

## ***Britannic Lodge - The Early Years***

We begin in 1846 when 'the Hornchurch Loyal Britannic Lodge of Oddfellows' was formed. The organisation was of Masonic origin and quickly became one of the institutions of Hornchurch with over 370 members. In 1896 the organisation celebrated its 50th anniversary and as part of the celebrations, they held a cricket match in Grey Towers Park. Perhaps one may consider this to be the first game ever played by Britannic Lodge, although it was actually 22 years later before the club was officially formed.

The Great War of 1914-1918 brought an end to village cricket as the battles moved from the cricket pitches of England to the trenches of Western Europe. When hostilities ceased in November 1918, the national game was once again played on village greens. In Hornchurch, a new team was formed by members of 'The Hornchurch Loyal Britannic Lodge of Oddfellows', some of whom were previously players of Hornchurch Cricket Club.

Jack Fielder, Jack Pierce and Ted Bratchell were three of the founder members. The first 'home' for Britannic Lodge Cricket Club was Billet Lane on the site of what is now the Queens Theatre. In the mid 1920s the club were forced to move as the developers moved in. Jack Fielder offered the club the Cromer Road ground on a 21-year lease and so the Club moved to what is now the Fielders Sports Ground. They even moved the wooden pavilion using log rollers and a carthorse!

From this time until the outbreak of the Second World War, Britannic Lodge became one of the leading clubs in the area, with players such as Arthur Bradfield (ex Essex wicketkeeper), George Adams (Essex trialist), and Ted Bratchell. Albert Miller (Chairman and Treasurer) and Jack Pearce (Secretary) were largely responsible for the successful running of the Club in this period whilst Sid Nice was in charge of maintaining the square (Sid Nice, where are YOU now!).

The photograph (shown right) was printed in our local newspaper, the Romford Recorder, in an attempt to ascertain the names of those who were in it. The photo was given to the club by Stan Green, who received it from Eric Pearce, nephew of our founder member Jack Pearce. To date we have positively identified two of the players. George Adams (mentioned above) is pictured in the back row, second from the left, whilst Fred Cook, who we believe is still alive today and approaching the ripe old age of 100, is in the middle row second from the left. We believe the picture is taken in the late 1920's but this has not yet been confirmed. Our efforts in identifying the faces will continue, but as time goes by the harder this task becomes.



### **The Post War Years**

One must assume that from 1939-1945 the Lodge in keeping with many sporting organisations simply lists this period of history as "On Tour". After the war life member Ralph Martin joined the club, and remembers that the ground was shared with Lyndhurst CC, a club formed by residents of Lyndhurst Drive, and hired by the A.R.P, the Fire Service and Local Government Offices for mid week games. Ex club president Ian Kirby recalls that up until the

middle 1950's, B.L.C.C. could hold its own against most senior clubs in the area. During this period the club hosted a game against a West Indian Cavaliers XI and a Frank Vigar benefit match against an Essex XI. The West Indian Cavaliers included the legendary Sir Leary Constantine, Dr. C. "Bertie" Clarke (Northants), Ernie Eyle and Ian Pieris (later of Ceylon now Sri Lanka).

In the early 50's Ted Bratchell, son of old man Bratchell, was 1st XI captain, whilst his brother Alan was occasionally 2nd XI skipper in the late 50's. During this period, Ridley Bartholomeusz, Dudley Twine, Keith Sutton, Don Smith, Vic Jenkins and Norman Balmford were all top class performers for the Lodge. Don Smith also played for Essex Young Amateurs whilst Ridley Bartholomeusz played for a combined Hornchurch, Upminster and Romford District side.

Ridley was perhaps one of the best batsmen to have played for the lodge, regularly scoring fifties. Ridley left Ceylon in 1943 to join the RAF in their fight against Hitler. If he had stayed in Ceylon, there is little doubt that he would have played for his country. Ridley currently holds the Club record for highest average in a season. He was also a lightning fast wicket keeper. Dudley Twine was another of the lodge stars in the late 40's and 50's. In 1949 he fell just 54 runs short of his thousand for the season at an average of 43. In the same season he took 58 wickets at 9.95 a piece. He was also a fine fielder and a capable wicket keeper. Keith Sutton recalls how Peter Elworthy used to ferry several youngsters to Alf Gover's cricket school, where these youngsters were then schooled by the likes of Tony Lock and Alec Bedser.

