

Southwold tour 2023

Vs Southwold 27.8.23

It's been a while since there was a fullish report on this tour.

This year was a three day tour as John Rowe has again been away in Scotland, so the Ixworth Abbey fixture was not possible, and may now have fallen away from the tour list. We will search for another fixture next year as interest in the tour remains good.

This meant that tourists could approach Southwold in leisurely fashion on Saturday 26th August, though some were, of course, already well-ensconced in the town.

For those arriving in that late afternoon a torrential downpour awaited. In cricketing minds this of course raised some doubts about the viability of the tour fixtures.

But Sunday dawned bright enough for a pleasant morning swim, and players approached Southwold Common from various directions as the 1.00 pm start time approached. A 35 over game was agreed by Captain Clive, who then also won the toss and elected to bat. It was also a game where each side batted twelve as Hetairoi had twelve players (so rotation in the field).

Megone father and son opened up -- and soon realised that their Captain had given them a challenging task as the pitch was indeed still damp, nay sodden (at the bottom end), leading to the ball stopping capriciously on landing, and moving about. The slowness of the pitch was to make scoring hard all day, though it did dry out somewhat as the game progressed.

Sure enough John Megone was undone third ball by one which stopped completely -- leading to a half stopped drive lobbing the ball to Ezra at short extra cover. Ezra was recognisable and it soon transpired that his batting and bowling had led Sudbourne Hall to victory over the Hetairoi in 2022.

Mike Price came in at three, but was also soon undone as the slow pitch led to an inside edge on a drive and then the loss of middle and off stumps. 6 for 2

Clive Mackintosh joined Chris Megone and it fell to the Captain to try to rescue the innings from the decision to bat first. And so he did. For a while the Oriel opening partnership of years gone by sought simply to avoid further loss of wickets and had some success until the twelfth over when Megone drove the new slow bowler low to Ezra who again snaffled the catch. Ezra was to take five catches as the ball followed him about.

David Freedman came in next but was soon undone by a ball which grubbed to hit him in front of middle. Ed Ball, returning to Hetairoi colours after something of a gap, top edged a full toss to square leg, and when Andrew Wilson was caught close to the bat Hetairoi had been reduced to 28 for 6.

But Captain Clive was still there, playing very carefully and occasionally hitting the ball into the very slow outfield, mainly for singles therefore. Brian Slade came out of retirement for this game and duly smote a six over the leg side, something of a trademark shot which had not been lost in his time away from the game. But then Brian too was lbw to a ball which came very close to being a double bounce no-ball.

The score was progressing though, helped by the bowling changes being rung -- so that a series of occasional bowlers served up a decent number of wides, full tosses and byes. And Clive still stood firm, encouraging each new batsman to try to say with him so that we used all 35 overs. However Will Fryer hit a four and then skied one, Matt Vincent was also caught (by Ezra), and then Richard

Slade hit a fine six, following in his father's footsteps, before being emboldened to try again. This time he was bowled. Charlie Fryer looked for a while as if he might last longer, but after he too had hit a boundary, undue enthusiasm led to him too being bowled. Clive was left unbowed on 36. But with three overs unused, and only 104 runs on the board, Hetairoi faced a tough challenge, though Megone senior had asserted that on this wicket 100 would be a competitive total.

One and three quarter hours at the wicket, and much running between the wickets, had taken its toll on Clive, and though he nobly rotated on for one stint he largely acted in an advisory role as Megone took on acting captaincy.

Hetairoi opened up with Will Fryer as black clouds loomed over the Common, and spots of rain fell. Will bowled with good pace through the air, but the wicket remained slow and largely low. John Megone opened at the other end as Richard Slade had not bowled since May and with 104 runs on the board we wanted to avoid extras early on. John too bowled accurately and with movement, and was in fact the first to strike, removing Matt Barbrook with a good Yorker. Will then took two wickets in an over, the first an lbw which depended on the judgement that the ball had hit pad before bat, and the second a fine clean-bowled. Southwold were now 26 for 3, and although Richard had indeed given away a few wides he had taken over from John to bowl with good pace up the hill.

The dark clouds continued to affect the light but no serious rain fell and the game was now well set. Ezra, batting at three was still there though. However Mike Price took over from Will and, though he took no wickets, his pace off the ball made runs very hard to come by, with his first seven overs going for less than two an over. In the end the breakthrough came when Charlie Fryer, who had been alert in the field, overran the ball which encouraged the batsmen to attempt a second run. Charlie recovered quickly though and sent in an excellent throw to leave the number five stranded by more than a yard.

