

## **5. Post War Boom and Bust: The History of Pinkneys Green Cricket Club 1946-62**



A successful return to cricket on the Green in 1946, heralded an era when the club would become home to the Julian Cup, winning the trophy for the first time in 1950. However this post war boom did not last and the failure to upgrade a decaying pavilion stopped play for a whole season for the only occasion in peacetime in the twentieth century.

The desire to enjoy leisure time after six years of war was evident in the two elevens fielded throughout the forties and fifties. 1946 proved to be a swansong for veteran bowler Brad Dann who at the age of 54 topped the bowling averages. President Mosenthal handed over to Gordon Palmer, whilst Dennis Piercey (below) began to focus more on his administration of the Julian Cup, the Green hosting a semi-final for the first time. Young



talent was evident in bowler Bob Hutchins who returned figures of 6-5 when Bisham were bowled out for 19, and left handed batsman Bill Hester who hit 80 not out against Taplow.

The hard hitting Hester secured his reputation as a prominent local player in August 1947, scoring an unbeaten century either side of scores of 69 and 82 in three consecutive weekends. A handy spinner he would go onto be the club's leading performer of this era.

For now his all round talents were accompanied by those of Harry Plummer whose daughter Rose described halcyon summer weekends on the Green, when once play had begun, the children would be sent to fetch water in a churn from a cottage over the road to make cups of tea in what was then a somewhat rudimentary pavilion. 'Johnny' Walker recalled how: "permits had to be obtained from the Ministry of Food for the teas and with the help of the members supplying commodities, the job of preparation was in the very capable hands of a magician - Dick Bunyan".

At the end of the match everyone would retire to the Stag & Hounds (now the Pinkneys Arms) run by club chairman Walker or sometimes The Golden Ball whose landlord was a member of the Piercey family who also ran the Waggon & Horses (now the Boundary Arms). Walker, who wrote a history of the club in the early 1970s, was of great support, hosting fundraising dances, jumble sales and whist drives at the Stag.

1947 saw Swallow break the club batting record with an score of 125 not out against Lendrums Ltd, beating Plummer's pre war mark of 110 against the same opposition. It was the latter's bowling which generated most headlines in this second post war season with five returns of five wickets or more, the best being 7-33 against Reading Exiles. Home advantage in the Julian Cup Semi-final was of no benefit as Maidenhead GPO easily beat Pinkneys by 9 wickets in front of a crowd numbering "close to two hundred". This meant the opportunity to grace the first of six successive Julian finals held at the Green was lost. However, Jim Plested, the bowler who was to spearhead the run to the final three years later announced his potential towards the end of this season, taking 7-15 against GWR Slough.

Another home semi-final appearance followed in 1948 when "several hundred spectators saw the Green lose gallantly to Old Maidonians in the gathering dusk by two wickets".



Ground improvements were supported by a regular donation for hosting Julian Cup matches from the organisers as in the distance the Bomber estate took shape (above), whilst Clarefield House was sold to the newly formed National Health Service. These improvements included a supply of water to the square. With pipes only available with a permit, Maidenhead Waterworks provided second-hand stock and agreed to lay it if a trench was dug 80 yards from Pinkneys Drive. It was literally a case of all hands to the pump with the task completed by the light of car headlamps. A different approach was required to dispose of three large trees which stood in the newly extended outfield on the western side of the ground. The shadow the trees cast in late afternoon made play difficult due to bad light. They were also thought to be decaying, a verdict confirmed by the Borough Surveyor. The National Trust thought otherwise and wanted them to stay. A meeting was called to decide what should be done, but before this took place the trees were felled one very foggy November morning. The meeting proceeded in a "a somewhat stormy atmosphere" but the presentation to the National Trust of a cheque for the value of the timber saw an end to the matter.

Bowlers remained very much on top despite the ability to water the square and in 1949 Jim Plested and Bob Hutchins went head to head in a race to reach the one hundred wickets mark for the first and second elevens respectively. Plested passed his half century as early as Whit Monday at an average of 4.6 when he took 8-34 away against Maidenhead & Bray 2nd XI. Hutchins had to wait until the start of July to match him, taking 7-26 against St. Marys to reach 50 wickets at an average of 3.74. Both had no shortage of partners in the hunt for victims. For the first team Plummer (8-31) and Edwards (8-16) backed up Plested whilst in the second team Allen (9-29), Young (8-9 including a hat trick) and Roy Treadwell (8-36) supported Hutchins. Hester continued to impress with the bat along with Cyril Denton in the firsts, whilst Roy Selby led the way for the seconds, on one occasion hitting five sixes in an innings of 44 against Maidenhead Post Office.

