

History of Ottershaw Cricket Club

Written and researched by Richard Bowden

Although we cannot, at present, say exactly when the village cricket club began, a later reference suggests that it was probably in the middle 1850s. The first season for which match reports survive is 1869 by when the club appears to have been quite well-established. It was, at that time, captained by the younger William Fletcher, son of the founder of Fletcher's Nurseries which was to expand across much of Ottershaw between the 1880s and 1920s. As the Surrey press pointed out, the club was fortunate to play its home games in the beautiful surroundings of Ottershaw Park, seat of Sir Edward Colebrooke M.P., who may well have been the club's President at this stage. By the early 1880s however, the club was playing in Botley's Park and the club's presidency had passed to the local vicar, the Rev. Baron Hichens. Hichen was to retain the position for an almost unbroken spell of twenty years. William Fletcher had retired and in the last decade of the century his place was taken by his young nephew, Edmund Fletcher.

The years immediately before and after the First World War constituted something of a 'golden age' for the local village cricket club. In 1907 the elder of the two Otter boys, Robert, later Major, RE Otter, club captain at the time, succeeded Rev. Percy Phillips as President and, in the following year, G.W. 'Jocky' Attfeld, yard manager at Fletcher Brothers, took over the duties of club secretary and the list of fixtures expanded considerably. Then, in 1913, the local press announced that Jack Hobbs, "generally adjudged to be the finest batsman in England during the past few years", would be residing in Ottershaw before the start of the season to coach the son of the new owner of Ottershaw Park, Mr Frederick Eckstein. On 19th April Hobbs scored 86 to help an Ottershaw Park side defeat the village club quite comprehensively in the opening game of the season, and followed it on the ensuing Wednesday with 76 against Chertsey who were no less comprehensively beaten. He was back again at the end of the season and again, briefly, at the start of the 1914 season. Hobbs was a popular figure, and many an Ottershaw youth whiled away his evening bowling at England's greatest batsman in the nets at Ottershaw Park.

After the end of the Great War, during which various of the club's players perished, the club was quickly reorganised thanks in particular to the enthusiasm and drive of the new proprietor at 'The Otter' public house, Mr George Hall, and the continuing presence of 'Jocky' Attfeld as the secretary. In 1919 the club won the new cricket league organised by the Surrey Herald newspaper, after a rain-affected drawn match with Chertsey. They were fortunate to be able to hold onto the cup when the league was disbanded before the start of the ensuing season. The growth in the club's fortunes was such that in 1920 a second XI was set up with a respectable list of fixtures, and they was to continue functioning until 1925. In 1923 the club went so far as to organise a special August Bank Holiday fete in the grounds of Botleys Park and began the holding of a special all-day match on Bank Holiday Monday against a Gosling's XI (otherwise known as a Barclay's Bank XI) brought down from London for the day. One of the older photographs of the Ottershaw Cricket Club team dates precisely from the first of this series of games on Monday, 6th August 1923, and the fixture was to continue annually until the death of the aged owner of Botley's Park Herbert Gosling, in February 1929. His death, the estate's appropriation by the County Health Authorities and their subsequent refusal at the end of 1931 to allow the village club to use the pitch which they had played on and looked after for over fifty years, almost caused the club to disappear. It was difficult to maintain a list of fixtures with no home ground. However, from 1935, the governors of the school recently installed in Ottershaw Park agreed to let the club use the grounds and, from 1936, the club enjoyed a remarkable resurgence. This was largely thanks to the efforts of one of its secretary and old stalwarts, Reg 'Royal' Garland, a player who in his time had been deemed worthy of consideration for a County trial. From 1938, the practice of presenting cups to the best batsman and bowler each

year was begun, with the cups being donated by the new President, the local J.P., Mr Sayle, and the club's Treasurer and post-war President, Mr W.S. 'Bill' Hunt.

It was not until 1948 that the village cricket club was re-established after the Second World War by pre-war members with only one XI which played friendly matches at weekends. Home matches were played on various grounds in the Chertsey area including the new Ottershaw School which also opened in 1948 in the grounds of Ottershaw Park. At that time, the club was run on a fairly informal basis with its headquarters based at The Otter pub where, landlord Mr Vic England, was a keen club member. After the War, a local resident anonymously donated some ground in Ottershaw to the village to be used for sport and recreational purposes, in memory of her son who had died in the war on active service. This was given over to the Chertsey Urban District Council to convert into a recreation ground and to administer on behalf of the village. A cricket pitch was established here in 1951, and it is the 'Memorial Fields' which have been the club's home ever since.

