

## Cricket

In June 1782 Johnson was Hannah More's guide on a tour of Pembroke College – 'he would let no one show it [her] but himself' – gallant and mellow, '[h]e ran over with pleasure the history of the juvenile days he passed there'. This was one of the occasions on which he described his old college as 'a nest of singing birds'; and, as they sauntered round the grounds, he said, 'Here we walked, there we played at cricket.'<sup>1</sup> This last remark has been seized upon by historians of the game: Peter Wynne-Thomas, in *The history of cricket*, cites it as the probable first recorded reference to cricket being played in Oxford in 1729, while saying evidence suggests that it had been introduced to Oxford and Cambridge by the end of the seventeenth century; others, unaware perhaps of Johnson's extreme short sight, take his words at face value. However, where they are quoted in a footnote in Boswell's *Life*, the editor has added, 'It may be doubted whether he ever played'; and those who question this assertion need only turn to the *Dictionary*.

CRICKET. *n.s.* 2. [from cryce, Saxon, a stick.] A sport, at which the contenders drive a ball with sticks in opposition to each other.

The judge, to dance, his brother serjeant call;

The senator at *cricket* urge the ball. *Pope's Dunciad, b. iv.*

Clearly, the author of this definition never defended a wicket; furthermore, had the game played any part in Johnson's life, he would surely have included definitions of such basic cricketing terms as wicket, stump, bail or notch, all of which were current at the time he was compiling the *Dictionary*. Johnson may have lounged around behind the boundary while members of his college were playing, but if he did so, he is likely to have had his nose in a book or been distracting the other spectators with disputatious talk.

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So what would have taken place on a field in Oxford in the summer of 1729? Not quite the game as played today from Lord's to Lahore, but one that was not so very different. William Goldwin's Latin poem 'In certamen pilæ', the ball game, published in 1706, describes a perfectly recognisable

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1 Hannah More, *Memoirs*, I, pp. 261–62. See also, Boswell, I, pp. 75–76, n. 5

cricket match, and provides details of how the game was played at that time: on a level field (*super aquora Campi* and *per sola plana*), with curved bats (*baculis . . . repandis*) and a leather-covered ball (*Coriaceus Orbis*); the players defended a wicket consisting of two forked rods, not widely spaced, with a bail balanced between them; a coin was tossed to decide which side should bat first, two umpires presided, and the scorers kept a tally of the runs by cutting notches in a stick.<sup>2</sup>

Players were dismissed, as they are today, by being bowled, caught, stumped, or run out; leg before wicket was not introduced until 1774, and the third stump started to be added a couple of years later. The ball was delivered underarm, rolled along the ground – the reason this activity is called bowling – and the most efficient bat to deal with a ball thus delivered was one similar in form to a modern hockey stick. There is an example in Francis Hayman's painting of a game at the Artillery Ground in 1743, in which Hogarth is thought to be at the wicket. In a couple of decades the bat had taken on what Frederick Lillywhite describes as 'the shape of a butter-knife', and, in the majority of instances, it reached 'to the height of the elbow'; it was, he adds, 'totally useless for blocking or any scientific mode of hitting whatever'.<sup>3</sup> Along-the-ground bowling gradually changed to underarm pitching, and the curved bat was replaced by a shorter, straight one; and it was not until 1828 that round arm deliveries were allowed – 'but with no "part of the hand or arm above the ELBOW at the time of delivery"' and full overarm bowling would not be long delayed.<sup>4</sup> Pictures, specifications, and museum specimens provide precise information about early cricket bats and their evolution.

Information about the ball is sparser. We know that early cricket balls were leather covered, and, according to the 1744 *Laws*, 'must weigh between five and six Ounces';<sup>5</sup> the revised *Laws* of 1774 are more precise (see below). Altham and Swanton believe that it 'probably differed little, if at all, from that which we use today'. Leather casings for balls made by the Romans have survived, and, according to these authors, 'the tennis-balls of the early sixteenth century were kid-covered and hemp- or hair-stuffed'.<sup>6</sup> Whatever their design – six-seamed or encased in leather cut like the peel of a quartered orange – cricket balls were exceedingly hard and, driven forcibly, could be lethal; indeed, one may have changed the course of history. Frederick, Prince of Wales, son of George II and father of George III, grew up in Germany and did not come to live in England until he was 21. Possibly

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2 This poem and a verse translation of it are printed in Altham & Swanton, *A history of cricket*, pp. 23–26.

