

Those were the days.

(A la recherche des jeux perdus)

In this age of school children who are, for all intents and purposes, professional sports persons by the time they take their GCSEs, it is perhaps the moment to look back, before “time has rewritten every line”, to an era when expertise was perhaps less prevalent but its absence no obstacle to immense pleasure. I am thinking in particular of my time spent in the last century on the cricket pitches of Clifton and surrounding rural villages with, initially, the Lobsters and subsequently, B.B. Club.

For the ignorant among you, the Lobsters was a team essentially of Clifton Pre. School masters, formed in the '50s, who played against local teams, mainly in 20 over evening games, years before the concept of T-20 thrashes had emerged. These invariably ended in *the Alma Tavern* if played at home, *the Failand Inn* or *the George at Backwell* if at BB or whichever of the local Somerset pubs that was nearest to Chew Magna, Temple Cloud, Lower Weare or Stone Allerton. The name derived from the unwritten law that they had to bowl at least one over underarm of 'Lobs' and the past master of this art, one of the founding members with Pat Holmes, was Peter Clay, the famous- some would say 'infamous'- Art Master. Many an opposing batsman had been surprised and/or amused when the umpire had announced that the action of the new bowler would be “left arm, under” and these bombs would come down from well above head height, often with a wicked spin imparted on them and regularly bamboozle the opposition; the better the batsman, the greater the ignominy of being bowled in such a manner.

There were times when the Lobsters had not been able to raise eleven players from the staff or parents, when one or two of the older Prep. school boys would be enlisted; this was how I played on occasions in the early Sixties, discovering a completely different side to my school masters. I am sure that such a thing would be neither contemplated nor permitted now, in the unlikely event of such a team still existing but those evenings are far more memorable than most, if not all lessons in the classrooms.

And there were some formidable performers! Apart from Peter, who tended to bat at number 11 because there was nowhere lower and to field at mid off with his shins, in the hockey goal-keeper style perfected by Tom Gover, there were some, like Geoffrey Williams who had played county 2nd XI cricket and stars of other sports, such as Ian Nuttall, a champion squash player whose speed across the ground made him a devastating silly mid-on or off and a liability to bat with, as he was capable of running the length of the pitch twice- there and back again- before his partner had left his crease. And Dave Rodgers, the former Bristol City footballer and future College soccer coach and Upper School House Master who memorably scored a century on the New Field on a baking Saturday afternoon during one of the full-length matches in Lobsters Week, when, after the end of the summer term, there were matches daily, both home and away, on tour.

Little is known of what happened during the away tours during Lobsters Week; apart from vague tales about Welsh beer and curries; there appears to have been an '*omerta*' similar to that of the Sicilian mafia, with the old English sporting adage: 'What happens on tour stays on tour' being well and truly maintained.

Arguably the golden era of early Lobsters was the summer of '64. Tony Britton (father of Fern) was starring as Professor Higgins in a tour of 'My Fair Lady' at the Hippodrome and the company raised a cricket team which played the Lobsters on several occasions, followed by momentous parties, as a result of which the Rev. Peter Whiteside, the assistant chaplain, met his future wife, a member of the chorus.

Later, a new generation of Lobsters under the benevolent stewardship of Tony Milligan, a mild-mannered classicist who transmogrified into a demon left-arm fast bowler, would uphold the tradition until finally it all came to an end. I will leave the last words to Julian Edgell, the last surviving Lobster still on the Pre. School staff:

“ the 'core' of Lobsters got old and stopped- we had our last game together on the Close vs the Crocs a year or so before Covid...a team including Milligan, Siddall, Nuttall, Hall, Hearn, Grice, Webb, Procter, Mills(?) and me...

The younger generation aren't so steeped in this sort of tradition (I think fun evening club cricket has gone the same way - e.g. Mortgagees, Bill Owen's XI, Stoke Druids(?))

The Crocs have kept something going, although it also includes 'fun' soft-ball fixtures inclusive of all staff but a poor substitute really.

Also, life has just got busier both at work and family - perhaps fewer staff on site / fewer bachelors / more of a balance between male & female staff etc.

It's a shame as the camaraderie we had was special - the evening fixtures (down at Weare & Allerton), the tours to South Wales - but not seem so important now? But only Webby & I remember it really..."

And this, from James Midgley (OC.O.H. 1986, a demon quickie who played for the College 1st XI and his home village team)

The visit of the Lobsters to Allerton C.C. was always a highlight of the season and it would have been the first fixture the Allerton players would have looked for on the fixture list, had there been one. The visit of the school masters from Clifton College always meant some great cricket and a very social evening both during the game and at The Wheatsheaf after stumps had been drawn. When the Lobsters first started playing Allerton, it would be fair to say that the standard of cricket in this small Somerset village was agricultural to say the least and the facilities could not even have been described as basic.. The club had been established by local farmer David Duckett, who donated one of his fields, and a group of friends. The "Pavilion was an old caravan with no wheels and the toilet was the hedge. The rudimentary status of Allerton was demonstrated perfectly on one of the early Lobster visits when, so the Allerton legend goes, the convoy of cars arriving from Bristol had to wait whilst hay carts manoeuvred out of the cricket field, the outfield having just given up its bounty. It must have led to some interesting fielding.

