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Cricket in the Eighteenth Century

### Original Citation

Light, Rob (2011) Cricket in the Eighteenth Century. In: The Cambridge Companion to Cricket. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 26-40. ISBN 9780521167871

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## 2

ROB LIGHT

# Cricket in the eighteenth century

Revolutionary events that were taking place across the English Channel during that summer may have had a far wider historical significance, but on 26 June 1789 one of the most symbolic matches in the history of cricket took place in what was to become Dorset Square, London. It was on this day that an eleven representing the Hambledon club took the field on the first of only two recorded occasions at Thomas Lord's ground, the home of the recently formed Marylebone Cricket Club.<sup>1</sup>

This brief association between what had been the game's most influential institution until this point and the organisation which was soon to take its place clearly marks a watershed in the history of cricket. But although the game's formative period of development was drawing to a close, this match offers a profound illustration of cricket's accelerated growth during the eighteenth century and the distinctive dynamics that shaped it. Whilst the significance it later assumed was clearly not yet apparent, the match was still a major event. Cricket had been at the forefront of a thriving commercial leisure culture in London for the previous forty or so years and any major contest such as this one received a considerable level of publicity.<sup>2</sup> Both teams were also assembled by members of the aristocracy, which reflected how far the predominance of the social elite at cricket's highest level had influenced the game's development. Their growing involvement resulted in a version of its laws first being codified in 1744 and published in 1752. The impetus for this set of regulations came from a group of cricket clubs, and Hambledon's position at the forefront of the game demonstrated the way in which such organisations had thrived as they became an important nexus for the Georgian gentry's pervading culture of sociability and idiosyncratic leisure habits.

Hambledon's victory in the match also reflected the origins and continued popular strength of cricket in the south-eastern counties of England where it had been played as a folk game since at least the fifteenth century. It was inspired by an innings of 94 from William Beldham, a twenty-three-year-old

farmer who learned to play in his home village of Farnham and was soon to become the leading batsman of the era. His grounding in the game demonstrated how cricket first became a strong focal point of communal identity in these vibrant rural parishes, and through its success over the previous four decades Hambledon had also come to embody the sense of local and regional pride that marked cricket in this context.

The Hambledon club also marked the convergence of these various strands in the development of the eighteenth-century game and consequently has often provided the focus for writing on cricket during this period.<sup>3</sup> In the most important of these works David Underdown expertly set the development of both the club and the game within the broader contemporary social, economic and cultural context of eighteenth-century Britain.<sup>4</sup>

The aim here, however, is to offer a different perspective by concentrating on the context which shaped Hambledon cricket, and the one pivotal feature of the eighteenth-century game that bound its key themes together was highlighted in an advertisement which was published by the *Morning Star* prior to the 1789 match. It explained that, 'Eleven of the Hambledon club are to play thirteen of *All England* ... the odds on the side of the Hambledon club are now six to five. The sum played for is considerable, the bets very great.'<sup>5</sup> The stake was in fact 1000 guineas, a figure way beyond the means of the farmers and tradesmen who were paid to play in the match. But they were representing members of the aristocracy and gentry whose resources and immense appetite for gambling enabled them to make such wagers on a regular basis.

### 'To pursue that wholesome Exercise': cricket and the eighteenth-century aristocracy

The appropriation of cricket by the gentry around the start of the eighteenth century shaped a new era in the game's development. Their growing involvement initiated a fundamental shift in cricket's social and cultural dynamics which altered general perceptions of the game. Before the start of the eighteenth century most references to cricket relate to prosecutions for Sabbath-breaking or associate it with the perceived immorality of other recreations that were popular amongst the lower classes. Indeed, as late as 1712 a Puritan pamphlet which was written as a deterrent against Sabbath-breaking gave:

... a very dismal Account of four Young-Men, who made a Match to Play at Cricket, on Sunday the 6th of this Instant July 1712, in a meadow near maiden Head Thicket; and as they were at Play, there arose out of the Ground

a Man in Black with a Cloven-Foot, which put them in a great Consternation; but as they stood in the Frighted Condition, the Devil flew up in the Air, in a Dark Cloud with Flashes of fire, and in his Room he left a very Beautiful Woman, and Robert Yates and Richard Moors hastily stepping up to her, being Charm'd with her Beauty went to kiss her, but in the Attempt they instantly fell down Dead. The other two, Simon Jackson and George Grantham, seeing this Tragical Sight, ran home to Maiden-Head, where they now lye in a Distracted Condition.<sup>6</sup>