3 *Cricket scores and biographies of celebrated cricketers*, p. xi

4 Brailsford, *A taste for diversion*, p. 171. It has been suggested that the first overarm bowlers were women, as this was the best way to deliver a ball without its getting caught up in their skirts.

5 Quoted by Parker in *The history of cricket*, p. 30

6 *A history of cricket*, p. 29



**Fig. 24** Pembroke College, Oxford, that ‘nest of singing birds’. Johnson’s rooms were above the entrance gate.

to establish some English credentials, he became a patron and enthusiastic follower of the game: in July 1733 he presented the first silver trophy to be played for – ‘a Plate of 30*l*.’ – and in the same month, after a Surrey *v*. Middlesex match, ‘was pleased to order a Guinea to be given to each Man for their Dexterity, &c.’<sup>7</sup> Waghorn, whose quotations in *Cricket scores, notes, &c. from 1730–1773* are unsourced, records that the prince ‘diverted himself at cricket in Kensington Gardens’ in September 1735, ‘it being the first time he ever played’. His skill – or lack of it – on the pitch goes unreported, but he captained sides for Surrey and London, and his attendance at games always attracted ‘a prodigious number of people’, when ‘a great deal of mischief’ might be done: men ‘falling from their horses, others being rode over, &c.’. When he died suddenly in 1751 at the age of 44, his physicians opened his body and attributed the cause of death to a ruptured imposthume<sup>8</sup> thought to have formed as the result of a blow he received three years earlier from a cricket – some said tennis – ball. Doubt has been cast upon this theory, but three reported deaths of those lower down the social scale have a clearly attributable cause.

<sup>7</sup> *St James’s Evening Post*, 19–21 July, 1733

<sup>8</sup> SJ: ‘A collection of purulent matter in a bag or cyst.’

On June 26, died Mr Johnson, Goldsmith at London-wall—his death was occasioned by a blow which he received from a cricket ball on Thursday last near Islington. *Middlesex Journal*, 28 June, 1770

On Wednesday the son of Mr. Hart, taylor in Water-lane, playing on Kennington Common at cricket had a ball struck as he was attending the wicket, which broke the bridge of his nose, and yesterday morning he expired. *Middlesex Journal*, 8 August, 1772

On Sat. Sept. 14, a youth, standing to see the Cricket match in the Artillery Ground, was struck on the temple by a ball, which stunned him; although he was able to walk home, he died the next day. *Morning Chronicle*, 17 September, 1776<sup>9</sup>

Today, a batsman stands at the crease wearing a face-guard and shin-pads to protect him against a ball that may come at him at 93 miles per hour. One last word on the ball: Wynne-Thomas suggests that the complexity of the game – not to mention the fact that it required equipment and teams – meant that it made ‘slow progress as a pastime for the general population, as opposed to the nobility’.<sup>10</sup> However, a cricket ball must have been a common enough object by 1767 for Gilbert White to make this startling comparison when describing a rarity: the nest of the harvest mouse, *Micromys minutus*.

One of these nests I procured this autumn, most artificially plaited, and composed of the blades of wheat, perfectly round, and about the size of a cricket-ball, with the aperture so ingeniously closed, that there was no discovering to what part it belonged.<sup>11</sup>

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A blow on the head from a cricket bat<sup>12</sup> could be as lethal as one from a ball. The surgeon Percivall Pott wrote up the cases of two boys who came under his care at St Bartholomew’s Hospital. I quote the first in full as an example of how a sports head injury might be treated in the eighteenth century.