After this the batting became weaker and much depended on Ezra. Wise counsel advised fields which allowed him only singles and thus deprivation from the strike. Matt Vincent replaced Richard Slade and got prodigious swing which produced two clean-bowleds. But at the other end it was Brian Slade who achieved the crucial breakthrough, with pace off the ball deceiving Ezra and knocking off the off-bail. Southwold were now about 70 for 7 with four wickets left, and the lower order sought to run singles as the overs ticked by. One of these efforts led to another run out. But when Brian bowled the ninth man, two overs remained and about 18 was needed. John Megone bowled the penultimate over from the bottom end and cleaned up the tenth man with his first ball. But Ezra returned as the eleventh batsman and managed a four, a two, and a single, so Southwold needed about eleven off the last over, with Ezra facing. Ezra managed one four but then a single and Mike was too good for the other lower order batsman to get bat on the final balls of the game.

HCC had made it home by six runs.

One key factor was that Clive's physical strain had required us to find a stand-in keeper. Ed Ball put his hand up and proved to be a more than adequate replacement. In fact the quality of his keeping certainly saved us at least ten runs in byes/leg byes. Ed missed one very difficult chance off Richard Slade where the batsman had top edged a fast one from which flew fast and rising to Ed's right, but few club keepers would have taken it, and overall Ed made clear that he is an excellent person to ask to keep whenever he is available for us.

Southwold were excellent hosts with a very good tea which could be eaten at leisurely pace, and then plenty of Adnams on offer in the bar afterwards. After defeats at Tilford and Wraysbury it was good to return to winning ways.

Melton St Audry 28th August 2023

Returning to the home of Dot's famous teas is always a pleasure (though Dot said at the end this had been her last), and HCC were also welcomed by warm sunny weather.

But the clouds that had swirled round Southwold the day before had not missed Melton, and their square had been under water. So once again we faced a tricky wicket when going out to bat first (not sure of the toss decision for this game). Malcolm Grubb had said that MStA were very much a second eleven this year, but they turned out to have a decent bowling attack, of course including Malcolm himself who can be relied on to put the ball on the spot at a pace that is hard to hit.

So the opening bowlers were a first team opener (but still only sixteen and in his fourth match in six days), and a good member of the women's first team. John Ball and Mike Price opened for HCC. From the sidelines it was hard to gauge the pitch, but it appeared slow and largely low, though occasionally one reared challengingly. Mike and John played with care and correctness and the opening bowlers were seen off. Two slow bowlers followed, a young leggie and an experienced off-spinner, but it proved hard to increase the scoring rate. John eventually gave the off-spinner the charge and was stumped for 18 with the score on 55, in the nineteenth over, but it would transpire that this solid opening partnership had done good work.

John Megone joined Mike Price. John had had a good school season but, after a seven week lay-off, playing on low slow Suffolk wickets proved a challenge, and he hit across a low one to be bowled. Even so, he and Mike had run some sharp singles to inject a little pace into the innings. It was great to have Chris Kennard with us again (after threats of retirement there too), and he also endeavoured to speed up the scoring, but top edged one to leave us at about 80 for 3. Melton had now brought on first Malcolm Grubb, who was miserly, and then a second young leg-spinner who settled in. When he had Will Ball caught at the wicket, flashing hard, our slightly fragile batting looked as if it might be in trouble at 97 for 4 off 30 overs. There was a risk of ending up at 120-30 which would have been within Melton's compass.

However Ed Ball was ideal for the slower bowling now on, and smote some fine blows. Mike Price was also now very well set and beginning to accelerate. Ed's twenty runs saw HCC up to about 135 for four, but this was still not comfortable.

Matt Vincent came in next. Matt has plenty of natural ability with both ball and bat, but technique needs refining. His attitude to backing up also caused some concern in the Hetairoi spectators. However Melton left on the slow bowlers for the last two overs and Matt's natural eye came to the fore as he smote three fours in a row off the penultimate over, an onslaught which also induced wides and no-balls from the young bowler facing it. Mike Price needed four fours off the last over to reach his hundred, and his blood now up, and the ball appearing to him like a football, he duly obliged to end up 101 not out.

We had gone from 144 for five to 178 for five in those last two overs, and that now looked a very good score in the conditions.