As the leaves started to fall Plested and Hutchins homed in on their target, both reaching one hundred wickets on Saturday 10th September. In a double fixture against Nomads Plested took 8-19 away, whilst at the Green Hutchins returned 5-1 as the visitors were dismissed for only 19. Their feat was made all the more remarkable by the number of matches completed that season; 31 for the first team and just 24 for the seconds. Both players would continue to star for Pinkneys into the next decade before eventually moving onto other local clubs, Jim Plested joining Warren Row in 1953, and Bob Hutchins going to Cookham Dean in 1959.

At the next AGM in February 1950, held at the Waggon & Horses, Secretary Vic Gurling congratulated everyone on the club's most successful post war season. With strength in depth in both batting and bowling, and financial stability, all was set fair for the new decade.



The young talent was led by shrewd captain and wicket keeper Ernie Weller (left) who would lead the team to the club's first ever honour, winning the Julian Cup in 1950.

Playing as the Hon. Gordon Palmer's XI to avoid the disapproval of the Club Cricket Conference, reaching even the second stage appeared unlikely when the President's men fell to 18-7 in their first round match at Maidenhead County Boys School. The tie turned on an eighth wicket stand between Harry Plummer and Jack Pearce, both scoring over thirty apiece, raising the final total to 88 and the School XI fell short by five runs.

A comfortable win over Maidenhead United FC led to another home semi-final against perennial winners Old Maidonians. Again it looked like the writing was on the wall for the Green's hopes as they fell to 18-6 but once more late order runs from Plummer and

Pearce, as well as Gordon Kean Jnr saw the fifty mark passed. This still looked insufficient as Old Maids openers Lawrie and Jennings made an first wicket stand of 23 but Jim Plested kept plugging away to return 6-19. Adding in a needless run out of Howes and with Lawrie having to retire under the Julian rule, twelve runs were required. "Amid great enthusiasm among the spectators", Edwards then finished the match off taking both wickets with no further score.

In the home final against St. Marys (now North Maidenhead) Pinkneys batted first and made 77. Bowling with accuracy in failing light Harry Plummer (5-15) and Jim Plested (4-12), routed the opposition for just 31. After being presented with the cup by Australian Test wicket keeper Ben Barnett, a team photo was taken outside the Stag & Hounds.

The following week, Weller led his team to the double by beating the Julian Cup Select XI at Aspros sports ground by six runs.

This success proved to be the last time the Green threatened to win silverware until the 1970s but the decade was full of good cricket as the sport boomed in the area. As well as the teams taking their name from their location, there were works elevens such as British Ermeto, Dynotron, Wesbisco, Simmonds Brewery and Huntley & Palmers, as well the Vikings who played on Oldershaw Field, and Old Gordonians (Gordon Road School alumni) based at the treacherous Desborough Park. August Bank Holiday saw an annual visit from Cambridge MAs.

It was a pivotal decade which saw the passing of those who had done so much to establish the club such as William Piercey (father of Dennis) who was responsible for obtaining permission to fence off the pitch and erect a pavilion on common land, and Walter Piercey landlord of the Waggon & Horses since 1919 who provided a base for the club to meet and store equipment.

PALMER'S XI	
W. Hester, b Woodage.....	2
C. Denton, retired Julian rule.....	14
S. Edwards, c Thatcher, b Drake.....	1
G. Kean, Jnr., b Drake.....	0
G. Kean, Snr., b Banbury.....	19
N. Gardner, run out.....	3
R. Selby, c Sheldrake, b Banbury.....	5
H. Plummer, lbw, b Hardy.....	7
E. Weller, not out.....	13
J. Pearce, c Thatcher, b Woodage.....	9
J. Plested, b Tuckwell.....	0
Extras.....	4
Total.....	77
ST. MARY'S	
E. Robinson, b Plested.....	0
W. Hodges, b Plested.....	4
J. Hicks, retired Julian rule.....	12
J. Thatcher, b Plummer.....	1
D. Banbury, c Weller, b Plummer.....	1
D. Hardy, b Plested.....	0
E. Sheldrake, lbw, b Plested.....	0
F. Broom, b Plummer.....	4
C. Tuckwell, b Plummer.....	3
R. Drake, not out.....	2
C. Woodage, b Plummer.....	0
Extras.....	4
Total.....	31





*Pinkneys Green - Julian Cup Winners 1950.*

*Back row (left to right): ?, ?, Keith Sharp. Middle row: Brad Dann, ?, Roy Selby, Bill Hester, Jack Pearce, ?, Johnny Walker, ?. Front row: Norman Gardner, Jim Plested, Ernie Weller, ?, Harry Plummer.*

