

# **BYFLEET CRICKET CLUB**

## **A BRIEF HISTORY 1876-2000**

### **THE EARLY YEARS**

Reference is made in an old cash book to a meeting held on March 14th 1876, chaired by the Reverend Newton J. Spicer (who was to become the first President), at which the rules of the club were adopted. The first Secretary was Mr H. S. Holroyd and the connection with the Holroyd family was to continue unbroken until the death of Mr W. L. Holroyd in 1949.

The minute books do not cover proceedings in the first two years, but it is recorded that in 1878 the opening balance was £4-19s-4d. The annual subscription was 5/- and the main item of expenditure was the upkeep of the ground in Parvis Road. This was a task undertaken by the 'ground man', Mr John Chapman, who was paid 5/- per week throughout the season to maintain the pitch and practice area in good condition. Additionally, Chapman was paid 10/- for each match he played or umpired. He was later able to negotiate free dinner on match days.

At this time there was no pavilion, but in 1878 it was agreed to hire a tent for home games from the Byfleet Horticultural Society. This luxury cost £3-15-0 that season. We can assume that this, or a similar, arrangement continued for some years, for it was not until 1886 that the subject of a pavilion appeared in the minutes.

Before then, however, the club survived some crisis years. In 1882 a General Meeting was called to discuss the advisability of the club continuing. The standard of the playing surface was poor and the only way forward would be completely to relay the turf, a project which would entail considerable expense. The minute book records the decision to proceed and it was decided to invite Mr Hearne of Lords Cricket Ground to give his opinions as to how best to tackle the ground improvements. His alternative suggestions were: 1) to lift 40yds x 30yds of turf, remove 6" of soil and mix this with 60 loads of clay, replace and level this mixture and then re-lay the turf. Cost 4d per yard plus the cost of the clay. 2) as the first option but without the addition of the clay. Cost 3d per yard. 3) to create a new pitch at an alternative site behind the Rectory at similar rates. The second option was taken.

The strain on finances over the next few years became evident as Mr Chapman, now on 15/- per week plus 10/- per match, was found to be too expensive and was replaced by Etherington at 8/- per week and a similar sum per match.

It is during this period that the subject of a pavilion began to dominate committee meetings, and in 1886 three or four estimates were obtained. A five year agreement was reached with the landowner, Mr H. Locke-King, for a rent of £5 per annum and Major Collis-Browne made a kind offer of contributing 1/3 of the cost of a new pavilion. Unfortunately the minute book ceases to record committee meetings, only containing reports of Annual General Meetings in the years 1889-1898. There is no direct reference in these minutes as to the date of erection of the pavilion, but in

1891 it was agreed to purchase an enamel washstand, implying the existence of a pavilion at this date.

Fixtures around this time were usually played on a 'home' and 'out' basis and included matches against local rivals Leatherhead, Chertsey, Shepperton, Laleham, Surbiton, Hampton Wick and Oatlands Park. Although scorebooks prior to 1903 have not survived, fixture cards from 1881 onwards are, with a few exceptions, retained in the club's records.

The period around the turn of the century saw the main fund raising activities take the form of concerts and dances. Cowley's Band often provided the music at the dances while the concerts would feature such local groups as the Meister Glee Singers and the Byfleet Lodge Amateur Orchestra, while the refreshments in the form of a supper were for many years provided (at around 2/6d per head) by Wiltshires of Weybridge. Ticket prices, including supper, would be from 1/- to 4/- for a concert whilst admission to dances would be 15/- for a double, 7/6d for ladies and 10/6d for gentlemen. For many years expenses for the evening included 7/6d for a policeman. These functions were initially held at Weybridge Village Hall, but after the opening of Byfleet Village Hall in 1898 (thanks to the generosity of Mr F. C. Stoop), gatherings were subsequently held there. Guests attending these functions included numerous members of the Holroyd family, Lady Louisa Egerton, Major Collis-Browne, Surgeon General Thompson, Colonel Engledine and, from 1895, a certain Mr F. C. Stoop. These social gatherings continued well into the new century, the only break being the cancellation of the dance scheduled for January 5th 1900 at only five days' notice, due to the (Boer) war.