The Lobsters, without doubt, always started these early games as favourites. Their knowledge and skill of the game of cricket far outweighed that of the group of villagers they took on. Gin was often forced onto the Lobsters batsmen waiting their turn to bat by the wives of the Allerton players...anything to give their boys the slightest chance of a victory against the much superior opposition. An Allerton win would eventually come, but not for many years. The "Lob" over was undoubtedly the talking point leading up to any Lobsters fixture. When would the over be bowled, who would bowl it, would it spin? It was a huge opportunity for whoever was batting at the time to score some easy runs...but it also carried the huge risk of being out to an underarm bowler. What a great invention by the Lobsters ! After the game, the two teams would retire to the Wheatsheaf to replay and embellish great cricketing feats and to re-establish friendships forged on the cricket field over many years. Finally, probably after one or two too many, the Lobster convoy would make its way back to Bristol. At some point, a return fixture was offered and the Allerton team travelled to the big city. This, like the home fixture, again became the most popular trip of the season with sumptuous teas and the promise of billiard table like outfields, well prepared strips not to mention changing rooms and toilets that not only flushed, but that you could

actually sit on !! I Although many of the games would have taken place at Beggar Bush , the Allerton team were also very lucky to have enjoyed playing on NF many times. The biggest Allerton dream was to one day be able to take on the Lobsters on the fabled "Close". This sadly remained just a dream but many imagined themselves on that hallowed turf taking five wickets or scoring a century. As a schoolboy at Clifton and playing cricket for Allerton, it was always a bit of a strange feeling when the Lobsters arrived. Suddenly, in my place of safety, my masters would appear. How do I react, do I call them sir? There was no need to worry, they were all transformed by cricket from school masters into normal human beings...and actually, really nice ones. Also, as a bowler, there was always the chance to get one over on my masters Notable Lobsters that spring straight to mind were Tony Cottrell, Chris Cottrell, Colin Millar, Tony Milligan, Nigel Siddal, Nick Sprutenberg, and Ian Nuttall. There were many many more over the years...I am sure at one point the Lobsters brought Terry Connor who was, at the time, playing for my beloved Bristol City...chatting to him over a pint of cider in the Wheatsheaf was a highlight for me. So the Lobsters will always have a hugely affectionate place in the annals of Allerton C.C. history...what a fantastic group the Lobsters were.

Only the 'crème de la crème' of sporting Cliftonians are likely to have remained on the Close or New Field in the course of their great and jolly days at school. The rest of us mere mortals would have either been taken in the purple Biscuit Tins, the buses or been made to 'run' out to B.B.

B. B. Beggar's Bush. Venue of so many memories.

Was it named after just the one or should the apostrophe come later? A 19th century article states: *The primary meaning was a rendezvous for beggars at the bifurcation of two roads. Such a one exists on the Leigh side of the river Avon, opposite Clifton, and it is still called "Beggar's Bush Lane".* So maybe the plural is more correct. However in a scholarly tome, J.S. Hill's *the Place-names of Somerset*, one reads: "Beggar's Bush in Long Ashton,, is, we are persuaded, a thorough-going corruption of Bega's Ratch." (Bega being St. Bega, an Irish virgin saint and missionary!) while another source claims that the land might once have been administered by Paul Busshe, Bishop of Bristol so the jury, if sitting at all, is still out.

The poor beggars who were regularly transported there in all winter weathers and then expected to hang about, cold and wet, waiting for their rides may not have fully appreciated the beauty of the spot. However, on a summer's Saturday afternoon, the sun on your back and the smell of newly-cut grass from the expanses that had just been gang-mowed by Nigel Peacock that morning in your nostrils- hay-fever obliging-there was nowhere (apart possibly from the Close) better to be and to indulge in a spot of cricket .

I returned to work at Clifton in 1976 and, towards the end of my decade's stay, had the pleasure of running the B.B. Club. It started as a sort of 4th X1., playing against similar teams from the usual schools, Sherborne and Cheltenham in particular. Imagine my delight on one occasion to meet a fit-looking,tall young Welshman who had brought the Cheltenham team - the late, lamented Eddie Butler in his brief career as a schoolmaster between playing and becoming one of the best rugby commentators.

However, there were some excellent players who either wanted to concentrate on their studies or who no longer enjoyed the pressure of Bigside cricket but who preferred a more relaxed game and somehow or other, - I really don't know how- some fixtures were arranged against teams from the lower echelons of local club sides in which a couple of us masters were allowed to play as well. And that's how B.B.Club was born.