A Lad about twelve years old, standing by a man who was playing at cricket, received a blow from the bat on his forehead. The boy became senseless, and as he was not known to any body present, he was brought to the hospital. He recovered his senses before he got thither; but the part which received the stroke being much swollen, he was dressed, let blood, and ordered to keep in bed. When I saw him next morning he

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9 *Morning Chronicle* entry quoted by Buckley in *Fresh light on eighteenth-century cricket*, p. 80.  
10 *op. cit.*, p. 17

11 *Natural History of Selborne*, Letter 12 to Thomas Pennant, Esquire, 4 November, 1767

12 The more portable, but non-native, baseball bat seems to be the weapon of choice for many of today’s criminals. The cricket bats in the following cases do not appear to have been used aggressively.

had no complaint, but the soreness of his forehead, under the skin of which there seemed to be a good deal of extravasated,<sup>13</sup> coagulated blood. His pulse was full and strong; he was therefore again let blood: and as he had not had a stool for two days, a glyster<sup>14</sup> was thrown up, and a lenient purge given. A discutient cerate<sup>15</sup> was kept upon his forehead; and being of a costive habit, he was purged once in two or three days; and on the ninth, from that of the accident, was discharged from the house. On the fourteenth, he returned to it again, complained of lassitude, giddiness and head-ach. He was put under the



**Fig. 25** ‘The hockey stick’ and ‘the butter knife’, the forms of cricket bats used in the early and later years of the eighteenth century.

care of the physician, was let blood, vomited, purged, and took proper medicines; but remained much the same for three or four days: that is, he was feverish, with a skin too hot, a pulse too quick, and what little sleep he got was unquiet, and short. On the seventeenth day he had a slight rigor, during and after which his pain in the head was much more intense, and the following day all his febrile symptoms were much exasperated; on the nineteenth, he complained of tenderness to the touch on his forehead, and a great general pain in his head. He was again let blood, and was more sunk by the discharge than I could have supposed; but no remission of his symptoms followed. His sleep that night was very little, and very unquiet; toward morning he had two distinct shiverings; and when I saw him at noon, on the twentieth, his forehead appeared somewhat tumid and puffy. From the continuance and exasperation of his symptoms, and from the new appearance on his forehead, I was almost certain their [*sic*] was mischief on or under the skull; I therefore divided the scalp, to examine the bone; and found, between it and the pericranium, which had quitted its adhesion for more than the breadth of a crown-piece, a small quantity of a thin, discoloured fluid.

This (as it appeared to me) put the nature of the case out of doubt, and left the boy no chance, but from perforation. I therefore applied the trephine immediately, and gave discharge to matter formed between

13 SJ ‘forced out of the proper containing vessels.’

14 SJ, under clyster, ‘An injection into the anus.’

15 For the definitions of discutient and cerate, SJ quotes *Quincy*: ‘A medicine that has power to repel or drive back the matter or tumours in the blood, with tendency to separate . . .’ ‘A medicine made of wax, which, with oil, or some softer substance, makes a consistence softer than a plaister.’

the dura mater and bone: for a week after the operation, the discharge was large, and the boy in much hazard; but at the end of that time, the suppuration lessened; the dura mater incarned<sup>16</sup> kindly; and by proper care, and taking freely of the decoct. cortic. peruv.<sup>17</sup> he got well.

This lad was extremely lucky, not only to have been Pott's patient, but to have survived his treatment, which, although almost certainly the best available at the time, would have been performed without asepsis or anaesthetic. The second child, 'about nine years old', had 'received a blow from a cricket-bat on the upper part of his forehead, which brought him to the ground, and deprived him of sense'. He, too, was bled, purged, and successfully trephined, but not before he had faced the added danger of falling into the hands of 'a dabbler in surgery, who was a relation'.<sup>18</sup>

The injury sustained by 'a Mr. Carter, a very eminent butcher of Grub Street', who was 'playing at cricket in the Artillery Ground', though not immediately life threatening, would have been life changing. He was a man 'of a corpulent body', and, 'making a stroke at the ball which he missed, he threw himself round with so great force that he broke his knee pan'.<sup>19</sup> He was carried home, with little hope of ever recovering the use of his leg again.<sup>20</sup>

So much for some of the dangers of playing cricket. The physician William Buchan, however, considered it one of '[t]he 'diversions which afford the best exercise', promoting 'perspiration, and other secretions' . . . 'likewise strengthen[ing] the lungs, and giv[ing] firmness and agility to the whole body'.<sup>21</sup> Its more subtle benefits to health and wellbeing – for example, developing hand-eye co-ordination, and team-work – were not generally recognised till late in the century, though Buckley cites an early example of the latter from *The General Evening Post*, 15 July, 1735:

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16 SJ: 'To breed flesh.'

