

1949

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## Notes on the History of Mill Hill Village Cricket Club (f.1881) – The Inter War Years

*NB: These notes were found in a photograph album about Mote End Farm and its tenants the Weedon family who ran the farm from about 1904 till 1941. They concern the Mill Hill Village Cricket Club during the interwar years up to the end of World War II. MHPS has established that they are extracts from the book 'The Story of Cricket at Mill Hill Village 1852-1952' by Howard Mallatratt (published 1977). The club are still in existence - see <http://www.pitchero.com/clubs/millhillvillage/>*

“It is considered that 1923 would probably be the year when the Club took full occupation of Nan Clark’s Lane after some brief sojourn at Holcombe Hill. Before launching into details of the resumption of matches, some words must be set down about the new ground at Nan Clark’s Lane.

This was owned by Mr James Fraser of Hendon Park, and rented from his tenants the Weedons at the farm. This was the very ground where the August Bank Holiday matches were played in the years prior to the 1914-18 war. The house and grounds then belonged to the Bishop family. It was a beautiful spot. The ground was a little on the small side perhaps, but its superb situation made up in full measure for any shortcomings.

It evokes wonderful memories for so many members of the Club, their friends and the numerous visitors it attracted. It was indeed a never failing source of surprise and delight to visiting teams who, over the years treated it as a spot to which they had to bring their families and friends to enjoy the peace and quiet and the feeling of being away from it all in this unique little corner of the Country just ten miles away from Charing Cross. It was situated on what is firmly held to be the second highest spot in the County of Middlesex and commanded a delightful rural view which completely belied its closeness to the great city.

Its rural setting – Weedon’s farm tucked away with its haystacks on the far boundary; the west side sheltered by the tall walnut trees; the coppice on the south east corner; the distant prospect of fields and wooded lands to the east, and the view of the “big house”, Hendon Park, across the paddock – all combined to transport one to a time and place so different from the roar and bustle of the seething city and suburban life just a mile or so away.

The transfer of the pavilion from Holcombe Hill to Nan Clark’s Lane had been made possible by Mr Chas Cherry who purchased it from Mr Cox and presented it to the Club. It has served the Club faithfully since the 1890’s and was to continue to give yeoman service until 1938.

Incidentally, another old servant of the Club was also taken up to Nan Clarke’s Lane – the old heavy roller. How long the Club has had it is not known. It is still in use at Burton Hole Lane and must have been used by the Village Club for something like one hundred years.



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The first recorded score of a game played after the break caused by the Great War came in May 1923. On the 13<sup>th</sup> of that month the Village side played Cricklewood Cons. The Village won scoring 68 to their opponent's 31. Those playing in this match were:

C. C. Cartwright	J. Woods	B. Rockhill	W. Pestell	E. Gaylor	A Bransom
H. Hook	A. Hewson	W. Bransom	C. Sherman	J. Gibbs	

On the Whit Monday a game was played against Emanuel who were skittled out for 56, Hook capturing 7 of the wickets. The Village replied with 61 to give them a very narrow victory. Two new names appeared in the side – Davis and Fred Vernall.

Keeping Both Ends Going: The outbreak of the Second World War did not seriously interfere with the game during the season of 1940, but towards the end of it the defence of London became of such paramount importance that the War Office decided that the ground at Nan Clark's Lane was a perfect site for an anti-aircraft gun contingent, it being the second highest spot in the County of Middlesex. So at the end of the season the Club had to pack up its own kit and cricket bag - and go.

No one who was there on that memorable Saturday afternoon in early September 1940 will forget the mounting tension as the big raid took place on London's dockland area; the ever increasing noise of bombs and guns, the whine of planes, and the ever growing glow in the eastern sky as the raging fires grew fiercer, and the huge palls of smoke over all. The raids on London had begun, and our cricketing days at lovely little Nan Clark's Lane were finishing against a backcloth of fury worthy of the grandest of operas.

During the winter months of 1940 a special Club meeting was called by the Committee which had been set up to find another ground, when members were asked to consider an offer to join up with Mill Hill at their Bunns Lane ground on terms which, to some members at least, savoured of an attitude of condescension to poor neighbours. A number of members felt they would rather retain their independence and agreed to try to carry on as a wandering side for a spell.

It was a daring decision in all the circumstances as Bert Rockhill, the old Secretary, who had held the reigns for many years, felt that running a wandering side was more than he could manage and the whole question of continuing independently was thrust upon the handful (just about one eleven) of the members who had decided to carry on. One or two did take advantage of the offer to go down the road to Bunns Lane but after a month or two several of them came back to the fold.

The old longstanding fixtures were more or less thrown out of the window by virtue of war conditions; many sides had gone under "for the duration", some for ever, and it was a case of looking around to find what teams there were available to play, and where there were facilities to put on a game, and whether it was possible to reach grounds by public transport, limited as that was. Obtaining fixtures was a time consuming job, although it was not too difficult in the end as



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many Clubs still possessing grounds were only too pleased to fix up games – they all wanted to stay home and so they were glad to receive applications from would-be visiting elevens. Some incredibly fine matches were arranged against teams of good repute and first class name, albeit a little weaker sometimes in their playing strength than hitherto.