## **THE STOOP ERA**

The 'Stoop' era saw the club become established as a leading centre in the development of club cricket with social gatherings galore. F. C. Stoop moved to the area in 1895 and by the following year he had taken the position of President, a position which he relinquished in 1932, shortly before his death. His 36 year involvement bears its legacy even today as events during that era were to unfold.

1897 saw the pavilion roof rethatched at a cost of £10. This sum was raised by special subscription by seven members of the club. An estimate of £40 by Tarrant, the local builder, was accepted for mains water to be connected together with the provision of a soakaway cesspit, and in 1903 the pavilion roof was tiled. Once again this was funded by special subscription, this time by 21 members.

1894 gave mention of Byfleet Football Club using the ground and then in 1900 it was proposed that tennis should be played. As an offshoot of the cricket club, Byfleet Tennis Club was formed and used the ground in 1901 for a rent of £8, and this continued until 1909 when the tennis club proposed moving to its own site (presumably in Dartnell Park which has only recently been vacated). Ladies hockey could also be seen at Parvis Road during the winter months.

At a dinner held at the Queen's Head on 17th August 1903 a presentation in the form of a gold watch was made to Mr F. Bullock who had acted as umpire for the club for the past '29 years'. Whether this was error in calculation will never be known, but the club at that time was only in its 28th year.

The 1906 accounts show an expenditure of £9 for a horse, which was used to pull the mowing machine, with associated costs of £3-13-6 for the horse keep and £1-12-6 for a set of horse boots, to protect the ground from the effects of the horse's

hooves. During this particular period horses seemed to come and go fairly regularly, for in 1908 £4 was spent on hiring a horse for the season while in the following year we can assume that a horse was again purchased since the accounts show an income of 10/- for the sale of a dead horse. The minutes indicate that for fear of intervention by the S.P.C.A. the horse was shot since it could only stand with the help of a sling!

Although dances and concerts were regular features in the Cricket Club's calendar, it was not until 1909 that the first annual dinner was held, taking place in May of that year at the village hall. One of the speakers, Mr J. W. Bashford (captain 1894-1902), reminded the assembled diners of the recent match at Cobham when the Byfleet side had set off with just seven players. Three more were enlisted on the way, but as the match unfolded and despite all the efforts of the ten men, the ninth (and last) wicket fell with 40 runs still required. Cobham kindly agreed to the village postman stepping in as the eleventh man and he was able to hold his end up while the necessary runs were scored for victory!

Membership numbers increased around this time and in 1914 a second eleven was formed, but this was to be short lived. The A.G.M. in April 1915 recorded that 25 of the club's members had joined His Majesty's forces and it became impossible for the club to operate normally due to the war. A decision was reached to rent out the ground to Derisley for grazing sheep, while those members who could, continued to pay half rate subscriptions so that any necessary maintenance costs could be met until such time as cricket could be played again.

1919 saw cricket recommence after the war and the ground was rented out for up to two evenings per week to Byfleet Village Cricket Club until such time as their ground was ready. There is no mention of where that ground might be or for how long this arrangement with the other local club was in force. By 1921 there was a healthy fixture list for first and second elevens of 26 and 10 matches respectively, and there was even consideration given to running a third eleven in 1922. These post war years were certainly halcyon days for the club. Membership in 1921 is recorded as being 141 and the finances were balanced thanks to a donation by the President, F. C. Stoop. The resurrection of the club after the war was largely due to the efforts of Secretary W. A. Giles whose "untiring energy" was instrumental in helping the club to the "present strong position which the club has attained".

There were great celebrations during cricket week in 1921 on the 25th anniversary of Mr Stoop's Presidency of the club. A flagstaff was erected by the members and the speech made by Mr J. W. Bashford on this occasion is recorded in the minute book and the club has a photograph taken at the time. Although the flagstaff was taken down in 1979 when the wooden pavilion was replaced by the current brick built structure, the engraved brass plate which was attached to the pole is now on display in the new pavilion.

