

## ***Shropshire Tour 1988***

The tour to Shropshire in September of 1988 was remarkable for two reasons. The first was that incredibly it was the club's first tour for some twelve years, when back in the hazy days of the mid seventies it was the inhabitants of North Devon who were treated to the wide ranging talents of Lodge cricket. The second reason and probably even more remarkable than the first was that even though we had ventured close to the land of the Barnhouse at a time of the year when rain was supposed to be a common as a Bob Bath DNB we were treated to a week of almost unbroken glorious sunshine.

The tour party consisted of the usual selection of 'old heads', youngsters and ringers and our base for the tour was to be the Penwergn hotel in the lovely town of Shrewsbury. We met early on a sunny Monday morning and set off full not only with anticipation of what was to come but also of not really quite knowing what to expect.

On the playing side the record books show that of the five games played only one match resulted in a Lodge victory against three ending in defeat, but tours are about more than just winning or losing. Of the games that were lost we were unfortunate to come up against a quality South African in the first match against Leopards C.C. who oozed class and smashed us all around the park. The same story applied pretty much to the second game although this time it was two Australians who did the damage.

The match that we won was on the Wednesday against Bomere Heath C.C. This was an excellent game of cricket played in a friendly atmosphere, well at least until Charlie Monk and fellow Fords cohort, (okay then ringer if you like!) Barry Stewart upset the locals by seeing us to a fine five wicket victory with an excellent stand of 62 when a draw seemed the odds on favourite. Earlier in the match Mark Wickham took the only five wicket haul of the tour with a fine effort of 5-50 from 16 overs. Thursdays match took us close to the Welsh border in Oswestry to play Kae glass C.C. This game ended in another defeat but not before Lodge had pushed their hosts all the way.

They say that the best things come to those that wait and indeed this couldn't be truer for we had to wait to the last game of the tour for the best game. The game was at a stop off point on the way back home not far from Northampton and the opposition was Warkton and Weekly C.C. for whom former England test cricketer David Steele played. David Steele, the man who faced the awesome pace of the Aussies in 1975 and the West Indies in 1976 was due to be playing against us although for an unknown reason had to pull out of the match, and it wasn't long before it was suggested that the reason for him not playing was because he had learned of the devastating Lodge pace attack of Wickham, Renny and Monk!

The game was played in the privately owned grounds of stately Boughton House and provided a magnificent 'picture postcard' setting, and thankfully the game lived up to its marvellous surroundings. The Lodge batted first and reached a good total thanks to fine knocks from Geoff Monk, Dave Hughes and another Ford's ringer Alistair Moore. In reply Warkton made steady progress keeping up with the run rate, and it seemed that the game was heading for a last over finish but nobody could surely have predicted what was to happen.

The final over duly arrived and Warkton were firm favourites to win needing only 6 runs with 4 wickets in hand. Geoff Monk who had already put himself in line for the man of the match award following his earlier fine half century was to bowl the final over and what an over for the Lodge it was. Three wickets taken and four runs conceded meant Lodge were 1 wicket short and their hosts 2 runs short of victory! In the fading light it was a truly memorable game of cricket!

Off the field memories of the tour are a plenty. The tour tradition of fines was enjoyed by everyone and the 'Top Duck' T-shirt (awarded to the best duck from the days play) always had an unwitting recipient! The first nights drinking session in the hotel I'm sure will always live with those members who took part. A game of nine card brag ended with Mike Renny scooping the pot of nearly fifty quid and it was during this marathon game of cards that Mark Wickham introduced us to the delights of LARGE Baileys and ice. The Aussie barman Scottie then took us one step further and introduced us to Orgasms! (Baileys & Cointreau) which quickly became the drink of the tour. I'm not sure quite how much was drunk that night but the sight of Tim Barr literally 'under the table' leading everybody in uncontrollable fits of laughter I think best summed up the atmosphere of the night! Breakfast the next morning was also notable by a large number of absentees.

Other memorable moments include Kieron O'Donovan attempting to chat up two middle aged nurses in the hotel and the stomach churning sight of Charles Monk wearing only his jockstrap!

At the end of the tour the money collected from the weeks' fines was produced and quickly consumed in the form of alcohol. Mark Wickham was awarded the player of the tour and Nigel Smith (not surprisingly to some) was named 'dickhead of the tour!' Billy Bethell for recording the most noughts of the tour was awarded the Top Duck T-shirt although to say he was not best pleased with his award was a massive understatement!

Contrary to popular belief we were all welcomed to return in the future, well everybody that was except Charles Monk! Charlie realised that we had been overcharged for our stay in the hotel, and in getting our money back after arguing with the hotel's manager was told that of the tour party only he was not welcome back! In the end though it really was a superb tour, enjoyed by everyone and with some truly unforgettable moments both on and off the pitch. Credit must of course go to Gary Carr and Charlie Monk for their excellent organisation.