17 *Compound Decoction of the Bark*. Take of Peruvian bark and Virginian snake-root, grossly powdered, each three drams. Boil them in a pint of water to one half. To the strained liquor add an ounce and a half of aromatic water. Sir John Pringle recommends this as a proper medicine towards the decline of malignant fevers, when the pulse is low, the voice weak, and the head affected with stupor, but with little delirium. The dose is four spoonfuls every fourth or sixth hour. Buchan, *Domestic medicine*, pp. 706–707

18 Pott, *Observations on the nature of those injuries to which the head is liable from external violence*, pp. 81–83 and pp. 271–272

19 SJ: 'A little round bone about two inches broad, pretty thick, a little convex on both sides, and covered with a smooth cartilage on its foreside. It is soft in children, but very hard in those of riper years: it is called patella or mola. Over it passes the tendon of the muscles which extend the leg, to which it serves as a pulley. *Quincy*.'

20 *Middlesex Journal*, 6 July, 1769 quoted by Buckley, op.cit., p. 50

21 *Domestic medicine*, p. 92

The loss of this Match [played 'for 1000 *l.* a Side' by a team of '8 of the London Club & 3 out of Middlesex' raised by the Prince of Wales against a Kentish team raised by the Earl of Middlesex] was judged to be owing to the three strange Hands mix'd with the Londoners, for it is thought that when they play altogether they understand each others Game so well they can scarce be beat by any Men in England.

In addition to promoting and working to improve the game, the cricket clubs, that proliferated as the game spread, offered social benefits to non-players: those who had paid their subscription could enjoy dining, drinking toasts, singing, and other manifestations of male bonding, in congenial company.

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The match in Goldwin's Latin poem was played according to the 1744 laws, which has led some cricket historians to suggest that the game was established by the beginning of the eighteenth century. John Ford believes a form of cricket had been fairly widely played by the poor and the young in friendly matches, not involving serious gambling, since before 1600.<sup>22</sup> When, in the eighteenth century, wagers began to be routinely placed on cricket matches, articles of agreement would be drawn up for individual games, and it is out of these articles that the laws grew. On 25 February, 1774 the 1744 laws were revised 'at the *Star and Garter, Pall-Mall* . . . by a Committee of Noblemen and Gentlemen of Kent, Hampshire, Surry, Sussex, Middlesex, and London'.

The Ball must weigh not less than five Ounces and a Half, nor more than five Ounces and three Quarters.

It cannot be changed during the Game, but with Consent of both Parties.

The Bat must not exceed four Inches and one Quarter in the widest Part.

The Stumps [still only two at this date] must be twenty-two Inches, the Bail six Inches long.

The Bowling-Crease must be parallel with the Stumps, three Feet in Length, with a Return-Crease.

The Popping-Crease must be three Feet ten Inches from the Wickets; and the Wickets must be opposite to each other, at the Distance of twenty-two Yards.<sup>23</sup>

The Party which goes from home shall have the Choice of the Innings and the Pitching of the Wickets, which shall be pitched within thirty Yards of a Centre fixed by the Adversaries.

When the Parties meet at a third Place, the Bowlers shall toss up for the Pitching of the first Wicket, and the Choice of going in.

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22 Cricket, a social history, p. 99

23 This is the length of one chain, a measuring line used in land-surveying, formed of 100 iron rods called links.

The Bowler must deliver the Ball with one Foot behind the Bowling-Crease, and within the Return-Crease; and shall bowl four Balls before he changes Wickets, which he shall do but once in the same Innings.

He may order the Player at his Wicket to stand on which Side of it he pleases.

