

## Cricket at Lincoln Christ's Hospital Girls' High School

The less said about the state of men's cricket in England at the moment the better, but at a time when we should be celebrating the England Women's retention of 'The Ashes', it seems appropriate to recall the time when cricket was played at Lincoln Christ's Hospital Girls' High School (LHS).

The Wikipedia article on women's cricket informs us that its history can be traced back to a report in *The Reading Mercury* on 26<sup>th</sup> July 1745 when a match took place between the villages of Bramley and Hambledon on Gosden Common near Guildford in Surrey. Eleven 'maids' from each side, all dressed in white, played out a closely fought contest in which the Hambledon girls won by 127 'notches' to 119. Historically the term 'score' related to the original method of keeping the tally of runs in which the 'scorer' made a notch with a knife on a staff. Apparently there was a large and enthusiastic crowd at the game, and the girls bowled, batted, ran and 'caught' as well as most men cricketers could do.

The Wikipedia article informs us that early matches were not necessarily genteel affairs! A match held appropriately enough at the Artillery Ground in 1747 between a team from Charlton and another from Westdean and Chilgrove in Sussex spilled over into the following day after it was interrupted by crowd trouble. Contemporary records show that women's matches were played quite frequently in Sussex, Hampshire and Surrey, with single women pitted against their married counterparts, and heavy betting on the side. Prizes ranged from barrels of ale to pairs of lace gloves.

The first county match was held in 1811 between Surrey and Hampshire at Ball's Pond in Middlesex. Two noblemen underwrote the game with 1,000 guineas, and its participants ranged in age from 14 to 60. Originally, the article tells us, deliveries were bowled underarm, and legend has it that the round-arm bowling action was pioneered in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in order to avoid the bowler becoming ensnared in her skirts! In fact, round-arm was devised by Tom Walker in the 1790s. The women's Cricket Association was founded in 1926, and the England team first played against 'The Rest' at Leicester in 1933, undertaking the first international tour to Australia in 1934-5. Since then women's cricket has evolved, and has become a microcosm of the men's game, and played at every level and at every form of the game including the '20-20' format.

A significant milestone occurred in 2009 when England batsman Claire Taylor was named one of the prestigious cricketing magazine *Wisden's* five cricketers of the year, the first woman to be honoured with the award in its 120-year history. More can be read about the history of women's cricket by referring to the full Wikipedia article, and by consulting a more detailed history at [www.womenscrickethistory.org](http://www.womenscrickethistory.org)

My good friend Chris Pickering, who shares my passion for cricket, has reminded me that Arran Brindle, who is a Sports Consultant at Greenwich House Independent School in Louth, is an opening bat for England. She holds the record for the opening partnership in a Test with Caroline Atkins, and later made her first Test century against Australia at Hove in 2005 to save England from defeat, and enable them to win the Ashes. In the recent Ashes series, Arran was a significant member of the team's success, topping the batting table with 244 runs and a highly commendable average of 61.0. She continues to play for Louth in the ECB Men's Premier League, and became the first woman to score a century in men's semi-professional cricket, making 128 against Market Deeping in 2011. Arran has only recently announced her retirement from top class women's cricket.

I have followed cricket for most of my life, but I was surprised to read in the LHS magazines that cricket was played at the Girls' High School since its early days in the last decade of the nineteenth century. The first reference to the game is in the third edition of the magazine in July 1899. The School lacked a playing field at the time, and the article on cricket informed us that their '...own playground was still coming', and the girls were only able to have a cricket practice once a week on the Training College ground (now Bishop Grosseteste University). The then Principal, Canon Rowe, had kindly allowed the ground to be available on Saturday mornings. The report told readers that a 'goodly band of future "Mrs W.G.s" (a reference to the legendary cricketer WG Grace) assembled regularly, and that the eleven 'was in a very promising position'. The batting was good, the style being 'almost professional', but alas, the bowling was 'terribly weak'! Moreover, the fielders still needed a great deal of practice in catching, and they were urged to remember to send the ball up to the wicket-keeper to reach her *first bounce*. This will be of interest to any cricketer reading this article, because until recent times it was regarded as best practice to reach the wicket-keeper on the full, but fashions have recently changed, more especially in the shorter forms of the game, and in particular in the '20-20' format.

It seems from reading between the lines that cricket had been played earlier than 1899, and in following editions of the magazine it was mentioned intermittently and randomly. The Christmas 1900 edition reported that the first cricket match for two seasons was played against Nottingham at the end of the summer term. Things must have changed quite dramatically because the bowling and fielding were described as good, but the batting was 'disgraceful' (no pun on the great WG, I assume!). All the eleven completely lost their heads (I will resist the temptation to mention recent England men's performances!) when they had to face *underhand* bowling, and although Nottingham had no less than seven 'ducks' in the first innings, they won by two runs. It is also quite surprising that they played two innings, presumably because of the anticipated low scores? It is unclear whether Nottingham was a school, or a city team.