However, notices of matches between groups of gentlemen who endowed the game with a far more virtuous image began to appear at around this time. For example, in 1730 the *British Journal* explained that 'His Grace the Duke of Richmond, and several other young Noblemen and Gentlemen, have begun to divert themselves each Morning, at the Play of Cricket in Hyde Park and design to pursue that wholesome Exercise every fair Morning during Spring' [sic].<sup>7</sup>

But there was far more behind the increasing aristocratic interest in cricket than its value as a healthy form of recreation. The patronage of popular sport and entertainment played an important role in reinforcing relationships that underscored the eighteenth-century social structure of Britain. Members of the aristocracy often staged lavish events which aimed to attract a wide audience in order to court popularity and emphasise the importance of a common English culture that crossed class divisions. Such displays of wealth and power were also a means of demonstrating economic and social standing through which the position of the aristocracy at the head of society could be reinforced. Consequently, matches like the one in 1725 'between a set of Gamesters headed by his Grace the D. of Richmond on one side and a set headed by Sir William Gage, Bart and Knight of the Bath' at Berry Hill near Arundel in Sussex began to take place. It was watched by a 'vast concourse of people', before 'his Grace the Duke of Norfolk gave a splendid Ball and Entertainment that Night at the Castle' [sic].<sup>8</sup>

As well as offering suitable opportunities for their social and economic status to be expressed, cricket was clearly a form of recreation which could also accommodate the distinctive leisure habits of the Georgian aristocracy. The game provided a convivial environment in which other sociable activities could take place and offered a natural focal point for the pervading contemporary associational culture. So as formal matches involving groups of gentlemen in places such as Dartford in Kent and Chertsey in Surrey became increasingly common, a wave of cricket clubs was established. In the earliest reference to such an organisation 'the Gentlemen known by the name of the London Club, who are composed of several parishes in London, Southwark &c' attended 'a meeting at the Three Tons and Rummer in Grace

Church Street' in 1722.<sup>9</sup> It was held to make a match against a team from the 'Parish of Dartford' where a club was formed in 1756, and by the 1770s similar organisations were also active at Bridge Hill, Bishopsbourne and Coxheath in Kent, Coulsdon in Surrey, the Star and Garter Inn in Pall Mall and, of course, Hambledon.<sup>10</sup>

It was this growing structure of formal clubs that initiated the wider regulation of the game. The adoption of a leadership role in cricket by a select number of clubs in the south-east of England mirrored that of elite societies in other areas of British life, such as medicine and the law. These organisations recognised the need to set out and maintain uniform standards and began to regulate their respective professions during the eighteenth century. As we shall see, the growing popularity of cricket began to demand a degree of rationalisation for much less respectable reasons. But the 1744 laws of the game were agreed upon at a meeting of clubs initiated by the Star and Garter Club in London, and it was this organisation which led subsequent revisions before Hambledon, briefly, and then Marylebone Cricket Club took on the responsibility.

The membership of these organisations provides a clear reason why they were looked upon to provide leadership for the sport: all three included high-ranking aristocrats. Those representatives of the Star and Garter Club, who presided over the Laws of the game, were described as a 'Committee of Noblemen and Gentlemen' in publications of their regulations and it was also members of this august organisation who eventually formed the Marylebone Cricket Club.<sup>11</sup> They included the Earl of Wincheslea and Col. the Hon. Charles Lennox who both provided Thomas Lord with financial backing to open his new ground in 1787.<sup>12</sup> By this time both men were raising teams to play the Hambledon club which, in its heyday, included aristocrats such as Lord Dunkellin and Viscount Palmerston, father of the Victorian statesman, as well as the renowned patrons of eighteenth-century cricket the Earl of Tankerville and the Duke of Dorset.<sup>13</sup>

Participation in cricket clubs, however, was not confined to members of the aristocracy. Although specific information relating to clubs in London's surrounding market towns is scarce, it is likely that the expanding urban gentry rather than members of the nobility formed such organisations in places like Dartford and Bromley in Kent and Croydon in Surrey. The membership pattern of some more prestigious clubs also developed on a relatively broad social basis, which suggests they began to serve as a locus of social formation for an expanding middle class during this period. Even in an organisation with the stature of Hambledon, recent arrivals in Hampshire society, professional men and those whose status was built upon new wealth, such as Edward Hale, the son of a local surgeon, and Captain Erasmus Gower,

were able to mix both with each other and with members of the traditional landed elite.<sup>14</sup>