The basis of continuing cricket at Parvis Road was laid amid a potential crisis in 1922. A large amount of land was transferred in ownership from Locke-King to the builder, Tarrant, but Mr Stoop stepped in and secured the cricket ground - an area of 4 acres, 3 rods and 9 poles - which he was then able to rent to the cricket club for a period of ten years at £5 per year. Thanks to this period of security the club was able to go from strength to strength. The annual cricket week became firmly established and was renowned for not only the standard of the cricket but for the variety of other entertainment in the form of dances, dinners, gymkhanas, water carnivals on the Wey Navigation and of course post match entertainment of the players and their ladies at

West Hall by the President or by the captain at his residence, for example, at Anningsley Park, Ottershaw, the home of H. C. Hextall ( captain 1924-1928).

A typical Cricket Week would be such as occurred in 1920:

Monday July 20th	11am	Match v Stock Exchange XI
Tuesday July 21st	11am	Match v B. Doresa's XI
	8pm	Gymkhana on the ground. Events include: Boot and shoe race Animal race Fancy dress race Blindfold team race Boat race - on the canal Flower pot race for ladies

(Explanations and rules for all these events were detailed in the Cricket Week programme.)

The band of the Queen's Royal West Surrey Regiment will play during the evening.

Wednesday July 14th	11am	Match v MCC
Thursday July 15th	11 am	Match v F. M. Stoop's XI
	9.30pm	Dance at Village Hall (fancy dress)
Friday July 16th	11am	Match v Butterflies
		Invitation from the President to the teams

for supper at West Hall.

Saturday July 17th	11am	Match v Eton Ramblers
	8.30pm	Cafe Chantant at the Tennis Club

As can be seen, the week was packed full of activity and the strength of the club through the 1920's and 1930's can be gauged by the fact that the 'week' continued much as the above example and the opportunity to take part either as a member or a guest was very much treasured.

Anyone who is familiar with the ground at Byfleet will be aware of the most unusual, if not unique, layout of the two 'squares'. The ground being relatively narrow prohibits the use of a square as wide as most clubs enjoy. The heavy usage led to a decision in 1922 to build a second square, end on but slightly separated from the first square, and also at the same time land to the north of the squares was 'taken in' in order to extend the length of the ground. At the same time extensions to the pavilion were authorised at a cost of £166 and in 1926 Mr J. A. Tulk presented a clock for the pavilion. The club records hold a photograph of the ceremony which took place during cricket week of 1926. The clock remained in use for about 50 years by which time difficulty in obtaining spares meant that repairs became impossible. It was also in this year, 1926, that Mr F. C. Stoop 'explained his wishes and intentions with regard to his gift to the club of the cricket ground and read a precis of the Deed of Gift'. He endeavoured to secure this by a clause in his will, but although the Deed is still in the club's possession it was later found to be invalid in law. Such was the strength of the club at this time that in 1930 a committee decision was made not to elect as playing members three applicants who did not live locally! It is also recorded that in 1928, as well as a ground man (Chandler) a gentleman by the name of Newton was engaged to bowl in the nets on practice days and to umpire in matches. This was the era when the

celebrated B.J.T.Bosanquet played for the club. He had previously appeared for Eton, Oxford, Middlesex and England and to him is attributed the development of the "googly" or "bosey" as it has also been known.

Apart from cricket, the ground was also used for croquet and an application for use by the Woking Lacrosse Club was approved, although a request for Sunday play was declined. Against the backdrop of high unemployment the committee felt it its duty to offer the ground man winter work, but since meaningful work was not always possible during the winter months the club asked local householders to look for the opportunity of offering the occasional week's work gardening or odd-jobbing.