Tragically Bill Hester died, aged just 38 in January 1960. The club groundsman, his performances enlivened many an afternoon's cricket with his cultured big hitting, contrasting with his "mesmeric" spin. His statistics speak for themselves. He scored five half centuries across three weekends in August 1951. He was caught out on the boundary for 96 in 1952 having scored 98 earlier that season which suggests he played for the sheer pleasure of batting rather than personal milestones. This was reinforced in 1954 when he hit 60 in boundaries in a score of 94, and also scored an unbeaten fifty reaching his half century with a six having already hit eight fours. 1955 saw him bowl with "subtle variation", opposition batsmen having "no answer to his guile". His memory stands tall to this day in the form of a Norway Maple on the north boundary, looming over the pavilion.

Hester's scores were complemented by those of Cyril Denton who scored an unbeaten century in 1951 against London Transport, and opening batsmen Mike Page who scored 84 against Windsor in 1953 aged only 17. Two years later Page scored two unbeaten centuries, the first against Dickensons described as "chanceless" with half of his runs coming in boundaries. Like Hester, Page was also a handy spinner.

Pinkneys were significantly strengthened in 1954 when Keith Cortis joined the club. He could open both the batting and the bowling, contributing equally effectively with bat and ball and became captain in 1956. In 1955 in an all day match against Reading 2nd XI he scored 64 in an unbeaten club record stand of 162 for the third wicket in bad light with Denton who scored 98. He had plenty of partners with the ball such as Roy Treadwell,

Bob Hutchins, Jack France, Bob Hopkinson and Bob Warrender, but the most threatening was his new ball partnership with Peter Jackson.

Jackson's terrific pace led to him winning the Maidenhead Advertiser Award for bowling in 1956, aged just 17 when he took 66 wickets, including two 8 wicket returns, and an analysis of 15-8-14-7 against Chinnor. His five wickets against Stratfield Turgis were not enough to save the match though which was lost when an extra ten minutes were played in error. Such was Jackson's dominance, in August, along with France he restricted Eton Wick to only 32 runs off the first 28 overs.

Other bowling feats of note included a dramatic end to the 1956 season when Bob Warrender took wickets from the third and fifth balls of the final over to beat Bracknell 2nd XI, whilst in contrast the following season Bob Hutchins took three wickets in the first four balls of the match against Maidenhead Post Office, ending up with 7-29.

Another feature of the decade was the debuts of a number of young cricketers who would go on to have a great impact on the club's success twenty years later. These included Alan and Barry Martin, the latter scoring 57 aged 15 against Chinnor in 1957, whilst the former took wickets with the new ball from 1954 onwards. Lennie Timms also appeared for the first time but it was his brother George who stole the limelight with his bowling, his best return being 8-5 against Slough Extra in 1960 when he was described as "almost unplayable". Other debutants included Tony Walker and Freddie Hearman who impressed with his "lively pace".

Off the pitch the club owed much to the contributions of Stanley Evans, Charlie Brenner, Alf Belcham and Reg Marks not to mention the women who created front page headlines in 1954 when Rosemary Barnes (right) became the first player from the club to appear on the front page of the Maidenhead Advertiser. This came as a result of a challenge match played in front of a crowd of two hundred which ended in a draw when the rain intervened.



As the decade drew to a close problems began to mount up. Petty vandalism and break ins were taking their toll, and the club's facilities began to be seen in a negative light making it hard to attract players and opponents. In 1958, annual subs were reduced to attract members but the club's better players began to drift away to their rivals.

By 1960 the pavilion, later described to me by Joby Rolls as full of "sparrow shit and rubbish", was portrayed in the Maidenhead Advertiser as "dilapidated" and "an eyesore". A sum over £300 was thought to be required for a new one and even though the club did not have the reserves for the project, the old pavilion was pulled down, with planning permission granted for its replacement in May. This left the players changing in a farmer's shed, and eating teas in the Waggon & Horses, hastening further departures.

Although the rebuild began there was not enough money for the roof with a further £200 required. A money raising fete was held in Grenfell Park on August Bank Holiday Monday, but by the start of 1961 although the shell was finished, the project began to run over budget and in June the interior was still not complete. An influx of players from the recently defunct Old Gordonians meant matches continued until the end of the season, Alf Garraway, Bill Miles, Dudley Jinman, Bill Imison and Don Sutcliffe all making notable contributions with the bat or ball, but there was to be no cricket played on the Green in 1962, as the 70 year history of the club hung in the balance.



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