These organisations were primarily aimed at providing recreational activities for their members, and participation in the sport often took place on a social footing in the form of ‘pick up’ matches between teams of members. During the 1780s, clubs at Coxheath, Bridge Hill and the Sudbury ‘cricket society’ in Suffolk all staged such matches on a regular basis. Dining and drinking were usually incorporated into proceedings and at Coxheath the day’s play was concluded with a dinner which cost 2 shillings for members and 3 shillings for non-members. Professionals were also employed to raise the standard of play. They received expenses for horse hire, 1 shilling and 6 pence for food and drink, and a payment of 5 shillings if on the winning side, 2 shillings and 6 pence if they lost.<sup>15</sup> Matches between teams representing different clubs also became common and again these could be primarily social events. But they nearly always carried a competitive edge in the form of a wager and this was clearly the case in a match at Shacklewell near Stoke Newington in 1743 between ‘eleven Gentlemen belonging to a cricket club there and eleven Gentlemen of the Westminster club, for a considerable Sum of Money’.<sup>16</sup>

Indeed it is unlikely that any of these developments could have taken place had cricket not been ideally suited to gambling, which was arguably the most popular leisure activity in Georgian society. Before the start of the nineteenth century it was uncommon for matches not to carry a wager between the participants, whoever they were. But at the pinnacle of the sport stood the ‘Great Matches’, in which teams assembled by cricket’s aristocratic rivals played for high stakes. Many of these contests took place between two sides that represented individual patrons, and as early as 1735 it was announced that a match between ‘his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales and the Earl of Middlesex for 1,000 L [£1000], is to be played on Bromley common by Eleven of a side’.<sup>17</sup> However, individuals or groups of backers also put together teams that played in the guise of counties, such as Kent and Sussex, or as All England, or sometimes bearing the names of leading aristocratic clubs. So, for example, in 1776 Hambledon played matches against England in June for £525 and Surrey in August for £1050.<sup>18</sup>

### ‘tis lawful for the Duke’: the structure and culture of eighteenth-century cricket

Significant sums of money were wagered upon cricket matches by members of the eighteenth-century social elite and this created a heightened sense of competition that shaped the game in its pre-modern context. But the key

concept in understanding the distinctive culture and structure that drove cricket forward during this period is the 'challenge'.

Although on a fundamental level the challenge was a necessary means of organising matches at a time of irregular work patterns, it also introduced the use of written regulations for cricket, and this process reveals much about the cultural dynamic which prevailed in the pre-modern period. Despite its accelerated early development, cricket, like other sports, was a localised and informal game in the first half of the eighteenth century, not far removed from its folk origins. This meant that, alongside the basic parameters of the game, variant elements also existed, and it was necessary to clarify which of these would be used in any single contest.

As in other sports, the large amounts of money wagered on matches by the aristocratic patrons of cricket meant that disputes were relatively common, and court cases held to settle them were not unknown. These could prove expensive and inconclusive and on 16 May 1719 the *Saturday Post* explained how:

Last week a Tryal was brought at Guildhall before Lord Chief Justice Pratt, between two Companies of Cricket Players, the Men of Kent Plaintiffs and the Men of London Defendants, for Sixty Pounds played for at Cricket, and after a long hearing and near 200 l. expended in the cause, my Lord not understanding the Game, ordered them to play it over again.<sup>19</sup>

So it became common for contests to be governed by written contractual agreements. A set of regulations was consequently made during the process of issuing and accepting the challenge, which aimed to prevent disputes by both clarifying various aspects of play and setting out the terms of the wager. The historian Adrian Harvey has identified the distinction between these twin purposes as a 'crucial difference between codes and contracts' [sic].<sup>20</sup> He defines the sporting 'code' as a means by which the specifics of general play were usually governed, and it was from these agreements that the generally accepted laws of the game evolved. The 'contract', however, related to separate arrangements for individual matches that usually referred to the wager, such as the means of arbitration, the composition of the teams and the size of the stake.

The distinction between the 'code' and the 'contract' is clearly demonstrated in an early set of 'Articles of Agreement', which presided over two matches between the Duke of Richmond and Mr Alan Broderick in 1727. Of the sixteen points that were set out in the document, the following six relate to the code by which the match was played, and state:

2nd. That the wickets shall be pitched in a fair and even place, at 23 yards from each other.