1932 heralded the end of an extraordinary era for the club. At a committee meeting on March 8th a letter from Mr F. C. Stoop was read. He resigned his office as President owing to ill health and enclosed a cheque for £130 to wipe out the club's deficit. The reply from the Hon. Secretary, Mr G. G. Hill, is reproduced in the minute book. Mr and Mrs Stoop celebrated their golden wedding anniversary that same year, but not long after that the Cricket Club's and Byfleet village's greatest benefactor was to pass away. As mentioned above, Mr Stoop's ultimate gift to the club of the ground where he and his family had spent so much of their time was to prove impossible to maintain in law, but extended negotiations between the executors and the Charities Commission resulted in the Trustees of the Deed being granted a 90 year lease at a nominal rent. However, should cricket for any reason cease to be played on the ground vacant possession would return to the Stoop estate.

Although membership began to decline in the early thirties (the restriction of membership to residents of Byfleet and Pyrford was lifted), the club still looked to improve the ground and its facilities. When it became apparent that house building was to commence on land to the east of the ground negotiations were opened with Tarrant, the landowner, for the acquisition of a strip of land 18 feet wide on which grew a row of fine oak trees. A price of £300 was agreed and the conveyance deeds are still in the club's possession. However, the proximity of houses being built in Tarrant's field (Queens Avenue) was a cause for concern and the club undertook to investigate the cost of insuring against causing injury to the residents. As the decade progressed the shortage of players became more acute to the extent that games had on occasions to be scratched and upon the outbreak of war in 1939 the ground was once again handed over to Derisley for grazing sheep. Once again members were asked to maintain half rate subscriptions. On 30th April 1941 the ground and pavilion were requisitioned by the War Office at a rent of £30 per annum and Dr P. C. Alexander gave an account of his dealings, on behalf of the club, with the Welsh Guards. This occupation of the ground continued until 16th November 1944. After the war, Harrods (acting for the club) submitted a claim for £500 to cover damage to the pavilion and ground since its occupation by the army. Eventually compensation was settled at £370 plus 3 months rehabilitation rent and surveyors' fees.

## **POST WAR**

While the club was indebted to Dr. Alexander, Dr. V. G. Ward and Mr George J. Bruzard for their careful stewardship of the club's affairs during the war, the task of rebuilding the playing strength in the post war years fell largely to Walter F. Goold. Walter first appeared in the club averages in 1928, topping the batting averages the following year, and became established in the thirties as a highly respected player (in 1935 he topped both the batting and bowling averages, a feat which he repeated in

1953). In 1949, the annual report records, he managed to score a 50 batting left handed, being handicapped by a broken finger. His enthusiasm in a period of considerable hardship and times of material shortages and rationing was instrumental in resuscitating the club after the war had ended. Recorded in the minutes of the A.G.M. held on 26th March 1947 were the following words:

" The Committee desires to place on record their appreciation of the great work performed by the captain, who not only made a large part of the runs and obtained the most wickets, but arranged all the matches, acted as team secretary throughout the season and, in fact, undertook the greater part of the running of the club as a whole. Without his efforts it is doubtful whether the club could have got going again"

In 1946 agreement was reached with the Hawks Hockey Club who had requested the use of the ground during the winter months. This was subject to satisfactory arrangements being made with the Lacrosse Club. It would seem that the Lacrosse Club vacated the ground since their rental ceases to appear in the accounts, being replaced by the 4 guineas paid by the Hawks. As the relationship with the Hawks became established the cricket club was to benefit from a certain amount of overlapping membership as the club sought to re-establish the reputation it had gained during the inter-war years. Mains electricity was connected to the pavilion in 1947, at the suggestion and expense of the hockey club, and then in 1950 the Hawks opened negotiations to establish a second hockey pitch on the ground and to increase the changing accommodation by building a new changing room alongside the existing pavilion. After discussions with the Stoop Trustees, plans were submitted and approved and the new building was erected in 1952, with a water tower being added in 1955. The increased changing space allowed more room in the old pavilion and this was used to expand the bar area. In 1964 a major rearrangement of the bar was overseen by Mr A. J. Pollard and it then remained relatively unchanged until the pavilion's demolition in 1979. The Hawks Hockey Club's tenancy ended in 1967 when new facilities were obtained in Whiteley Village, but the extra changing room was officially transferred to the cricket club, after a good deal of discussion, for the sum of £100.