In the summer of 1901, cricket came 'rather as a relief' after the more traditional girls' games; tennis and hockey. More girls were joining and Mr Ruston had kindly allowed the team to use the former Ruston playing field to the west of Lincoln prison on Greetwell Road. One advantage of this was that there were 'very few expenses'. The bowling and fielding were described as 'weak' and the batting 'far from good', but the reporter optimistically wrote that with more practice she was certain that the girls could hold their own with any other school! An appeal was made for more matches, but this would be impossible unless there was 'a great improvement'. Three 'golden rules' of cricket were then poetically invoked by someone with the initials 'B.O.P';

"In batting hold the bat upright,  
And bat the ball with all your might.  
In bowling don't exceed your strength,  
And vary both the pace and length.  
In fielding put both hands to the ball,  
And butter-fingers is worst of all."

Underneath is added, 'Please note the last line – the ball won't bite!'

It's strange how fashions change in games, including the language used by commentators. Nasser Hussein, for example, seems to have coined the term 'taking the pace off the ball'. We used to call it 'bowling slower'! Unfortunately I can't find one of the cricketers with the initials K.P.!

The year 1902 seemed to have seen an improvement in the skills of the game when a strange illness which had interfered with tennis appeared to have benefited cricket considerably, with the result that the staff were considering organising a match with Nottingham once more. It was also regretted that they were unable to arrange matches with other teams as there were no girls' cricket clubs within reasonable distance. As it happens a match was arranged with Nottingham High School that year, but it was reported in the later edition of the magazine that the match was sadly cancelled because of the rain! Memories of many such disappointments at Lincoln School in the 1950s were evoked!

Things seemed to be going from bad to worse in 1904 when the report bemoaned a 'disgracefully slack season, badly attended practices, and numberless complaints from the parents of small children' who, because of the small numbers, had to play with the 'rough' older ones! "Why don't more join?" was the plaintiff cry! Things did not get much better in 1905, when the LHS team was soundly beaten by a Nottingham High School 'scratch' team in which Nottingham won the two-innings game by '86 runs and 2 wickets'. I'm not quite sure how such a result could be valid, but perhaps the rules of scoring were different in those days! A similar idiosyncratic result occurred in the next game against Sleaford High School, when the team had to retire in their 'usual state of beatenness' after it was suddenly decided that they had to catch the early train back to Lincoln! One feature of the season was that the First and Second Forms and the Kindergarten were introduced to the game, thus possibly forming the first Cricket Academy in England!

The cunning plan must have worked, because the next report on cricket, in the Christmas 1911 edition of the LHS magazine, celebrated one of the most successful seasons the School had enjoyed. The girls had been most enthusiastic, and there was an 'immense improvement in the play, especially in the fielding'. Five matches were played against Church House Ladies, Lincoln Training College, the Old Girls, and the Mistresses. The first three were won by the School, although perhaps understandably the last two were lost against older and more experienced opposition. The curious scoring system was once more in evidence, with one result being recorded as a win for the School by 56 runs and two wickets!

Cricket seemed to continue to enjoy some popularity in the months leading up to the Great War, and indeed during the four years of combat, although matches were restricted to local rivals. The Christmas 1914 edition of the LHS magazine reported that the game was not as popular as hockey, but that all those who did attend the practices were keen. Three matches were played that summer, with two against the Training College and one against the Old Girls. Two were lost, but one against the College was won. For the first time, the names of the members of the eleven were included, with a brief description of their talents. N Hewitt was advised not to try to hit every ball to leg! I wonder if 'cow corner' had been invented in those days? Encouragingly the next entry showed that her batting had shown a decided improvement, and her wicket-keeping was also good. By 1916, however, her batting had become 'unsteady'! Practice makes perfect, however, and in 1917 she played well throughout her final season at LHS, being described as a quick and reliable wicket-keeper

with her batting much improved. By this time, the celebrated Headmistress Miss Lucie Savill had become President of the Cricket Club.

Cricket continued to be played fairly consistently during the 1920s, and House Cricket seems to have been introduced for the first time. On 1<sup>st</sup> July 1922, St Hugh beat Fleming by 52 runs to 45. During the same year the cricket eleven entertained Retford and won a closely fought game. The return fixture at Retford, however, resulted in a win for LHS by over 100 runs. I wonder if they caught the early train home?

The latter half of the 1920s appears to have been the heyday of cricket at LHS. In addition to matches against the Training College, Retford and the Old Girls, more matches were played against teams such as Louth, and House Cricket became much more organised with more frequent inter-house games, and some inter-year matches. Some interesting First Eleven Cricket 'Criticisms' included;

'Her fielding shows no anticipation. She must realise a fielder is not a fixture.'

'Her batting needs more force and variety.'

'She must learn to play an "off" ball to the "off" side and use her wrists.'

She must try to disguise her bowling tactics more.'

Her throwing in is too vigorous to be useful.'

There was also one rather curious 'criticism'; 'Her batting would improve with more varied length and pace.' Did the critic mean her bowling, I wonder?

