

Cowbridge Cricket Club celebrates 175 years of the sound of willow on leather

PHOTOGRAPHS by
MIKE WILCOCK

ONE of the main events in Cowbridge Cricket Club's 175th anniversary year took place last week – a star-studded dinner.

Among the guests were the First Minister, Carwyn Jones AM, and Hugh Morris, chief executive of Glamorgan Cricket Club – and a former club player.

The chairman of Cowbridge CC, Hugh Williams, was master of ceremonies, and the audience was treated to a hilarious speech by Charles Dagnall, of the BBC's Test Match Special team.

The club also took the opportunity to launch a new publication – a history of the club (pictured below).



LEFT: Two stalwart members of Cowbridge Cricket Club, Gerald Leeke and John Bevan (right) received a presentation to mark their selection as honorary life members. They are pictured with club president Jeff Bird (on left) and Hugh Morris.



Jeff Bird welcomes the First Minister.



CRICKET CLUB'S HISTORY IS ABOUT MORE THAN SPORT!

NOTHING takes you back to a different era more completely than a sports book.

In football you can read how first division players would take the bus to the game alongside the fans.

Rugby will take you back to days when full backs did little but catch kicks ahead and then despatch the ball into touch – a certain Cowbridge resident put an end to that!

Put together a history book about cricket and you will pass through a whole series of eras – particularly when you are covering 175 years of Cowbridge cricket history.

That lengthy time period was what confronted Jeffrey Bird and Malcolm Woolley – both club members for many years – when they decided to write a book on the history of Cowbridge Cricket Club, entitled *1840 and all that - History and Reflections of Cowbridge Cricket Club*.

They start with the first recorded game, a match with 11 from Cowbridge taking on 11 from Bridgend in 1840 in a field at the Golden Mile – easily accessible by stagecoach, say the authors.

Cowbridge had a comfortable win, by 61 runs. There was even a Mr Bird opening the batting for Bridgend. However, as he was out for a duck in the first innings, and then for one in the second, the author is in no hurry to claim him as an ancestor!

As the years pass by, all the important figures in Cowbridge cricket make an appearance – none more important than Harry Ebsworth, who bought the land that is still the home for the cricket club.

He paid 1,200 guineas in 1895, which sounds like a lot of money to me, and then lifted “three acres of fine turf” from Stalling Down - much to the disapproval of locals.

He was clearly a man with the means and the determination to get his own way. In fact, for many years the ‘Ebsworth XI’ topped the bill in Cowbridge, with the town team playing second fiddle.

However, in 1914 Mr Ebsworth was in failing health and, having decided to move back to Scotland, he offered the club a chance to buy the ground at a knockdown price of 700 guineas.

It was still a considerable sum and raising the cash was not easy, but it did give the club a base on a fine ground

almost a club academy, providing the team with a stream of well-schooled cricketers.

The 1930s sounds fascinating, and the authors refer to a major schism that developed, with the first team made up of ‘gentlemen’ while the second team was for manual workers and tradesmen. During those years, the seconds were an extremely strong side, which rather tells its own story.

Matters came to a head in 1936, the authors say, when the club chose to send a mixed team of first and second team players to west Wales for a friendly on a country estate.

The ‘gentlemen’ were invited to lunch ‘upstairs’ with the lord of the manor, while the plebs had to stay ‘downstairs’.

The downstairs group left and headed back to Cowbridge – leaving a depleted group of gentlemen to carry on with the match!

The authors say that the internal wounds did not heal for another 10 years – until people started to return to normality after the War intervened.

Cricket fans will find many famous names – particularly from Glamorgan Cricket Club – making appearances, and the massive influence of JC Clay is discussed in detail.

In later years, there was the brief appearance of a young man clearly headed for the top. Hugh Morris, the authors say, was an established talent at the age of 12, but made few appearances for the club as he had been talent spotted by Glamorgan.

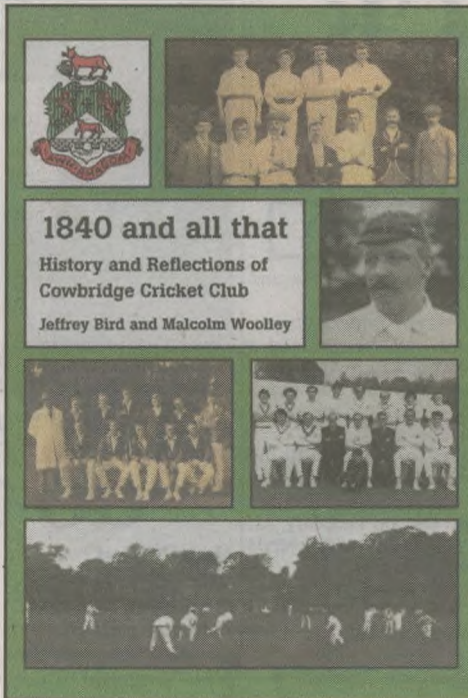
He did, however, play in a testimonial match in Cowbridge for Eifion Jones, the Glamorgan wicketkeeper, at the age of 21.

He marked this by hitting two sixes over the poplar trees at the Lwynhelig End – a unique feat, say the authors, and it’s sad to report that those trees are no longer there.

Hugh has stayed a supporter of the club and contributes his own memories in this book, as do Ralph, Roger and Jeff Bird, Ben Wright, Douglas Davies, Andrew Newark and several others.

It might be overstating the case to call this book a social history of the town, but it is much more than a collection of anecdotes and facts.

Report by PHILIP IRWIN



ABOVE: The book cover.
RIGHT: The club scoreboard shows 175 (years) as Jeff Bird and Malcolm Woolley (on right) show off the book!





Nigel Anderson and Julian Ebsworth, the great-great-nephew of EH Ebsworth, who created Cowbridge CC's ground.



ABOVE: Roger Bird (left) with Alex Clay, who brought along the ball used by his grandfather JC Clay when he took 17 wickets in a first-class match.