- 3rd. A ball caught, cloathed or not cloathed the Striker is out.
- 4th. When a Ball is caught out, the Stroke counts nothing.
- 5th. Catching out behind the Wicket allowed.
- 7th. That 12 Gamesters shall play on each side.
- 14th. The Batt Men for every One they count are to touch the Umpires Stick.<sup>21</sup>

Each of these points relates to a familiar aspect of cricket that is covered by its present laws and this set of 'Articles' is generally seen as the first written codification of the game. It is likely that, along with similar agreements, it provided a model which was adhered to in other contests before attempts to establish a single more generally accepted code began with the publication of the laws in 1752. Consequently, the precedent of written regulations was established for a game that had been built on informal oral folk traditions, which became a key feature of modern sport.

But the purpose of this and other similar documents bears little relation to the concept of fair play that underscored the widespread development of codified rules in sport around 150 years later. The central function of the 1727 'Articles of Agreement' are dealt with by the 'Articles' which relate to the 'contract' and attend to the conditions that presided over the wager. Most importantly, the tenth article stated 'that each Match shall be for twelve guineas of each Side'. Although this was a relatively small sum, the contests were still keenly competitive and the sixth 'Article' stated:

That 'tis lawful for the Duke of Richmond to choose the Gamesters, who have played in either of his Grace's two last matches with Sir William Gage; and that 'tis lawful for Mr Broderick to choose the Gamesters within three miles of Pepperharowe, provided they actually lived there last Lady day.<sup>22</sup>

By the 1720s, wealthy patrons had already begun to employ leading players on their estates in order for them to play cricket. So, as Lady Day was traditionally the day for hiring servants, this regulation was clearly aimed at ensuring that both the Duke and Mr Broderick were aware of the players they would encounter by preventing new men from being engaged after the agreement had been made.

Competition was clearly fundamental to eighteenth-century cricket and the challenge provided the key means through which it was articulated. But the versatility of the concept meant that these competitive dynamics were not confined to expressing the rivalries of aristocratic patrons. In the rural parishes that surrounded London, those lower down the social order played in less formal challenge matches and despite the lack of written references to cricket in this context some details have survived. They suggest that the popular game served as an important expression of local identity as early



as 1708, when a Kentish farmer declared in his diary 'Wee beat Ash Street at Cricketts'.<sup>23</sup>

By the second half of the eighteenth century the sense of local identity that was invested in cricket amongst these rural communities had been transposed into the elite context of the sport. Leading players from Sussex, Hampshire and Kent began to gain wider recognition and find engagements to play in the 'Great Matches'. Consequently, William Beldham could later speak of how these men became 'the pride and honour in the parishes' when describing the way local people, in the villages where most early professionals learned to play the game, followed their performances in London.<sup>24</sup>

The synthesis between aristocratic patronage and local identity was most profound at Hambledon and played a key role in the club's success. Between 1770 and 1790 it has been estimated that the predominantly professional teams which represented the club played for £32,527 in stake money and won £22,497.<sup>25</sup> But the roots of both the club and most of its players in rural Hampshire meant that on occasions such as when Hambledon played England for £1,050 in 1777, the importance of the contest went far beyond the stake money that had been wagered. The compelling sense of local identity that was invested in these matches was vividly expressed in John Nyren's famous reminiscence that:

There was high feasting on Broadhalfpenny during the solemnity of one of our grand matches. Oh it was a heart-stirring sight to witness the multitude forming a complete and dense circle round that noble green. Half the county would be present, and all their hearts with us – Little Hambledon, pitted against all England was a proud thought for the Hampshire men. Defeat was glory in a struggle – victory, indeed, made us 'a little lower than angels'.<sup>26</sup>

