a few statistics from the 1989 season:

- 18 Saturday matches in the Norfolk League (45 overs), 8 won, 8 lost, 2 cancelled.
- 17 Sunday matches in the Mid-Norfolk League (40 overs), 13 won, 4 lost.
- Weekday evening cup matches (20 overs) 20; finalists in the Hellesdon Cup and winners of the Billingford Forge Cup and the Gordon Smith Cup.
- Best batting average: Tony Sheahan, 46 runs.
- Best bowling average: Glen Chipperfield, 9.1 runs per wicket.
- Highest single innings: Paul Reeve, 114.

So, roll on the 1990 season; new members will be welcome. Contact Nick Mears, (tel: 968 8251). The season begins on Sunday April 29th v Haddiscoe and then Saturday May 5th v Scole.

The first home cup match will be against Lexham on Sunday May 27th. Some extra fixture cards will be available at The Chimes and results are published regularly mid-week in the *Eastern Daily Press* and also in the *North Norfolk News*.

John Ricketts

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