Dot's tea maintained its own very high standards and was much enjoyed by one and all, with special note being made of the chocolate fudge brownies, strawberry cream scones, banana loaf and chocolate cake, though the sandwiches and sausage rolls were delicious too.

Stephen was Captain for this game, and gathered his troops together after tea to tell them his strategy, and what would be demanded of each of them. With ten bowlers in the side short spells and frequent changes would be the order of the day. Ed Ball was again available to keep, and again performed very well.

Will Fryer opened up and again bowled well, but this time took no wickets in three overs. William Ball did the same. In fact what was striking was each of the first five bowlers was incredibly miserly in their three over spells, with Richard Slade (first change) bowling three maidens, and John Megone (third change) giving away just one run.

The pressure told and the openers foolishly attempted a second run to Will Fryer's throw only for one of them to be run out by about five yards.

Matt Vincent (second change) was the first bowler to take a wicket when he bowled an unplayable banana ball that swung eighteen inches, hit the ground, carried on moving in, and struck off stump.

However by twenty overs Melton had crept to about 30 for 2. One could still see that had Hetairoi ended up 120/130 all out, a Melton victory might have been possible.

As it was, the effort to pursue a larger total after the drinks break produced rapid results. The opening batsman and number four both fell to John Ball. Meanwhile the captain, a successful hitter in the past, came in to add impetus. He had one over producing ten runs off Oli Fryer, but in the next Oli had his revenge as a mighty hit to deep mid-wicket was beautifully caught by William Ball, a foot or so inside the boundary.

Now younger batters entered the fray including the lady opening bowler. Calling became less well judged as first she and then one of her successors were defeated by poor calls and good throws, one a direct hit by Matt Vincent.

With John Ball taking another wicket, Stephen entered the arena of activity before cheap wickets were all taken. With his customary skill he managed one with his first ball, caught by Megone (J) at mid-off. It was then left to Mike Price to finish things off. In a matter of six overs or so Melton had been reduced to 57 all out.

Retiring to the bar early, Melton apologised for putting up less of a fight than usual, but the Hetairoi are always happy to register a victory, and despite its apparent ease there were plenty of ways in which things might have ended up very differently.

There was some discussion of how long we had played the fixture – fifteen years or twenty three years (did we play Melton at their old ground?). But we hope to be back again next year.

Sudbourne Hall 29th August 2023.

After a third lovely swim in a flat Southwold sea, the Hetairoi venture forth to SHCC once more. Clive Mackintosh was now able to stand, having secured a sports physio on BH Monday after putting out an urgent call. But he could not play so Brian Slade was in for his second game post retirement.

This was the first ever game between the clubs in which Peter Clift had not played. Rob Jenkins is now the only player to have played in all 41 games thus far. Much discussion beforehand recalled Peter, all his cricketing prowess and his quirks of character. Sudbourne had uncovered an item given him after his fifty years with the club which might serve as the cup for this game and perhaps for our competitive games going forward.

A discussion between CMack, CMeg and SM agreed that we should field if we won the toss, but we lost it and were put in to bat.

John Ball and William Ball opened, and once again an Hetairoi father and son pairing was not a success on this tour. The wicket was again a reflection of recent rains, so very slow. At the end of the second over John leant forward and pushed a ball to short extra in much the same way John Megone had done at Southwold.

Mike Price came in third as Graham Mackintosh was still recovering from his drive. As in 2022 Mike was batting on the back of a very good score the day before, and as before he was out cheaply, this time caught behind off Tom Jenkins. It was good to see Tom back to face us one again after a few years missing the fixture.

With Graham still not ready to bat, John Megone was elevated to four. He and William slowly rebuilt. William had commenced his innings with two lovely fours off full tosses and looked in good form. Tom Jenkins came off and was replaced by a young leg spinner who took a while to settle so that the score moved along to mid forties. John Megone then played across a ball which hit him low on the pads. From square leg it was definitely not going over, so the question was whether the ball pitched outside leg (presumably it would then have been a googly). Umpire and batsman disagreed on that point, but the umpire's view prevailed, of course.

There was some reflection in the pavilion on the apparent fact that batsmen are generally less likely to raise the finger on lbws than bowlers.

John was replaced by Graham who was ready enough now to hit his first ball for four. There followed the main partnership of the innings with Graham only making 13, but proving a nice support for William who was motoring along, and hitting some big boundaries.

