

Deddington Cricket Club

Apart from hunting, which was the preserve of the gentry, the only organised sport in the parish during the 1850s was the "manly" game of cricket. Matches were played on the Castle Ground, courtesy of Samuel Field, the town's leading lawyer, who appears to have held a long-term lease from the owners, the Dean and Canons of Windsor.

Although there are records of a cricket club at Deddington since 1835,¹ the *North Oxfordshire Monthly Times* for August 1849 carried the following report:

We are glad to see that the game of Cricket is not yet quite an extinct amusement at Deddington. Our players have just commenced practising in the Park Ground [Deddington House], which has been kindly lent for that purpose by the Rev. W. Cotton Risley. Although the season is now too far advanced to admit of a match being made with any of our neighbouring clubs, we do not despair of again seeing them in the field, and this fine and manly game again flourishing in our town.

The press reports, with detailed scores usually subjoined, indicate that the Deddington Club had a busy schedule of fixtures during much of the 1850s. Home and away matches were played with various other clubs in the district, including Oxford, although a considerable number of the matches were between scratch teams selected by individual gentlemen for the occasion.

In several years cricket matches were organised as part of the attractions at the annual flower show, which was often held on the Castle Ground.

A popular event was the annual match between the married and the single, adjourning afterwards to a Deddington hostelry. In its report on the match in September 1851, the teams being called the Benedictines and the Bachelors, the *Oxford Journal* noted that the game "caused a good deal of excitement among the numerous spectators - the ladies more especially appearing to take the liveliest interest, and ever and anon expressing their delight most enthusiastically".

Samuel Field was one of the principal supporters of the Club. In the early 1850s he was President of the Club. In November 1851, the club members presented him with a handsome engraved silver chalice (capable of holding two bottles of wine) for allowing the free use of the Castle Ground "now for many years past" at a dinner held at the Unicorn Inn.

The account of the proceedings in the *Banbury Guardian* occupied a whole column on the front page of the paper. The numerous speeches, toasts and responses, interspersed with songs, which were made after the removal of the cloth, were reported *verbatim*. At the invitation of Mr. Field, to immense cheering, "the cup was accordingly filled with Port, and due justice done to its contents".

At the AGM in April 1852, the Club (which had about 30 patrons) agreed to engage a professional bowler from Nottingham, jointly with the Banbury Cricket Club. It was

¹ <https://www.deddingtonhistory.uk/clubs,societiesandorganisation/cricket>

reported that in the centre of the Castle Ground, "a dead level of many square yards has been laid down, the surface is of the finest quality, and the drainage perfect".

In November 1852 the affairs of the Cricket Club were thrown into confusion by the sudden decamping of the hon. secretary and treasurer, Mr. Landon, a young doctor, with the funds of the Club. To make up the loss, members agreed a levy of 5s. and upwards, but there are no further reports of cricket matches involving the Deddington Club in the Oxford and Banbury newspapers for the next three seasons.

In August 1856 the *Oxford Journal* reported: "We understand that this manly game is likely very shortly to be revived with considerable spirit at Deddington".

By June 1857 the Club was able to report 50 members, who were drawn from the principal gentry and clergy of the neighbourhood rather than merely from Deddington. Samuel Field was treasurer. "The members meet for play every Monday."

Interest in cricket was not limited to the gentlemanly class, and in March 1859 a Park Cricket Club was formed at a meeting at the Red Lion Inn. Farmers and tradesmen appear to have been well represented on the committee.

Cricket matches were not necessarily without incident. At the commencement of a match between Deddington and Souldern on the Castle Ground in September 1859, a rabid dog suddenly appeared. "As a bite from a mad dog was any thing but desirable, each one began to look out for himself, and the playing ground was in a few seconds deserted." One of the Deddington players stunned the dog with his bat; the animal was then shot and buried on the spot. "The escape of all from the fangs of this rabid animal was truly providential, and none can so well appreciate it as those who were in such imminent peril."