### **'The pride and honour of the parishes': professionalism and eighteenth-century cricket**

The growing prevalence of professional players in the 'Great Matches' offers a further insight into the wider social, economic and cultural relations that shaped the game during this period. Initially these men were employed through a form of 'retained' or 'indentured' professionalism, by which they were given token jobs on the estates of aristocratic cricket patrons and spent the greater part of the summer months playing in challenge matches. Thomas Waymark, who was a groom on the Duke of Richmond's estate at Goodwood in the 1720s, is the earliest known example of a professional cricketer. According to the Goodwood accounts he was paid seven shillings a week plus board from Christmas 1729 until the following summer. Waymark also has the distinction of producing the first recorded match-winning

performance by a professional player. On 6 September 1728, the *London Journal* described how, whilst playing for ‘Sussex, Surrey and Hants’ against Kent, a groom of the Duke of Richmond’s, who is widely accepted to have been Waymark, ‘signalized himself by such extraordinary agility and dexterity to the surprise of the spectators which were some thousands and ’tis reckoned he turned the tide of victory which for some years has been generally on the Kentish side’.<sup>27</sup> Leading players continued to be engaged in this way throughout the eighteenth century, and in the 1770s John Minshull, the man who scored the first recorded century, worked as a gardener on the Duke of Dorset’s estate.<sup>28</sup>

But although the finance and opportunities that enabled professionalism to first develop were provided by aristocratic patrons, the origin of the players offers a further illustration of cricket’s origins as a folk game and its continued vitality as a popular recreation. The matches which took place between local parishes in the rural south-east of England clearly developed a vibrant competitive culture in which talented local players could come to the attention of aristocratic patrons. Although the exact social backgrounds of the earliest recorded indentured professionals are largely unknown, it is likely that these players worked at the lower end of the rural economy, as they were willing to accept fairly menial positions on the aristocratic estates in order to play in major cricket matches. So the cultural association between professionalism and the lower classes, which later came to mean much more in cricket, existed from the outset and already offered a way into a life of greater possibilities for men of humble backgrounds.

By the second half of the eighteenth century, however, employment opportunities for professional cricketers had begun to expand. The game’s growing popularity led to an increase in demand for major matches, and a form of independent professionalism was developed that saw players receive payment for the individual contests in which they took part. The introduction of match payments saw a subtle but significant shift in the economic background of professional players, which became even more prevalent during the next century. Although they were still members of the lower classes, the players who were engaged to play cricket through this system commonly enjoyed a relatively independent economic status. Many were tradesmen or farmers who were clearly not willing to give up their occupation for more menial work on the aristocratic estates. So, for example, when Lord John Sackville’s Kent XI faced an All England XI at the Artillery Ground in 1744, his team included Mills of Bromley, who was a bookmaker, and Hodswell of Dartford, a tanner.<sup>29</sup>

The Hambledon team became a model for this type of independent professionalism. Travelling expenses and a system of fees for both practices and ‘Great Matches’ were paid to the farmers, publicans and tradesmen who

made up the club's match-play team. They received 'four shillings if winners and three shillings if losers' on practice days and, according to William Beldham, five guineas for a win and three guineas if they lost in the 'Great Matches' during the 1780s.<sup>30</sup>

In view of subsequent attitudes towards gambling in cricket, it comes as little surprise that these players have been widely recognised for achievements other than the phenomenal amount of stake money they won. Regular practice and competitive matches between the era's leading players saw advancements in playing technique and equipment manufacture take place at Hambleton that resulted in significant changes to the way the game was played. First Richard Nyren and then David Harris developed the practice of length bowling, which exploited the irregular bounce of uneven pitches in a way that the old style skimming delivery did not. Then, in response, batsmen like John Small and 'Silver' Billy Beldham pioneered the straight bat approach, through which they used forward and back play and brought the bat down in a vertical position. Indeed, Small, a master bat maker, turned his playing innovation into a literal one by first changing the shape of the bat from its original curved form to one similar to that which is used today. John Nyren later described the benefits of Small's technique in his book *The Young Cricketer's Tutor*, which included instructions on 'How to play at a ball dropped rather short of a length on the off side of the wicket'. In it Nyren explained how, 'Old Small, one of the finest batsmen of his own day and perhaps of any other, always played such balls with an upright bat; he would pass his left foot across the wicket and this action gave him power and command over the ball'.<sup>31</sup>

But the importance of professionals within the context of eighteenth-century cricket was perhaps most clearly demonstrated through the position they were afforded by the game's aristocratic patrons. It was marked by a level of respect which differed significantly from the inferior status that was later ascribed to them in first-class cricket and could result in a blurring of the social hierarchy that was remarkable even for this period. Indeed, professionals sometimes captained sides that included members of the aristocracy, and in 1744 Valentine Romney, who was employed as a gardener on the Duke of Dorset's estate at Knole, led a Kent Eleven which included his employer and the Duke of Richmond in a match against All England.<sup>32</sup>