The death in 1949 of Mr W. L. Holroyd severed links between the club and the Holroyd family which stretched back to the formation days of 1876. W. L. Holroyd had himself been a member since 1887 and he had served the club in many capacities in his 62 years of association.

1957 saw the retirement of Lintott, the groundsman. He was taken on in 1932 and appreciation for his work was a regular feature of the annual reports. During the war he continued to tend the square even while the ground was under the control of the War Office and he could often be seen working until nightfall. A tribute to him in the annual report of the 1947 season (a full 10 years before his eventual retirement) reads:

"Lintott's work on the ground has once again been invaluable, and both pitch and outfield were in first class order during the season. He was still only able to work in his spare time, all of which he must have given to the club. The Sunday fixtures added considerably to his work and it must be remembered that he also umpires every home match and clears up ground and pavilion afterwards".

In 1957 the Central Electricity Authority proposed the erection of a pylon at the northern end of the ground. The committee fought the proposal at all costs, but to no

avail. The pylon was eventually erected in 1961 and the cables overhang the ground to this day.

Despite the most strenuous efforts, the club never regained the standing it enjoyed in the inter war years. The affiliation to the club in 1952 of the Byfleet Falcons - a group of local schoolboys from in and around Byfleet - hopefully provided a source of new playing members, and indeed a number of Falcons graduated into regular senior players. Amongst these was Robin Jackman, later to play for Surrey and England.

There was a resurgence in the 1960's with full fixture lists for two elevens - around 40 games for the first team and well over 20 for the seconds. In 1963 Robin Jackman headed both the batting and bowling averages, while in 1965 Walter Goold, in his 37th season with the club, took the batting trophy.

In that same year the death occurred of the club president, Dr V. G. Ward. Dr Ward joined the club in 1907, was secretary 1908-1913, captain 1921-1923 and took up the presidency in 1946. He was instrumental in resolving, to the club's benefit, the complexities of the Stoop legacy, and later in guiding the club, in the absence of organised cricket, through the war years. Two years later saw the death of W. A. Giles, secretary in 1895, 1905-1907, and 1919-1921, who was largely responsible, as mentioned earlier, in resurrecting the club after the First World War.

The mid sixties saw an extension to the pavilion to incorporate a larger kitchen and also a scoring area. At the same time an interior partition was moved in order to enlarge the bar. Glazing was installed along half the length of the pavilion, all these alterations costing the club £200. There is no doubt that hitherto the club had been the preserve to a large extent of the comfortable classes with the emphasis unashamedly on such factors as schooling and pedigree. But it was in the "swinging sixties" that a more relaxed attitude became apparent. 1967 was probably the club's most successful season to date since the war. Membership expanded, results were good, and in order to boost bar income it was decided to hire the recreation ground pitch on occasions during the following season so that two 'home' games could be played on the same day. In 1968 a tour to Gibraltar was organised by J. J. Buzaglo, a Gibraltarian by birth and a club member since 1966. Although the tour party was supplemented by a few guest players, the tour was an unqualified success. Cricket lovers on the Rock welcomed the visit of a team from "England's green and pleasant land" which had provided a shot in the arm for the sport in Gibraltar. "These popular cricketers have played some wonderful stuff, and their sporting behaviour on and off the field has been a great credit to their club..... Please come back again, Byfleet" (Gibraltar weekly paper 'Voix', August 16th 1968). Back in England, the 1968 season was one of appalling weather. The first Saturday match to be completed was played on June 1st, while in September the last three weekends were entirely washed out. Byfleet was flooded and rescue boats could be seen sailing down the High Road. As had occurred in the earlier successful years, dances were a regular feature of the social diary, these being organised by A. J. (Jim) Pollard. Not only were they social successes but they usually generated a healthy profit which was vital in a period when the club's finances were on occasions perilously close to disaster.