Whilst having its own permanent ground was a big step for the club the facilities were very basic with the only building being the groundsman's little store shed. In 1952 Arthur Foot the Headmaster of the Ottershaw School became club chairman and introduced a structure to the club. His approach paid dividends and in 1955 the club joined the Club Cricket Conference, built its first sightscreen, issued club caps & ties and started to provide cricket teas from the adjoining former hostel for the Land Army Girls. It also held its first Annual Dinner and Dance which became a highlight of the season for many years with Surrey cricketers including Tony Lock, Ken Barrington and Micky Stewart attending as guests of honour. 1956 saw the building of the second sightscreen and the first attempt to develop facilities but unfortunately the application to install a permanent practice wicket was declined by the council. Undaunted by this set back the club continued to lobby for improved facilities and after much persuasion, the Council agreed to the erection of a pavilion. This was officially opened in late 1961 by the Ottershaw Memorial Committee who had raised funds for the pavilion clock as a permanent reminder of the fallen of the Second War World. The pavilion began to be used in 1962 but only provided basic changing facilities and storage space. Teas, washing and toilet facilities were still only available in the Land Army Hut. It was in that year that the club joined the Surrey Cricket Association and began to compete in the mid-week Flora Doris Knock Out Competition succeeding to win its subsidiary plate competition, The Admiral Dunlop Cup, in 1966 and again in 1998.

The club continued to press the council for improved facilities and in 1963 an application to build its own pavilion was rejected on the grounds that it would create a precedent. However, in 1964 the council did extend the existing pavilion to provide facilities for other sporting activities, such as bowls and tennis, and electricity and water supplies were installed. Further applications to erect the club's own score box and lay down a concrete practice wicket were rejected. Renewed efforts were made to obtain agreement to build the score box and at the Annual Dinner and Dance, Micky Stewart, then Captain of Surrey and the guest of honour, said that if the club were successful, he would bring down the county side to officially open it. Pressure on the council finally resulted in their agreement to the score box albeit with the proviso that it needed to be a mobile structure which would require to be wheeled out and back by members for each game. This was constructed by members in line with the council's requirements and remained in use until the 1980s although by that time the wheels had sunk firmly into the ground. Micky Stewart kept his promise and in September 1965 a crowd of about two thousand was at the ground for the official opening and to see his team, including bowling legends Alec Bedser and Jim Laker, up and coming stars Geoff Arnold and Mohammed Younis and television celebrities David Frost and Bernard Cribbins honourably defeat the Ottershaw side. With the increase in membership a second XI was formed in 1966 initially with a limited number of matches but it was soon managing a full weekend fixture list. 1968 began with the welcome news that after much lobbying the council had agreed in principle that the club

could build its own pavilion. At that time a Century Club was formed to finance the project with a subscription of £13 a year. The initial prize was a new Austin Mini to be supplied by a motor trader member, although the winner in fact took a cash alternative. The Century Club continued until 1996 and provided valuable finance to develop the club's facilities especially during the 1970s and early 80s. Whilst the council's agreement was secured, it was not until 1973 that the project was eventually finished as a club room attached to the existing pavilion. The exterior was completed in the same style as the original pavilion by the same firm whilst the interior was the work of club members. With a Bar Licence also agreed drinks could now be served to members and guests from the club's own premises.

In the meantime, in 1971 a colts section was formed for junior members. The initial fixture list grew rapidly and Ottershaw became one of the founding members of the West Surrey Carmen Heating Colts League in 1978, a league sponsored by one of the club members. 1973 saw the introduction of league cricket with both the 1st and 2nd XIs joining other local teams to form the Wey Valley Cricket League. There was great optimism in joining a league with clubs that Ottershaw had traditionally performed well against, but initial aspirations were soon dashed due to difficulties in adapting to limited overs cricket. However, eventually the 1st XI were league champions in 1981 and the following year both the 1st and 2nd XIs won their respective leagues. Development continued throughout the 1970s and '80s. Major projects being improvements to the changing rooms, including the erection of a shower block completed purely by club volunteers in 1976 and further improvements to the clubhouse, with a formal bar area completed in 1978. Thirty years after the initial request the council finally approved plans to install a concrete net base, which was completed in 1987.