The trail appears to go cold as we enter the 1930s, and it seems that the game of 'rounders' became more and more popular to the apparent detriment of cricket, whilst hockey and tennis retained their popularity until LHS closed in 1974. As with most trends in schools, much was dependent on the enthusiasm of members of staff, and the motivation which they were able to arouse in their pupils. For a brief interlude on the 1930s it appeared that cricket might have undergone a revival as in the summer of 1933 it was reported that cricket had been taken up with great enthusiasm in the Middle and Upper School. 'Valuable coaching' from Miss Buck appeared to have been the catalyst for this upsurge in interest. However the revival was short-lived, and after a couple of matches against Louth and the Old Girls, there were no further reports of cricket in the subsequent magazines.

There is no evidence of any competitive cricket being played in 1938, but there must have been some interest in the game as a party from the School went to Trent Bridge, Nottingham, to see the second day of the Test Match between England and Australia. Sixth-former Nancy Thompson reported that, on the first day England had batted and were in a strong position with only three wickets down for 417 runs, so they were all hoping to see a record score. The party had the opportunity to inspect the English team at the nets, and they picked out such famous names as Edrich, Compton and Verity. Then the Australians came out and they had the thrill of seeing the cricketing legend Don Bradman bat from only a few yards away.

The umpires led the Australians onto the hallowed turf, closely followed by the England pair Paynter and Compton. Although disappointed to see Compton caught, the party was hoping that England

would declare so that they could see the great Bradman bat. It was midway through the afternoon session when Wally Hammond finally declared the innings closed, and how the crowd cheered when Fingleton was out and 'The Don' arrived at the crease. However, after being given one chance, Bradman was eventually caught by wicket-keeper Les Ames and was out for 51 runs.

The 'day of thrills' came to an end at 6.30 pm, and the party returned to Lincoln having had the satisfaction of seeing seven new cricket records, and of course the unforgettable experience of seeing the legendary Bradman bat. Thanks were expressed to Miss Ineson, who organised the trip, and to Miss Ashley, Miss Hall and Miss Malleeson, who were the chaperones. For those who are interested, the match was drawn. England declared on 658 for 8, and Australia made 411 all out in their first innings. Having been invited to follow on, the Australians scored 427 for 6 in their second innings. There were seven centuries including two double centuries by Paynter (England) and McCabe (Australia). Clearly the Trent Bridge wicket lived up to its reputation!

Miss IV Cleave took over the Headship of LHS from Miss Lucie Savill in 1943, and I have been reliably informed by an alumna that she was not an avid fan of the game of cricket. Apparently she told the girls, "It will develop your shoulders, my dear"! And since Miss Cleave was not a person to be challenged, that appeared to be that!

Unfortunately there are no photographs in the Garton Archive of the girls at LHS playing cricket. However we do have a picture of the girls practising their tennis skills on the LHS playing field on Nettleham Road, and another of girls playing rounders. These are reproduced below. One wonders how the girls managed to serve so vigorously without developing their shoulders!



Mass synchronised serving on the LHS Nettleham Road playing field



A study in concentration in a rounders match

PE teacher Mrs Owen has informed me that the girls do a small amount of cricket in PE lessons during the summer term at Lincoln Christ's Hospital School. Last year the School entered the Under 13 and Under 15 Lady Taverners Indoor Cricket competition, and did well to reach the final, only to be beaten by the Lincoln Minster School. The School is hoping to enter the competition again this coming year, and the Lincolnshire Cricket Development Officer, Andrew Hibberd, has offered a couple of training sessions, so the girls are hoping to be much better prepared than last year.

Let's hope that the fine example by the England women's team may act as an incentive for girls in Lincoln and elsewhere in the UK to develop an interest in the game, provided of course that it doesn't develop their shoulders too much!

### **Acknowledgement**

Many thanks to Chris Pickering for proof-reading the article and checking the statistics.

### **Appendix**

The following poem was written by Joyce Midworth of FormV2, and published in the Midsummer 1935 edition of the LHS magazine.

**A Song of Cricket**  
***(Adapted from Macaulay's Horatius)***

But the bowler's brow was sad,  
And darkly looked he at the ball,  
And darkly at 'midoff'.  
'Their thousand will go up tonight,  
Before the stumps are drawn,  
And if you miss another catch  
You'll regret you were born.'

The out spake the wicket-keeper,  
The captain of the team,  
'Will someone tell the deep out there,  
To field; not stand and dream!'  
So then the bowler took his run  
And bowled with all his might.  
The waiting batsman smiled a smile,  
Which turned the fielders white.

Then whirling up his broad bat  
With both wrists gripping tight,  
He rushed to meet the coming ball,  
And smote with all his might.  
The 'midoff' in a sort of daze  
Right deftly stopped the ball.  
The batsman tried to sneak a run  
Before his bails could fall.

But with a click of triumph  
Fell all his shaken bails,  
His splintered wicket was outspread  
Just like a peacock's tail.  
And a long shout of triumph  
Rose from the people there,  
As to the cool pavilion,  
The batsman did repair.

Joyce Midworth was an eminent and active member of the LHS Old Girls' Association, and worked for many years in the Lincoln Education Office at 4 Lindum Road.

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**February 2014**