### **'The greatest Match that ever was play'd': cricket and commercialism in the eighteenth century**

The game's growth also meant that professional players could gain considerable popular recognition during the eighteenth century and some became

star attractions in the increasingly commercialised context of cricket in London. Along with events such as foot races and prizefights, cricket was staged at commercial venues and promoted to attract a popular audience in the capital throughout most of the eighteenth century. Publicans were often at the centre of these events, and the Ram at Smithfield was rated for a cricket field as early as 1668.<sup>33</sup>

However, the first important venue for cricket was the Artillery Ground in Finsbury, which grew in prominence whilst George Smith was the proprietor in the 1730s. Smith clearly recognised the growing commercial potential of cricket and was able to attract large crowds to watch the game by developing a relatively sophisticated business strategy. As well as hosting the 'Great Matches', he staged more explicitly commercial events such as single-wicket contests in which leading professionals played against each other in teams of less than eleven or as individuals. These events were also publicised regularly in the press, and the growing celebrity of leading players was used to promote them. For example, in 1743 an estimated 10,000 people attended a contest which was publicised in the *Daily Advertiser* as a:

Match at Cricket in the Artillery Ground, London, for Five Hundred Guineas viz, Hodswell of Dartford, Romley of Sevenoaks, and Cutbush of Maidstone, against Sawyer of Richmond, Newland of Slindon in Sussex, and Bryant of London; as this is the greatest Match that ever was play'd three on a side, all persons are desired to be particular in keeping the full bounds of the line. [sic]<sup>34</sup>

The large crowds that watched cricket during this period also offer an insight into the way the game became embedded in the popular culture of London and parts of the south-east of England during the eighteenth century. Gambling was equally popular amongst the lower classes and considerable amounts of betting often took place at matches. Furthermore, crowd disturbances were not unknown. In 1731, the Duke of Richmond's Eleven was 'greatly insulted by the mob some of the men having their shirts tore off their backs' following a match with Mr Chambers' Eleven' [sic].<sup>35</sup> There had been much betting on the result but the contest ended in a draw with Chambers's side needing just '8 or 10 Notches with 4 or 5 more to have come in' [sic].<sup>36</sup> Direct popular action against perceived injustice was a customary practice in contemporary society and was clearly not confined to redressing breaches of the 'moral economy'.<sup>37</sup> George Smith used a ring of benches to keep spectators away from the playing area.<sup>38</sup> But in 1744 'there was great disorder' during a contest between 'the county of Kent and All England' at the Artillery Ground and 'it was with difficulty the match was played out'.<sup>39</sup>

The incident resulted in a temporary rise in admission charge from 2d to 6d, which proved unpopular and costly to Smith's business. However, the crowd continued to exert its own form of moral justice and after a pickpocket was caught stealing during a match at the Artillery Ground in 1746 'he was most severely duck'd by the populace'.<sup>40</sup>

Nevertheless, the model pioneered by George Smith was followed by other entrepreneurs well into the next century. Thomas Lord's ground staged commercial events throughout the first fifty years of its existence and in June 1800, for example, a contest between All England and Surrey for 1,000 guineas was advertised in the *Morning Herald*.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, during the 1820s this form of commercial cricket played a pivotal role as the game first spread across the expanding urban industrial regions of the north and midlands. An estimated crowd of 20,000 watched Sheffield play Nottingham for 200 sovereigns at Darnall, Sheffield in 1824.<sup>42</sup> The Nottingham team for this contest was assembled by William Clarke, who later opened a commercial venue at Trent Bridge, Nottingham in 1843. It was also Clarke who took the model of professional-centred commercial cricket a step further in 1846 when he began touring the British Isles with a team that included the leading professionals of the day. Clarke's All England Eleven is widely recognised to have played a pivotal role as cricket became a sport of truly national dimensions, and his successors later looked to exploit the potential of new commercial markets by undertaking international tours which stimulated the game's growth overseas.

### The legacy of eighteenth-century cricket

Cricket's growth during the eighteenth century was clearly remarkable. Yet, as the Hambledon Eleven's first appearance at Lord's illustrates, for all its progress the game continued to revolve around the distinctive social, economic and cultural relations of pre-modern society throughout this period. Consequently, cricket's development was also constrained by the inherent limitations of contemporary Britain. As commercial and demographic growth was heavily concentrated in and around London before the start of the nineteenth century, the high level of aristocratic influence, popular interest and commercial investment that stimulated cricket's growth in the region did not exist elsewhere. So although the increasing spread of British influence overseas meant the game was played as far afield as North America from 1710 and India from 1721, and whilst even ill-timed plans for a team to tour Paris were made in 1789, little sustained development took place away from the south-east of England before the nineteenth century.