Late in the decade the deaths of two more of the club's longest serving members are recorded in the annual reports. Dr. P. C. Alexander (whose stewardship of the club through the Second World War is described earlier) was only narrowly succeeded by one of his close colleagues in that mission, George J. Bruzaud. Mr Bruzaud was elected a member of the club in 1904 and became a committee member in 1912.

Although not holding any of the major committee posts he played a leading part in directing the club's affairs for over 50 years. His greatest legacy, however, is the fact that he was meticulous and orderly and these attributes have benefitted future generations in that he had a profound interest in maintaining accurate records of the club's affairs. It is a tribute to him that much of the information required to compile these notes is still available. Upon his death a host of papers were donated to the club by his daughter, Miss Patience Bruzard, and these are now stored along with other archive material at the Surrey Records Office.

The recovery in the sixties was, however, short lived. By the late 60's and into the early 70's the club was suddenly struggling to raise even one representative side. A working party called to relay the water main was so poorly supported that the first few games in 1969 were played with no running water in the pavilion! It was around this period that the local leagues were being formed and when Byfleet were not invited to join the Surrey Cricketers League a number of traditional fixtures were lost as other clubs entered into the competition. However, a group of other local clubs, including Byfleet, combined to form the North Surrey/South Middlesex League and fixtures began in 1972. It was a reluctant decision by the club to enter into league cricket, but the alternative was to lose an increasing number of Saturday fixtures as league cricket expanded. The entry into league cricket came at a time when the club's fortunes were at a low ebb. In the inaugural season Byfleet finished bottom of both the first and second eleven sections. Difficulty in raising sides led to suggestions of a merger with another local club. There were two possibilities, and discussions were held at committee level with both B.A.C., whose ground was right next door, and New Haw, and at a special general meeting held in October 1972 the committee proposed a merger with one or the other, seeing it as the only way forward. It was agreed to meet further with the two possible partners, but as events were to turn out the suggested merger never materialised. The club experienced an upturn in interest and membership as the centenary in 1976 approached and in fact a third eleven was operated in 1976-1979.

Earlier in this decade, in 1972, the death occurred of Mr F. M. Stoop, son of F. C. Stoop. F. M. Stoop was club secretary in 1914 when the war intervened and he spent 20 years as a vice president. His invitation XI was one of the regular highlights of the cricket week in the inter-war years.

About this time one of the major concerns to the club was the proposed building of the M25 motorway and although the route of the Chertsey-Wisley section was not finalised, one of the proposals was for it to run between the ground and the Wey Navigation. There was even a possibility of realigning slightly eastwards in which case part of the ground would be lost. The indecision forced a deferment by Woking Borough Council of the club's formal application for outline planning permission for a new pavilion to be built in time for the centenary year. The dream of a new pavilion to replace what was now becoming a potential drain on the club's resources had, with regret, to be abandoned for the time being although with the club now in a healthy position, both in terms of players and finance, there was a feeling that the time would have been right to push for new facilities.

## **ONE HUNDRED YEARS ON**

So the centenary season arrived with the old pavilion still in use, and, with the prospect of various social functions being held and special guests being invited from



time to time, a pre season work party spent several weekends patching up and redecorating. At the same time a new practice net was laid in the north west corner of the ground and this was to prove an attraction right through to the end of the season as practice nights were the best attended in living memory. The highlight of the centenary celebrations was the resurrection of the cricket week. Matches were played on each day followed by various social functions in the evenings, and the week culminated in a celebrity charity match which included appearances by several well known radio, television and sporting personalities. Once again the club embarked on a Gibraltar tour, thanks again to Joe Buzaglo's organisation, and it is evidence of the club's all round strength that while many of the team were away on tour the club continued its fixtures back home and remained undefeated. A third eleven that season played eight matches.