Graham then miscued a slow spinner and was caught. Chris Megone came in with the firm intention of simply pushing singles to be a foil to William Ball. But after not too long he managed to hit a long hop straight to square leg. Rob Jenkins was now bowling, with plenty of pace off the ball, but also guile, and Brian Slade duly fell to him – clean bowled. We were now about 130 for six, and when William picked out Tom Jenkins at deep square leg to be the seventh wicket to fall it looked as if we would fall short of a competitive total.

But Charlie Fryer supported Richard Slade, who struck the ball beautifully to add quick runs. On Richard's departure Ollie Fryer entered to strike his first ball for a mighty six. A couple more blows and two twos run with SM at the end, and we were up to 177 for 9 declared.

Once again one batsman had held our innings together. William had scored 88 (or 90?), half our runs. Until Richard and Ollie at the end he had seemed the only batsman able to cope with timing on a very sluggish track and against quite a few fairly slow bowlers.

Sudbourne also provided a very good tea. What a pleasure to have cricket teas on all three games of the tour! The social side of the game provided by tea, and by drinks afterwards, seems to be under quite severe pressure, a sad reflection of the modern view of sport.

Sudbourne opened with two players we had not seen before. The first hit Richard Slade hard down the ground for four in the first over, but then Richard got one to rise at him and he prodded a catch to Graham at short extra. At the other end we opened up with Mike Price and the young opener generally found him quite befuddling. It was not long before he was bowled.

SHCC 10 for 2 and the possibility of the shop being shut very early in the innings.

With nine bowlers in the side we also again faced the need for short sharp spells. William Ball replaced Richard Slade and John Ball replaced Mike. But no shop shutting as the numbers 3 and 4 (the SHCC chairman and Tom Jenkins) settled in. William was then replaced by John Megone and John Ball by Brian Slade.

The idea had been to make use of the pace of Richard, William and John whilst the ball was hard, but the ball perhaps softened quite quickly, and John and William both looked a little tired, William after his long innings and John after playing all three days of the tour.

After John, Charlie Fryer took over from the Orford end, and bowled medium pace in-swingers. At the other end Brian was again taking the pace off the ball, with gentle outswing to great effect.

Brian effectively tied up one end as the batsmen struggled to hit him off the square. Only sixteen runs came off seven overs. Charlie was more expensive at the other end but his efforts produced several chances. It was Stephen Matthews, taking over from Brian, who made the breakthrough. He removed the number 3, lbw much to that batsman's disbelief. Brian at square leg also felt the ball struck the pads a little high, but arguably it was on a slow downward trajectory at the time of impact, and the point of impact was plumb in front of the wickets. The next wicket, given caught down legside off the glove, was also controversial as the batsman was convinced it came off his arm. The umpire was a bowler.

On the other hand we were not given a stumping off Stephen. This was much to Ollie's chagrin, as it had been a long afternoon with a fair number of byes and this was his moment of triumph. Fortunately two balls later the lucky batsman was very well caught by William Ball jumping in the air at mid-wicket.

Charlie Fryer was finally rewarded with the wicket of Tom Jenkins, caught at deep-mid-wicket by Brian Slade, the ball after he had been dropped in the same spot. Tom scored 71 and played very well as usual. Had he stayed in Sudbourne would have won.

But now the tables had turned and when Mike Price took two wickets in the third over from last Sudbourne were 153 for 8 needing 25 to win off two overs.

Stephen Matthews nearly induced a lob to mid-wicket but the ball fell just short of Charlie Fryer's dive. Rob Jenkin then saw out Mike Price's last over and it was an honourable draw.

The dark cool evening, and the midges, had seen many of the Hetairoi's loyal Sudbourne Hall spectators retire to the pub, so the excitement of the last few overs was received more quietly than on some occasions. But it has been a match that Peter Clift would have approved of.

We had a good team out for this game, but the final day of the tour always finds us a little weary. More catches were dropped than we would have liked, and we were sometimes a bit flat in the field. But nonetheless we did very well to achieve our first innings total and then nearly bowl SHCC out on a very slow paced wicket.

Sudbourne now offer beer in the pavilion, but the message reached our players too late and so only a limited contingent stayed to chew things over with Rob Jenkins and co. But hopefully SHCC is on the up and there will be many more good games of cricket there in the years ahead.

CM 31.8.23