Few can dispute that the pavilion on the Close, immortalised in Newbolt's poem, is one of the most beautiful settings for cricket. We ,by contrast, played on BB13, our pitch right at the top of those fields. And were housed in a derelict cattle truck, something of a shock to visiting teams, with no

facilities; calls of nature were answered in the hedge behind and match tea taken in a tent several hundreds of yards away

Staff members, David Jacobs (see photo., middle of back row), Len Brown (end of back row,) Peter Jagger, Nick Denman, the South African David Williams and Phil Hallworth all appeared at some time or other while school luminaries such as Steven Kurer, Head of School in '82 and Jonathan Davies, who held a similar position in '85 both displayed remarkable prowess. Stephen, who had played hockey for the school and so had a powerful bottom hand, once scored 100 n.o. while 'Jonners', when not acting as scorer for the 1st XI or swotting for his scholarship, evolved an idiosyncratic leg-spin action reminiscent of that of the South African Paul Adams as they both ended their deliveries, head down facing the ground.

The college recognised the achievements of the 'jocks' awarding beribboned blazers and colourful caps, worn round the school on a Saturday morning; I felt that the lesser mortals also deserved some sort of recognition and so designed a tie (see the picture) which the Head Master, Mr. Andrews, allowed to be similarly worn, somewhat to the displeasure of the Marshall, prior to a match. And they were highly prized, to such an extent that several former club members still have them, 40 years on.

Of course, time gilds the memory. And I hope that other generations have their own special memories; but for a few years, in the early Eighties, there was magic at the top of Beggars Bush.

This, from Stephen Kurer: [Beggars Bush Cricket Club 1981ish](#)

‘In selecting the team below for this Saturday’s game, I haven’t allowed such niceties as ability, fidelity or high frequency to affect my judgement – it is based purely on sentiment. I could have put out two teams from those who volunteered to play, so I would like to thank you all for the support. However, I have selected a team of players who apart from myself are leaving at the end of the year, taking the experience gained within the Club to the four corners of the Earth.’

And there you have it in a nutshell, the ethos of the Beggars Bush Cricket Club lead by, captained, umpired and organized by the unforgettable Tony Cottrell. The pre-amble to the team sheet for our last game. Playing for BB club – amongst the most memorable of my many memorable moments at Clifton- and the fact that I still have the team sheet and pictures over 40 years later, testament to the place in my heart playing for the Best Club of all.

Sport at Clifton was a serious business. Dedication, fitness, speed, accuracy, discipline- well bollock’s to all of that. BB club was fundamentally about not taking sport or life too seriously and having some fun.

We played- we even wanted to win – but it was all played with a certain ‘joie de vivre’ (Finally learning French has paid off). Seriously but not too seriously. Well, but not too well. I have no idea to this day who the opponents were or where they came from – rarely if ever from other public schools, but a ramshackle mix of different clubs, backgrounds and abilities who wanted to have an enjoyable Saturday afternoon escape from work and family and there you have it, whatever the lack of logic, or end product or reason, like so much else in life- it worked, it was fun and years later we remember it fondly.

Tony Cottrell keeping wicket while smoking his cigar. Umpiring and accidentally blowing smoke as the opponent’s came in to bowl and for me my life long record-breaking achievement -scoring a century. It never happened before; it’s never happened since. It will never happen again. But once, just once my greatest sporting achievement – slogging a century. We did have Moses playing for us so maybe being of the faith he had some influence but I don’t care- I scored a century for the world

renown Beggar's Bush Cricket Club. Unforgettable.



B. B. CLUB

In selecting the team below for this Saturday's game, (I have not allowed such niceties as ability, fidelity or high frequency to effect my judgement - it is based purely on sentiment. I could have put out two teams, (AND MAY BE TOO) from those who volunteered to play, so I should like to thank you all for the support (- I shall wear it proudly!) - However, I have selected a team of players who, apart from myself, are leaving at the end of year, taking the experience gained with the Club to the four corners of the Earth.

Therefore, the following are invited to represent the Club against Castle Green on Saturday :-

- The Club's President
- The M.P. for Clifton College
- The Head of School
- The Captain of Rugby
- The Captain of Swimming
- The Captain of the Third XI
- The Vice-Captain of Soccer (- and one of the worse drivers and navigators known to Man)
- The Producer of 'Royal Hunt of the Sun'
- The Club Opening Gopher and Resident Spanish School (- much needed for our forthcoming tour of Buenos Aires local cricket 2 XIs)
- The Possessor of the Two Most Famous Fingers in Club History.

AND JAMES PRATT!

Reserves:- Mackay, Ruck, Dair, Siddique, Loxdale, Buxton, Robb, Saunders, Rosen, Christie, Thurlow and DJJ.

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