The Striker is out if the Bail is bowled off, or the Stump bowled out of the Ground:

Or if the Ball, from a Stroke over or under his Bat, or upon his Hands (but not Wrists) is held before it touches the Ground, though it be hugged to the Body of the Catcher:

Or if, in striking, both his Feet are over the Popping-Crease, and his Wicket is put down, except his Bat is grounded within it:

Or if he runs out of his Ground to hinder a Catch:

Or if a Ball is struck up, and he wilfully strikes it again:

Or if, in running a Notch, the Wicket is struck down by a Throw, or with the Ball in Hand, before his Foot, Hand, or Bat, is grounded over the Popping-Crease; but if the Bail is off, a Stump must be struck out of the Ground by the Ball:

Or if the Striker touches or takes up the Ball before it has lain still, unless at the Request of the opposite Party:

Or if the Striker puts his Leg before the Wicket with a Design to stop the Ball, and actually prevents the Ball from hitting his Wicket by it.

If the Players have crossed each other, he that runs for the Wicket that is put down is out; if they are not crossed, he that has left the Wicket that is put down is out.

When the Ball has been in the Bowler's or Wicket-Keeper's Hands, the Strikers need not keep within their Ground till the Umpire has called *Play*; but if the Player goes out of his Ground with an Intent to run, before the Ball is delivered, the Bowler may put him out.

When the Ball is struck up in the Running-Ground between the Wickets, it is lawful for the Strikers to hinder its being caught; but they must neither strike at, nor touch the Ball with their Hands.

If the ball is struck up, the Striker may guard his Wicket either with his Bat or his Body.

In Single-Wicket Matches, if the Striker moves out of his Ground to strike at the Ball, he shall be allowed no Notch for such Stroke.

The Wicket-Keeper shall stand at a reasonable Distance behind the Wicket, and shall not move till the Ball is out of the Bowler's Hand, and shall not, by any Noise, incommode the Striker; and if his Hands, Knees, Foot, or Head, be over or before the Wicket, though the Ball hit it, it shall not be out.

The Umpires shall allow two Minutes for each Man to come in, and fifteen Minutes between each Innings; when the Umpires shall call *Play*, the Party refusing to play shall lose the Match.



They are the sole Judges of fair and unfair Play, and all Disputes shall be determined by them.

When a Striker is hurt they are to allow another to come in, and the Person hurt shall have his Hands in any Part of that Innings.

They are not to order a Player out, unless appealed to by the Adversaries. But if the Bowler's Foot is not behind the Bowling-Crease, and within the Return-Crease, when he delivers the Ball, the Umpire unasked must call *No Ball*.

If the Strikers run a short Notch, the Umpire must call *No Notch*.

#### B E T S.

If the Notches of one Player are laid against another, the Bet depends on both Innings, unless otherwise specified.

If one Party beats the other in one Innings, the Notches of the first Innings shall determine the Bet.

But if the other Party goes in a second Time, then the Bet must be determined by the Numbers on the Score.<sup>24</sup>

A cricket match was as much an opportunity to gamble as it was a sporting event, and almost every announcement or report of one mentioned the stake involved. The newspapers may have exaggerated the size of the sums wagered, but any stake over £10 was technically illegal, since this was the limit placed on such transactions by an act of 1711. An act that is unenforceable, however, will be widely disregarded.

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Cricket originated in the Weald and spread erratically across the country, reaching London in the early 1700s. Wynne-Thomas gives 25 June 1709 – the year of Johnson's birth – as the date of the first inter-county match: Kent *v.* Surrey, played at Dartford for £50; and by 1728 the game had become a common sight in the capital and the home counties.

The English are very fond of a game they call cricket. For this purpose they go into a large open field, and knock a small ball about with a piece of wood. I will not attempt to describe this game to you, it is too complicated; but it requires agility and skill, and everyone plays it, the common people and also men of rank. Sometimes one county plays against another county. The papers give notice of these meetings beforehand, and, later, tell you which side has come off victorious. Spectators crowd to these games when they are important.<sup>25</sup>

César de Saussure may be one of the first foreigners – but is certainly not the last – to be baffled by this arcane and most English of activities, and it did not escape his notice that 'everyone' played it and it drew crowds. From its earliest

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24 Reproduced in *Hoyle's games improved*, 1775, pp. 210–214

25 César de Saussure, *A foreign view of England*, pp. 295–296

days cricket brought together the nobility and the labouring classes – there are instances of men being hired to work on the big estates because they were skilled cricketers – but not everyone thought this a good thing; the anonymous author of this article ‘From the British Champion, Sep. 8. N<sup>o</sup> 68 [1743]’ for one believed that ‘honest *Crispin*’ should know his place and keep to it.

