

The Hetairoi Cricket Club: a brief history.

The club was founded in 1980, by four friends, three from Oxford, one from Cambridge (all still involved). Three of us were classicists, hence we agreed the name Hetairoi which is ancient Greek for travelling companions, fellow drinkers, wanderers. It is the term for Odysseus's companions in the Odyssey. The aim of the club was to maintain a bond between a group who had played cricket together as students, mainly based on Oriel college, by playing good friendly cricket. In our first year (1980) we had two fixtures against Headley CC and the Coots CC. Both matches were cancelled due to torrential rain (enabling the writer to revise properly for his viva in Greats on the following Monday morning). This fixture list grew to six the following year and nine in two years. The first fixture to be completed was against New College, Oxford, in May 1981. New College was in those days perhaps the best Oxford ground, and was one of our first fixtures as a friend of the founders' was captain there in 1981. Of the eleven selected for the Hetairoi that day six are still playing regularly for the club. It is also interesting to note that the first four batsmen from New College all went on to play for the Hetairoi. (Again three are still actively involved.) Indeed it became clear that to play a reasonable number of fixtures as a social wandering side we needed more than the initial 15 or so players, and the club expanded to include a number of New College players. In that first playing season we also completed fixtures against the Coots, Headley CC, the All Sorts, Addington 1743 CC, and the Old Cholmleians. All six games were lost! Our first victory came the following year when we defeated St. John's College, Cambridge by 71 runs, largely thanks to an undefeated century by John White, an Oriensis and grandson of J.C. White of Somerset and England.

Thanks again to our friend at New College, Giles Brown, who hailed from East Anglia, we began our first tour to Southwold on the August Bank Holiday of 1983, playing Leiston, Southwold, and Sudbourne Hall. Accommodation was in Eversley school, where the prep school beds were not quite adequate for those over six foot, such as Henry James, and where we were woken each morn by reveille at the scout camp based on the common outside. This tour continues still and many will have happy memories of games on the windy Southwold Common and at the wonderful Sudbourne ground that have occurred every year since. The next year there was added a tour to York, that also persists to this day, and over the years has included games with the University, Driffild CC, Beverly CC, Hull CC and Escrick Park CC. In addition to this expansion to North and East we had also now added a fixture against Shipton-u-Wychwood in the West, and a game with Australia House in Oxford.

The Australians have invariably been our strongest opponents over the years and have handed us down some sound defeats. Perhaps for this reason, memorable games have certainly included our two victories against them. The first occurred when we chased 265 successfully on the Christ Church ground and the second last year (1999) when James Louw (a Blue) scored 173, the club highest score, as we posted 302 for 4 and won by over 100 runs. Another fine feat was attained in an early fixture with the HAC in London. HAC were 91 for 2 and cruising rather unduly confidently towards our total of 151 all out, when Clive Hayes (a New College linguist now based in Paris) came on to bowl 6.2

overs, two maidens, and take seven wickets for ten runs, leaving us with a victory by 29 runs. In that same season (1984) Leigh Cricket Club locked themselves in the changing room for 20 minutes at the end of our first game with them. Having set us 208 to win in two hours batting, they were as surprised as we were when a hundred by Martin Lamb and 58 by Jim Reeve (both still playing for us), saw us home with 3 overs to spare. We continue to enjoy a game with Leigh to this day. Such glorious moments as these are interspersed with less happy memories such as our one and only all-day game against Barclays Bank when what looked like a strong batting side on paper was skittled out for 72 and the game was all over at 3.10. In the nature of social cricket, where players turn out less regularly for clubs, individual achievements are rarer. Only one batsman, Chris Iley, has scored more than 1000 runs in a season, and Ron Boddy was also unusual in taking 57 wickets in a season. Cumulatively, last year (1999) saw Chris Megone and John Ball vie to be the first to hit more than 5000 runs for the club, whilst Stephen Matthews was the first bowler to take 500 wickets. One of the advantages of being a relatively young club is that we have an almost perfect score-book record of all our games. Thanks to statistician Brian Slade the club also now has an enviable computerised statistical database.

Since the early days the fixture list has grown and we have acquired brothers and friends of members as players, though we maintain a strong Oxford/Cambridge basis (predominantly Oxford, with about 50% of players still from there). The number of playing members is now about 50, with 40-45 fixtures a year. The present list of opponents ranges from Oxford and Cambridge college sides to village sides to some strong club sides. In addition we continue to play a number of fellow wandering sides at mutually agreeable locations. We try to get out sides suitably strong for our opposition, and our explicit aim is to play cricket in the right spirit and foster the social side of the game. For this latter reason there is a strong involvement of girl-friends, wives, and families in the club. The East Anglian tour is a good example where cricket is mixed with early morning swims for all, play on the beach, and family outings to the Southwold Common Circus and the Southwold theatre. Similarly on our first overseas tour several families came along too.

It is also certainly the case that through the Hetairoi many of us have kept in touch with friends, many based around the world, with whom we would otherwise have lost contact. A number of our overseas members make sure to fit in a couple of Hetairoi games when they are back in the UK each year. At times it has been plausible that we could raise a stronger side from members based overseas than from those based in the UK. Our University base also means we have members drawn from all over the world, and we regularly put out teams with players drawn from four continents (Africa, Asia, Australia and Europe). We have certainly had players from the Americas, though not yet, I think, a side with all five continents represented. The club has thus served its social purpose in maintaining friendships within its membership. We also like to believe that our attitude to the game has fostered many new friends amongst opponents in some of the long-standing fixtures mentioned above.

In 1999 we achieved a long-standing ambition, namely an overseas tour, in this case to the Eastern Cape in South Africa. As a result of contacts made by one of the Hetairoi in the Grahamstown area, this in fact became a development tour in which we linked with the Swallows CC, a club full of cricketing talent based in one of the poorer areas of Grahamstown. This benefited both parties. It enabled us to put out sides competent to take on the strong South African opposition, both in the Pineapple tournament in which we participated with Swallows, and further afield. And we were able to take members of the Swallows on our travels further afield, and also to introduce them to the Hetairoi's style of serious friendly cricket, a little different from their regular league game. It is as a result of this link with the Swallows and Grahamstown Cricket Board that we have organised a reverse development tour from SA for this August and some of these cricketers will participate with us in the Oxford Millenium festival. We hope to continue to foster these links over the coming years.

In the last four years we have developed a club website, which has enormously facilitated our organisation. We put reports on our games there, and there are also copies of the statistical information from recent seasons. One of the effects has been that we now receive inquiries from overseas players generally seeking a professional season with us. Regrettably the club coffers, which hover perilously close to the red, do not run to meeting such requests.

Despite the benefits of computerised communication match-managing, and all the other organisation of the club, remains a demanding chore. Similarly, as for many clubs without a specific geographical base, the task of renewing membership is unending. Noentheless we hope that the style and quality of the cricket we play, and the social nature of the club, will enable us to continue to flourish well into the next millenium, and to contribute to the game some of what the game has given us.