On the cricketing side membership was increasing and following several additional 2nd XI games being arranged a formal 3rd XI was set up in 1986. Fixtures were patchy at first, but by 1990 a structure was in place to meet a demand for cricket which resulting in games being arranged most Saturdays that year and the league being joined the following year. After making several applications the club was accepted into the more prestigious Marrant Three Counties League in 1988 where it stayed until 1993 when the Fuller's Brewery Surrey County Cricket League was formed in response to the restructuring of cricket in Surrey. The 2nd XI won promotion to the Fuller's First Division in the initial adjustment season but the 1st XI remained in the Second Division. This is where both teams stayed during the 13-year stint with the league although the new 3rd XI were champions of the 3rd XI League in 1993. The nineties were the best years in terms of membership with the club fielding three Saturday and two Sunday XIs with a colts section of around 80. A further extension to the clubhouse was completed during the winter of 1991/2 costing £17,000. In 1999 a new double net with an artificial wicket was opened by Surrey cricketer Darren Bicknell. This was partially funded by a club member who raised £5,000 by donating a proportion of each sale of the cricket stats computer program he had developed.

Unfortunately, these halcyon days were not to continue as many long-standing members reached the end of their cricketing careers at the same time and were not replaced by our colts who seemed to develop new interests after moving on to university. The first signs were in 1999 when the Sunday 1st XI was temporarily dissolved and the long-standing Golf Society disbanded. Although the Sunday 1st XI was resurrected in the following year, the 3rd XI was forced to withdraw from the League after being unable to fulfil fixtures. In 2004 the club was approached by Addlestone and Hamm Moor CC about pooling players from the two clubs for Sunday fixtures. Furthermore, the Council decided, following complaints from local residents, that the Hamm Moor ground at Victory Park Addlestone, was no longer suitable for cricket and, in consequence, they would be not be able to continue to use the ground after that year. As a result of discussions held throughout that season, it was decided it was in the best interests of both clubs to merge, using the facilities at the Memorial Fields in

Ottershaw under the name of the Ottershaw and Hamm Moor Cricket Club. This merger was agreed at the AGM in December 2004, initially for a one-year trial period, with the 1st and 2nd XIs continuing in the Fuller's League, the 3rd XI entering the Wey Valley League in which the Addlestone and Hamm Moor CC had been playing and the Sunday 1st XI joining the Thameside League. The merger was finalised at the AGM the following December. Despite the merger there were still problems fielding competitive sides. The 3rd XI was relegated to the Second Division of the Wey Valley League in 2005 and the Sunday 1st XI resigned from the Thameside League at the end of that season to concentrate on friendly fixtures. There was a further downturn in 2006 when the 2nd XI withdrew from the Fuller's League after being unable to fulfil fixtures and the 3rd XI was disbanded. This led to the club resigning from Fuller's League and entering both 1st and 2nd XIs into the A & J Surrey Cricket League in 2007. Results initially improved playing at this level with the 1st XI winning Division Four in their first season but success was short-lived as playing strength was further reduced when the Colts section was disbanded in 2008 after failing to find an organiser. Eventually the 2nd XI was withdrawn from the League after the 2009 season and from the 2010 season the club was only fielding one Saturday side in the Surrey Cricket League and one Sunday friendly XI. At this level the club was competitive, with teams winning Division Three of the League in 2013 and a further promotion. However, the enthusiasm that had built up the club in the second half of the 20th century had been lost and it seemed that without divine intervention it was only a matter of time before the Club folded. Fortunately, that intervention came in the shape of Mike Kyriacos, the current Chairman, who joined the club in 2017 reigniting interest by reintroducing colts cricket in 2018 which expanded in 2019, setting up a mid-week T20 team and initiating various other improvements. In 2020 with the Club re-branded as the Ottershaw Cricket Club with a thriving Colts section, some of whom would play for the new Sunday Development XI and the Saturday team now promoted to the Surrey Cricket League Premier Division.

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