*Of Publick Cricket-Matches.*

In Diversions, as well as Business, Circumstances alter Things mightily, and what in one Man may be decent, may in another be ridiculous; what is innocent in one Light may be quite the contrary in another; neither is it at all impossible that Exercise may be strained too far. A Journeyman Shoemaker may play from five o’Clock on *Saturday* in the Afternoon till it is dark at *Skittles* provided he has work’d all the rest of the Week. Yet I can’t say but it would shock me a little, if I saw honest *Crispin* tipping against a Member of either House of P—t.

All Diversions, all Exercises, have certain bounds as to Expence, and when they exceed this, it is an Evil in itself, and justly liable to Censure. Upon what Reasons are all the Laws against Gaming founded? Are not these the chief, that they break in upon Business, expose People to great Dangers, and cherish a Spirit of Covetousness, in a Way directly opposite to Industry? The most wholesome Exercise, and the most innocent Diversion may change its Nature entirely, if People, for the Sake of gratifying their Humour, keep unfit Company.

I have been led into these Reflections, which are certainly just in themselves, by some odd Stories I have heard of Cricket Matches, which I own, however, to be so strange and so incredible, that if I had not received them from Eye-Witnesses, I could never have yielded to them any Belief. Is it not a very wild Thing to be as serious in making such a Match as in the most material Occurrences in Life? Would it not be extremely odd to see Lords and Gentlemen, Clergymen and Lawyers, associating themselves with Butchers and Coblers in Pursuit of these Diversions? or can there be any thing more absurd, than making such Matches for the sake of Profit, which is to be shared amongst People so remote in their Quality and Circumstances?

Cricket is certainly a very innocent, and wholesome Exercise; yet, it may be abused, if either great or little People make it their Business. It is grossly abused, when it is made the Subject of publick Advertisements, to draw together great Crowds of People, who ought all of them to be somewhere else. Noblemen, Gentlemen and Clergymen, have certainly a Right to divert themselves in what Manner they think fit; nor do I dispute their Privilege of making Butchers, Coblers, or Tinkers their Companions, provided these are qualified to keep them Company. But I very much doubt whether they have any Right to invite Thousands of People to be Spectators of their Agility, at the Expence of their

Duty and Honesty. The Time of People of Fashion may be indeed of very little Value, but, in a trading Country, the Time of the meanest Man ought to be of some Worth to himself, and to the Community.

The Diversion of Cricket may be proper in Holiday Time, and in the Country; but upon Days when Men ought to be busy, and in the Neighbourhood of a great City, it is not only improper but mischievous in a high Degree. It draws Numbers of People from their Employments, to the Ruin of their Families. It brings together Crowds of Apprentices and Servants, whose Time is not their own. It propagates a Spirit of Idleness at a Juncture, when, with the utmost Industry, our Debts, Taxes, and Decay of Trade, will scarce allow us to get Bread. It is a most notorious Breach of the Laws, as it gives the most open Encouragement to Gaming; the Advertisements most impudently reciting that great Sums are laid; so that some People are so little ashamed of breaking the Laws they had a Hand in making, that they give publick Notice of it. †

† *The Advertisements are publish'd, it is supposed, by the Alehouse- or Ground-keepers, for their own Profit.*<sup>26</sup>

When this piece was written, the War of Austrian Succession was grinding on in Europe – three months earlier England had defeated France at the Battle of Dettingen – while at home the working population was being ravaged by cheap gin. London suffered damaging gin riots in 1743, which could explain the writer's fear of what might erupt when thousands of idle people – who, he believed, should have been working – got together. Finally, he weighs in against gambling, which was endemic. Bets were routinely placed on matches; the grotesquely rich were said to gamble in thousands – it is hard to calculate today's equivalent values – the poor suffered worse consequences with small sums.