On paper, some of the opposing teams with whom games were ultimately fixed were far too strong but the war was a great leveller, service calls depleted many a strong side, from County teams to the small village club, so fixtures were not so audacious as they could appear at first sight appear. In the case of the Village, it is true to say that the better the opposition the greater the stimulus the Club had to attain a higher proficiency in the game and some really magnificent matches resulted, games which effectively put the Club on the map as sportsmen and good cricketers, gaining for it a reputation which has never been lost.

War time restrictions necessitated making do in many ways; Fixture cards, for instance, were hand-made, typed and stencilled and cased in old index file cards. Matches had to be arranged which were easy to get to as transport was quite a problem and with a minimum of players available it was always a question whether a full eleven would turn up at the appointed ground at the appointed time. Such was the loyalty and enthusiasm of the members that there were never any complaints of sides turning up short handed.

As an example of the kind of things the players had to face, the following is a quote from the fixture card for 1941 – “Members will have to provide their own teas because facilities have been destroyed by bombing”. Another problem which had to be tackled was the storage of Club equipment.

When the ground at Nan Clark's Lane was vacated because of the acquisition of the land, all the Club equipment was left in the pavilion and the mower shed. In the pavilion were housed numerous folding chairs and deck chairs, folding card tables (used for teas), crockery and urns. In the mower shed were two mowers. In the copse alongside the mower shed was the large club roller, and of course on the ground itself there were two large sight-screens. These latter were dismantled and the rollers on which they ran were stored by the simple expedient of hiding them deep at the bottom of the haystacks in Weedon's stack-yard at the north side of the ground. These were retrieved intact after the war and are still in use today. The roller also survived and is a proud relic of the old days, which is still in use. No one knows the age of the roller, but it seems to have been in use down at Highwood Hill ground before the First World War!

The army contingent, who used the ground as their gun and camp site, erected a guard room and an officers' mess. The men were housed in tents for a while, later Nissen huts were provided. Although the grounds, including part of Hendon Park Garden and the cricket ground had been requisitioned by the Army, nothing was said about the cricket pavilion and this was actually not part of the Army requisition.



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That particular winter was a bitter one and feeling some concern about the Club equipment a visit was made to the ground to see what conditions were like. It was found that the pavilion had been forced open and was in fact being used by some of the troops as a sleeping hut. All the crockery and urns had vanished and so had the chairs and tables except one or two which were obviously being used by the troops. The mower hut had been demolished and used for firewood, leaving the mowers to rust in the rain, snow and wet where they stood in the wood.

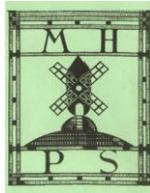
A request was immediately made at the guardroom of the camp to see the Camp Commander and in due course an adjutant appeared who, on being told that there was reason to believe that the property of the Club had been commandeered unlawfully and was being used by the officers and men in the Camp, went into a high dudgeon and flatly denied that anything had been touched or was being used. He was shown very rapidly to be entirely misinformed. The three tables and six chairs being used in the guard-room were up-ended and there displayed for all eyes to see was the Club monomark burnt into the underside of each article of furniture. The poor adjutant's face was a sight for sore eyes! He was visibly deflated and began to preface all his further remarks with "Sir".

An inspection of the officers' mess and quarters revealed more tables and chairs, including deck chairs, but nothing was ever found of the crockery and urns – after all, it is difficult to brand cups, saucers, teapots and spoons with a hot branding iron. Eventually, it was agreed an inventory should be made of all the furniture being used – one or two tables and chairs were removed from the camp but others were left as, if they had been taken away, the men would have been left without a stick of furniture of any kind. The inventory was signed and acknowledged by the adjutant who agreed to advise the War authorities and recommend some payment in respect thereof by way of requisition rent. The mowers were taken away and a claim put in for compensation for the damage caused by the dismantling of the mower shed.

After a good deal of argument, a settlement of £100 was agreed and the money paid over, and a requisition rent was then negotiated in respect of the use of the pavilion as this was obviously going to be used by the men on the gun site whether we liked it or not. The compensation was fairly nominal but was increased several times over the war years.

The compensation and lump sum payment and requisition rent were all banked and provided a valuable nest-egg at the end of hostilities to enable the Club to launch itself again in the brave new post war world. Not all clubs were so fortunate. The settlement of £100 may not seem to be very much in these hyper-inflationary days, but it did represent at the time quite a considerable sum and was, all in all, a satisfactory outcome for the Club.

The battle to obtain a requisition upon the pavilion was really audacious, indeed it was outrageous. The Army had requisitioned the ground it is true and any money paid in respect thereof went either to the tenant (the Weedons, of whom the Club were sub-tenants so far as the cricket was concerned), or the owner of the whole estate. Therefore, any requisition in respect of the pavilion should, rightly, have resulted in any payment going to the Club's immediate landlord, or her overall



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landlord, the owner of the property. But the Army did not seem to query this and naturally the Club's representative did not either, and so, with tongue in cheek, the requisition for the pavilion was insisted upon in the Club's name.

A few years after the end of the war, a query was raised by the new owner of the whole estate about the payment of the requisition rent to the Club, with the suggestion that any amounts received were the rightful property of the landlord or his tenant. After an interview in which it was pointed out that he had possession of the pavilion which was really Club property, having been provided and erected by them at considerable expense just before the outbreak of war, the landlord agreed to let bygones be bygones and the matter was allowed to rest. After all, what could we do with a dismantled pavilion, especially one that had been neglected for so long?"

JL / 17.10.2013 / End