Sadly as facilities at other clubs improved, the better players were lost and standards began to deteriorate by the late 1950's. By this time there were ex-lodge players in the 1st XI's of every senior club in the area. It is perhaps a sign of the club's strength that the players who left were all able to walk straight into the 1st XI's of the clubs they joined.

Ralph left the Lodge for a while to sport the colours of Gidea Park & Romford and Chadwell Heath and upon his return found a very sick Lodge. He recalls an AGM, which boasted 100% turn out, all 7 of them. With the assistance of stalwarts Peter Balsom, Eric Pearce and Peter Overton, they worked very hard to keep Lodge alive, then expand it to two Saturday and one Sunday sides plus a Colts XI and Ladies XI.

### **The 60's and 70's**

Thanks to the hard work of several Lodge stalwarts of the 50's, the club was able to survive into the 60's despite losing many of its best players to other local sides. New players were recruited, amongst them Stan Green, Peter Barnhouse and the late Tony Notley. All new players were required to undergo a vetting system at Thursday night nets. The trialists went into bat at around 7.30pm by which time the quickies had warmed up properly and usually received a bruise or two as an introduction to club cricket. Selection was then left to a four-man committee made up of the three captains and the match secretary. Teams were selected on a Monday evening and posted in the home dressing room and selection cards were posted to those selected to arrive by 1st post on Wednesday. Cry offs were treated with disgust and unless there was a valid reason, your name was not discussed at the next selection meeting, i.e. a one-week ban was imposed. The club was in a position to impose such controls due to the surplus of players available. Sadly by 1970 this was not the case. The 1st XI was still strong but the 2nd XI was struggling for players. Thanks to the efforts of the late Henry Coyle, the 2nd XI kept going and by the mid seventies, things were buzzing again. In 1975 the club was forced to join League cricket, as poaching of players by sides already in leagues was rife.



The ground was the responsibility of the club up until the early 70's and the late Eric Pearce, nephew of founder member Jack Pearce, supervised maintenance of the square. Members who lent a hand were excused paying a sub. When the volunteers could no longer be found, the club tried hiring professional groundsman but this did not produce satisfactory results and until the council assumed control of Fielder's Sports Ground, Cyril Wolstenholme (pictured left) cared for the hallowed turf of Cromer Road.

One of the darkest nights in Lodge history was April 3rd 1979 when unknown youngsters burned down the club's wooden pavilion on their Easter holidays. One changing room was salvaged from the wreckage and the Council provided a Portakabin for the visitors to change in. The council decreed that teas should be taken in the tennis pavilion, and thus an uneasy bond was formed between BLCC and Wingletye Tennis Club. The remnants of the old pavilion were deemed unsafe and were removed in just under two hours by two council tipper trucks and a JCB.

### The Modern Era

Following the fire in 1979, which burnt down the old wooden pavilion, the club began the 80's as joint tenants of the Wingletye tennis pavilion. In order to look after the interests of both clubs the Fielders Sports Association was set up. However by the late 80's the association was no longer required as the tennis club had folded leaving the Lodge as the sole tenants at Cromer Road. However by this time the facilities at Fielders Sports ground had drastically deteriorated. The old tennis pavilion, built back in the 1950's was literally crumbling around us and the toilet block was demolished due to persistent vandalism.

In spite of this the club had grown to three sides on a Saturday and two on a Sunday. In addition to this the club even managed to field four Saturday sides in the late 80's. The committee realised that in order to maintain this growth, something would have to be done to improve facilities and so the project to build a new pavilion was born. Despite countless objections from local residents and a multitude of other obstacles put in our way the dream finally became a reality.

In the summer of 1996 the new pavilion was up and running. This was thanks mainly to the early design work of Mike Renny and the sheer determination and perseverance of then Club Chairman and Development Officer Charlie Monk and Lloyd Owen along with the generosity of Cyril Wolstenholme who donated £10,000 of his own money.

The club's tours of the 1970's were resurrected. In 1988 a trip to Shropshire was followed by a mini tour to Bournemouth in 1990 and in 1994 a full five day tour to West Somerset. The same trip was repeated in 1995 and 1996 and although a three-year gap without a tour followed the Lodge is once again venturing on tour for the year 2000, with a five-day tour to the South Coast of England planned for July this year.

Who can forget the sight of Jamie Terrell (pictured right) tied to a telegraph pole smeared in shaving foam in only his underpants in 1994. The absolutely fantastic cabaret



night in 1995 and a dozen Blodgers marching naked, in military formation and saluting a wheelchair bound lady at 2 o'clock in the morning in 1996!