Mon. last a young Fellow, a Butcher, being entrusted with about 40*l.* by his Mistress, to buy Cattle in Smithfield-market, instead thereof he went into the Artillery-Ground and sported away the whole Sum in betting upon the Cricket Players. *St James's Chronicle*, 22 August, 1765

The game at cricket which requires the utmost exertion of strength and agility, was followed, until of late years, for manly exercise, animated by a noble spirit of emulation. This sport has too long been perverted from diversion and innocent pastime to excessive gaming and public dissipation: cricket matches are now degenerated into business of importance. The increasing evil our magistracy ought to suppress in the Artillery-ground. It is confidently said, that a set of idle fellows, or more properly a gang of dextrous gamblers, are hired and maintained by a most noble lord, at so little expense as one thousand pounds a year.

*Morning Chronicle*, 23 August, 1774

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26 As reprinted in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, September 1743

The combination of heavy betting and a huge crowd could produce ugly scenes:

Monday Afternoon a Cricket Match was played in the Artillery-Ground by the Gentlemen of Surry and Dartford, for 100 Guineas a Side, in the Presence of near 12,000 Spectators, which was left undetermined. The Mob (many of whom had laid large Bets) imagining foul Play, began to be outrageous,<sup>27</sup> several of whom were dangerously wounded and bruised. *The St James's Chronicle*, 20–22 August, 1765

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During the 1730s and 1740s the Artillery Ground was the principal venue for London cricket matches. George Smith, a considerable entrepreneur and occasional player, was the lessee of this ground and of the nearby Pied Horse public house. Several thousand spectators might turn up for an important match, and there would be betting, drinking, brawling, and loose dogs 'greatly obstruct[ing] the players' – so much so that notice was given that they would be shot on sight. Occasionally he called in Captain Vinegar, who, with 'his bruisers and bull-dogs', would see to it that 'no civil spectators' were 'incommoded by the rabble'. Invasion of the pitch was also something Smith had to contend with and against which he took his precautions:

Wide o'er th'extended Plain, the circling String  
Refrains th'impatient Throng, and marks a Ring.  
But if encroaching on forbidden Ground,  
The heedless Croud o'erleaps the proper Bound;  
*S[mi]th* plies, with strenuous Arm, the smacking Whip,  
Back to the Line, th'affrighted Rebels skip.

[Mr. *Smith*, the Master of the Ground, who, to his *immortal Honour*, and *no inconsiderable Advantage*, has made Improvements; and been perhaps a principal Cause of the high Light in which CRICKET at this Time flourishes.]<sup>28</sup>

Yesterday [Monday 18 June, 1744], was play'd in the Artillery Ground the greatest Cricket-Match ever known, the County of Kent playing against all England, which was won by the former: First Innings England got 39, and Kent 53; Second Innings England got 57, and Kent 44. There were present their Royal Highnesses the Prince of Wales and Duke of Cumberland, the Duke of Richmond, Admiral Vernon, and many other Persons of Distinction.

*London Evening Post*, 16–19 June, 1744

The all England team was assembled by the second Duke of Richmond, who did so much for the game, and it contained the three Newland brothers, Richard 'of *Slendon* in *Sussex*, Farmer; a famous *Batsman*', Adam and John – a family

27 SJ: '1. Violent; furious; raging; exorbitant; tumultuous; turbulent.'

28 James Love, *Cricket: an heroic poem* Book II, ll 55–60, plus note

performance not equalled until the three Grace brothers appeared together in 1880. Also playing for England were: ‘Bryan, of London, Bricklayer’; ‘Cuddy, of Slendon, Sussex; Taylor’; ‘Weymark, the Miller’, who, with ‘Stephen Dingle, of Rygate in Surry’, the county’s star all-rounder, was in the Duke of Richmond’s employ; and Mess. Green, Smith, and two Harrises. On the Kent side were: ‘Lord John Sackville, Son to the Duke of Dorset’; ‘Vol Rumney, Gardiner to the Duke of Dorset, at Knowles, near Sevenoaks in Kent’; Mills, ‘sawyer of Sussex’; ‘Mills of Bromley in Kent’; Robert Colchin, ‘commonly called Long Robin’; ‘Hodswell, of Dartford in Kent, Tanner; celebrated Bowler’; ‘Kips . . . particularly remarkable for *handing* the Ball at the Wicket, and knocking up the Stumps instantly, if the Batsman is not extremely cautious’; and ‘Mess. *Cutbush, Bartrum, Sanyer and Danes*’.<sup>29</sup>

Watching the match was the young James Dance – *nom de plume*, James Love – who recorded it at length in heroic couplets. Here is Book III, *The Game*. It sets the scene, introduces the players and records some intensely dramatic moments; in short, it is the eighteenth-century equivalent of a ball-by-ball commentary. Imagine it read aloud by one of those legendary BBC commentators, and you’re back on the Artillery Ground on that June afternoon in 1744.