It was disappointing at this time that planning permission for a new pavilion in the south east corner of the ground was refused. However, the route of the M25 was finally confirmed as passing through the next field parallel to the canal so the club was then able to embark on further plans and proposals for a new clubhouse. A meeting was held with the residents of Queens Avenue to discuss proposals and the outcome, in the interests of the likelihood of planning permission being obtained and also for reasons of economy was to suggest building the new structure on the same site as the present one. Before that could happen the old pavilion and changing rooms needed a major rewiring due to extensive damage caused by squirrels.

Meanwhile, in 1979, work began on the new Parvis Bridge which would carry the road over the M25. On the playing field the club continued to prosper and mid week evening games were arranged in order to provide sufficient amount of cricket for the number of members wanting to play. A tour to Devon was followed in succeeding years by similar ventures to other parts of the West Country.

The club was at this time still in a very healthy position but the task of raising funds for the new pavilion was a huge one. Grants and loans were sought along with donations from members, but it was apparent that the only way the new pavilion could realistically be achieved was for the work to be done by the club members themselves, so as planning permission was sought plans were also laid for how the task could be carried out. The driving force behind the whole project was club captain Joe Buzaglo whose enthusiasm and determination in the face of all the difficulties was the reason the project proceeded. The go-ahead finally came from Woking Council after the end of the 1979 season and in late October of that year the old pavilion was demolished after having served the club for around 90 years. Work parties assembled every Saturday and Sunday through the autumn, winter and spring, the only professional help being one builder who was able to advise on technical matters as well as acting as instructor for bricklaying and other skills which the dedicated band of members had to acquire. By Easter 1980 the basic structure was complete and was just about usable for the first match of the season with the exception of the changing rooms and showers, for which purpose the old Hawks building had been left standing.

The official opening took place in June 1980 and for the occasion the President, Bob Goldsmith, researched old records and invited numerous guests and former members, including Adrian and Geoffrey Stoop, grandsons of F. C. Stoop. Altogether about 150 members and guests packed into the clubhouse to toast the future of the club and to do not a little reminiscing. The second eleven celebrated the season by winning their league, while the club once again toured Gibraltar.

Finishing work continued on the pavilion over the next winter while nearby the new Parvis Bridge was completed clearing the way for activity to commence on the actual motorway. The route of the new road deprived the British Aerospace Sports Club of a large chunk of their playing field and as a consequence the cricket club was approached for use of the ground during the winter for hockey. An agreement was reached whereby as part of the deal the outfield was to be maintained by the BAE groundstaff the whole year round. This arrangement began in the autumn of 1981. The 1981 cricket season saw the demolition, finally, of the Hawks changing room while on the pitch the club were delighted to stage a match in aid of Robin Jackman who was in his benefit season with Surrey. The match was against the Courage Old England XI which included such famous ex-England players as Fred Trueman, Basil D'Oliveira, John Murray, Fred Titmus, Godfrey Evans. The club finally appeared to get the hang of league cricket as both teams finished runners-up in their respective leagues. Walter Goold, in his 54th season, took 5 wickets for 39 runs against Cuddington Gamecocks.

### **UP TO THE NEW MILLENNIUM**

The general strength of the club was maintained through the eighties. The club moved from the Thameside League (formerly the North Surrey/ South Middlesex League) and moved to the Three Counties League, continued to participate in the midweek Fordham Evening League and was one of the leading sides in the winter Indoor League played at Woking Leisure Centre. The financial burden of building the pavilion was gradually lifted and by 1985 all debts had been paid off. The annual report of 1988 pays tribute to the outgoing treasurer, Bill Denness, whose diligence and efficiency as Treasurer, Secretary and Bar Manager at various times since he first served the club in 1966 was a major factor in ensuring the stability of the club at this time. This was despite a period of unprecedented and unexpected expenditure, which included a cost of well over £1000.00 to repair serious damage to the oak trees caused by the great storm of 16th October 1987.