When economic conditions which could support the game's development spread elsewhere in the country, however, they were built around a new set of social economic and cultural relations which began to transform the face of cricket. The changing structure of agriculture in rural south-eastern England resulted in a significant reduction in work and wages which began to undermine many of the region's communities. Their decline was met by an increase in social unrest that exacerbated the general withdrawal from public life of the aristocracy following the French Revolution. The fusion of aristocratic enthusiasm and popular vitality, which characterised the eighteenth-century game, largely disappeared. Aristocratic involvement became centred on London, and especially the MCC, at the expense of the game's rural heartland. At its highest level, cricket was increasingly dominated by social relations that were shaped by class divisions which prevailed until the end of the next century.

Yet, as David Underdown noted, there was a 'shift in the game's regional vitality to the industrial Midlands and the North, to Yorkshire, Lancashire, and Nottinghamshire, where by the later 1820s the game was spreading rapidly and attracting great crowds'.<sup>43</sup> Here, cricket's growth continued to be driven by the competitive pre-modern culture and structure of sport. Initially, through challenge matches and the professional-centred commercial model pioneered by George Smith, then developed by William Clarke, cricket's popular cultural traditions were transposed into the new urban industrial setting where they later found expression through the development of league cricket. Indeed, it could be argued that commercialism and the kind of popular professional-centred spectacle that marked the eighteenth-century game have re-emerged in the twenty-first century as cricket enters a new phase of development.

## NOTES

- 1 Ashley Mote, *The Glory Days of Cricket: The Extraordinary Story of Broadhalfpenny Down* (London: Robson Books 1997), pp. 222–29.
- 2 *St. James's Chronicle or the British Evening Post*, 2 July 1789; *Whitehall Evening Post*, 2 July 1789; *Morning Star*, 3 July 1789; *World*, 3 July 1789.
- 3 See David Underdown, *The Start of Play: Cricket and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000) and Mote, *Cricket's Days of Glory*.
- 4 Underdown, *Start of Play*.
- 5 *Morning Star*, 18 August 1789.
- 6 In Michael Davie and Simon Davie, *The Faber Book of Cricket* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987), p. 260.
- 7 *British Journal*, 11 April 1730.
- 8 *Daily Journal*, 26 July 1725.

Cricket in the eighteenth century

- 9 *Weekly Journal or British Gazetteer*, 21 July 1722.
- 10 Underdown, *Start of Play*, pp. 67–158.
- 11 Christopher Brookes, *English Cricket: The Game and its Players Through the Ages*, (Exeter: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1978), illustration 5.
- 12 Underdown, *Start of Play*, p. 160.
- 13 *Ibid.*, pp. 126–51.
- 14 *Ibid.*, pp. 130–34.
- 15 *Ibid.*, pp. 126–27.
- 16 *Daily Advertiser*, 3 June 1743.
- 17 *Old Whig or The Constant Protestant*, 24 July 1735.
- 18 Mote, *The Glory Days of Cricket*, pp. 182, 188.
- 19 *Saturday Post*, 16 May 1719.
- 20 Adrian Harvey, *The Beginnings of a Commercial Sporting Culture in Britain, 1793–1850* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2004), p. 116.
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- 43 Underdown, *Start of Play*, p. 209.

This, at the end of the eighteenth century, where our story ends, was through Bentley, Denison and Lillywhite, the ancestor of Wisden itself. By the start of the seventeenth century, cricket exists and is, very shortly afterwards both widespread and popular in parts of South-Eastern England. By the end of the next century, M.C.C. is well established, the game is already being played in many parts of the world, and we are on the threshold of the modern period. Thus these two hundred years span a most interesting era -- one which we can in our ignorance still call the infancy and growth of the game. The First Worcester Edition of *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book, Intended for the Instruction and Amusement of Little Master Tommy, and Pretty Miss Polly* includes this picture and description of 18th-century cricket. Click on the image to view an expanded version. Media Credits. Published by Isaiah Thomas, Worcester, Massachusetts, 1787. Image, Library of Congress. To cite this story (For MLA citation guidance see easybib or OWL ): Bos, Carole "Cricket in the Eighteenth Century" *AwesomeStories.com*. Oct 07, 2013.