What about the future of Britannic Lodge though? Well the future of any club depends on new players coming through and with our youth policy, started in 1994 now firmly in place, the club is well situated to grow both in numbers and in strength. The talent in our youth sides over the past few years has been obvious to see. Barry Sturgeon at only 17 was part of our 1st XI, which gained promotion to the 1st Division of the Essex County League in 1997. Andy Roberts scored his maiden century for the club at only 15 years of age. Both these players attended Essex trials at Chelmsford and surely more will follow in their footsteps.

1997 went down in club history as one of, if not our most successful. In addition to our promotion to Division 1 of the Essex County League, the club's Sunday 1st XI under the captaincy of Mike Renny proudly succeeded in playing through the entire season, some 25 matches, without losing one match. To top this off the club also won the Mick Maguire Memorial Shield for the first time in three years and also won for the first time the Duncan Allen Memorial Salver. The success did not stop there however. During the following winter the club's Havering Indoor League team capped a tremendous season by winning the Division 3 title with a 100% record of 7 wins from 7 matches, thus gaining promotion to Division 2 for the first time in our history.

For the start of the 1998 season the Lodge ventured into new territory by signing it's first ever overseas player - Adrian Simon, an all-rounder from Sydney, Australia. Adrian came from New South Wales grade cricket side Mosman, and although having to return home early due to injury helped the Lodge to a respectable mid table position in our first season in the top flight.

The continued improvement showed throughout the club with the Saturday 2nd XI achieving some notable victories and the Saturday 3rd XI having probably their best ever season. The continued development of the youth team was also very pleasing to see, with good performances in the Havering Youth League and the emergence of a number of promising youngsters as genuine potential 1st XI players of the future.

The 1999 season once again started with an overseas player in our ranks - Dominic Brogan, a club colleague of Adrian Simon, Dominic was a quick opening bowler who was also pretty handy with the bat. 1999 proved to be another triumphant year for the Lodge. Under the captaincy of Gary Carr the Saturday 1st XI had another successful season just missing out on third place in the League and ultimately finishing a commendable 5th and reached the semi-finals of the Essex County League Cup. The Saturday 2nd XI captained by Jason Syms were runners-up in Division 3 of the Essex League only missing out on the title during the last couple of matches after leading the league for all of the season.



A number of the club's youngsters continued to impress. Seventeen year old Andy Roberts not only scored 1000 runs in the season but also topped the club's 1st XI averages and also broke the clubs record highest score smashing 155 for the Sunday 1st XI versus Wickford C.C. Andy's older brother Matthew also got in on the act by starring with the ball for the club's Saturday 2nd XI. Two other 17-year-olds also impressed. Sunit Patel took over 100 wickets during the season with his off-breaks and leggies and Danny Simpson (pictured left) continued to display his undoubted talent with the bat, in addition to being a more than useful off-break bowler.

With the club's continued improvement, Club Captain Gary Carr felt that in order to maintain our development we would need to move up to a higher standard and indeed status of League Cricket. So under Gary's direction the club applied to join the Marrant Essex Cricket League for the start of the year 2000 season. Following a lot of hard work in putting together a comprehensive application the club was elected to join the league receiving a remarkable 14 votes from the 17 member clubs.

This news rubbed off on both of our Winter Havering Indoor League sides. Our 'A' team secured promotion to Division 1 of the league for the first time in our history by finishing runners-up, just missing out on the title by a solitary point. In addition to this our newly entered 'B' team capped a tremendous winter by winning the Division 4 title at their first attempt.

Sadly the next two seasons saw a distinct downturn in the Lodge's fortunes as a number of well established players moved on to pastures new. Without the strength in depth of recent seasons the Lodge began to struggle both on and off the pitch. During the winter of 2002 we were approached by Hornchurch Cricket Club with a view to a possible merger of the two clubs. Negotiations followed over the ensuing weeks and at the BLCC AGM of 2002 it was unanimously agreed by the club's membership that going ahead with the proposed merger was the way forward. Particularly in light of Hornchurch's offer of continuing the name of Britannic Lodge by retaining the name as a Sunday only club.

The first season following the merger has now passed and 'the proof is in the pudding' - the merger has been a resounding success! We as a club have been made to feel extremely welcome by the officials and members of Hornchurch cricket club, and the results speak for themselves! The most successful season ever results wise in Hornchurch's 220 year history with four league sides winning their respective league..... who ever said mergers were a bad thing??!

**Mike Renny**