Mentioned earlier was the decision of the Electricity Authority to plant a pylon on the edge of the ground. This was considered a major blight to the ground, but the 1985 season was the first played after the opening of the M25. The inadequate sound barriers were no match for the constant noise of cars and lorries speeding across the concrete surface, carried towards the ground by the prevailing winds. Memories of birds singing in the trees became distant indeed. It was appropriate that Bill Denness's last contribution as treasurer was to bank a cheque for over £3000.00 for which he had fought as at least some compensation against the blight of the motorway.

As the decade came to a close it became clear that the revival of the 70's and 80's was not being sustained. Largely because of the motorway it became difficult to attract new players to the club as the ideal of playing club cricket against the background of peace and tranquility was obviously only a dream. There was a gradual loss of players, not necessarily by desertion, but new blood was difficult to recruit. A further blow was dealt when it was announced that the M25 was to be expanded to dual four lanes, with the possibility of 'feeder roads' running alongside the motorway to be built at a later date. If this possibility became fact it would spell the end of the club at Parvis Road for the land required would encroach well on to the cricket ground. In the meantime a major restructuring of league cricket in Surrey was under investigation and in order to take advantage of the possibility of progressing up

through the leagues the club joined the Surrey County League in 1993. The ultimate intention was for this league to feed directly into the Surrey Championship, thereby providing the structure for clubs to progress through to the top level.

Considerable expenditure in the nineties was incurred. In 1990 the whole outfield was treated in an attempt to banish the moss which had been encouraged by some unusually dry summers followed by mild, damp winters. The closure of the BAe sports club and the consequential running down of their groundsman's operations meant that the cricket outfield was not being maintained satisfactorily so a tractor and gang mowers were purchased in 1993 so that the club had complete control over the preparation of the field. This proved to be money well spent since at the end of 1993 the sports club next door was closed completely. This had an interesting result in that it brought together the now homeless Woking Rugby Club and the cricket club. Agreement was reached for the rugby club to use the clubhouse and bar facilities outside of the cricket season with their matches being played at Byfleet Recreation Ground and this arrangement continued until the end of the century.

Subtle changes in the face of club cricket began to emerge in that Saturday gradually became the dominant day and faced by pressures of a wide range of alternative means of entertainment many players began to restrict their cricket to one day per weekend. This became evident throughout club cricket and it became increasingly common for clubs to field just one, instead of two, Sunday sides. Thanks to the enthusiasm of the Byfleet leadership the club did not suffer as much as many other more prominent clubs, but it was a concern for the future. In an attempt to stimulate Sunday cricket local Sunday leagues were formed, but to date it is too early to say whether these will have a lasting effect on the popularity of the Sunday game.

Byfleet's immediate future looks satisfactory. The first eleven won the Surrey County League title in 1995, the first major championship in the club's long history. Unfortunately, at that time automatic promotion to the Championship League was not established and the Club had only the satisfaction of winning the title to reflect on. Strength in numbers is adequate although not over abundant, and the finances are sound if not spectacular. A colts section was formed in 2000 for 7 – 12 year olds with a view to developing a fixture list as the section becomes established. This has been well supported by local children, some of whom have already been given a taste of action in the senior teams. A mobile practice net has been purchased which enables members to practice on grass wickets when conditions allow, while a hard surface net still permits practice in less favourable conditions. The millenium year was celebrated with a return to Gibraltar in a week long tour which took 37 players and family members to the Rock. Amazingly, the club still fielded two league sides back home with the first eleven achieving a memorable victory. The season concluded with the club lifting the Thameside Sunday League championship trophy.

Although the threat of motorway expansion seems to have receded, there is now the spectre of Central Railway's scheme for a freight line to run alongside the M25 on its way from Liverpool to Lille in France. Early plans indicate that this would clip the western side of the ground, rendering what was left to be too small for cricket. The proposal also means that any thoughts of major improvements to the ground or facilities need to be put on hold for the time being. One can't help but wonder what Mr F. C. Stoop would have made of all this!

## **TO COME – 2000 ONWARDS**