#### The ARGUMENT . . .

*The Game. Five on the Side of the COUNTIES are out for three Notches. The Odds run high on the Side of KENT. Bryan and Newland go in; they help the Game greatly. Bryan is unfortunately put out by Kips. KENT, the first Innings, Thirteen a-head. The COUNTIES go in again, and get Fifty-seven a-head. KENT, in the Second Innings is very near losing, the two last Men being in. Weymark unhappily misses a Catch, and by that Means KENT is victorious.*

With wary Judgment, scatter’d o’er the Green,  
 Th’ambitious Chiefs of fruitful *Kent* are seen.  
 Some, at a Distance, for the *Long Ball* wait,  
 Some, nearer planted, seize it from the *Bat*.  
 H[odswell] and M[ills] behind the Wickets stand,  
 And each by Turns, the flying Ball command;  
 Four Times from H[odswell]’s Arm it skims the Grass;  
 Then M[ills] succeeds. The *Seekers-out*<sup>30</sup> change Place.  
 Observe, cries H[odswell], to the wond’ring Throng,  
 Be Judges now, whose Arms are better strung!  
 He said—then pois’d, and rising as he threw,  
 Swift from his Arm the fatal Missive flew.  
 Nor with more Force the Death conveying Ball,  
 Springs from the Cannon to the batter’d Wall;  
 Nor swifter yet the pointed Arrows go,  
 Launch’d from the Vigour of the *Parthian* Bow.

29 Information on players in ‘Critical Observations of SCRIBLERUS MAXIMUS’.

30 Fielders: this word did not come into use until the 1830s.

It whizz'd along, with unimagined Force,  
And bore down all, resistless in its Course.  
To such impetuous Might compell'd to yield  
The Bail, the mangled Stumps bestrew the Field.

Now glows with ardent Heat th' unequal Fray,  
While *Kent* usurps the Honours of the Day;  
Loud from the *Ring* resounds the piercing Shout,  
Three *Notches* only gain'd, five *Leaders* out.

But while the drooping Play'r invoc'd the Gods,  
The busy *Better* calculates his Odds.  
Swift round the Plain, in buzzing Murmurs run,  
*I'll hold you Ten to Four, Kent.—Done Sir.—Done.*

What Numbers can with equal Force, describe  
Th' increasing Terrors of the losing Tribe!  
When, vainly striving 'gainst the conq'ring Ball,  
They see their boasted Chiefs, dejected fall!  
Now the two mightiest of the fainting Host  
Pant to redeem the Fame their Fellows lost.  
Eager for Glory;—For the worst prepar'd;  
With pow'rful Skill, their threat'ned *Wickets* guard.  
*B[rya]n*, collected for the deadly Stroke,  
First cast to *Heav'n*, a supplicating Look,  
Then pray'd,—*Propitious Pow'rs! Assist my Blow,  
And grant the flying Orb may shock the Foe!*  
This said; he wav'd his *Bat* with forceful Swing,  
And drove the batter'd Pellet o'er the Ring.  
Then rapid *five Times* cross'd the shining Plain,  
E'er the departed Ball return'd again.

Nor was thy Prowess valiant *N[ewlan]d*, mean,  
Whose strenuous Arm increas'd the Game *eighteen*;  
While from thy Stroke, the Ball retiring hies,  
Uninterrupted Clamours rend the Skies.  
But oh, what horrid Changes oft' are seen,  
When faithless Fortune seems the most serene!  
Beware, unhappy *B[ryan]n!* oh beware!  
Too heedless Swain, when such a Foe is near.  
Fir'd with Success, elated with his Luck,  
He glow'd with Rage, regardless how he struck;  
But, forc'd the fatal Negligence to mourn,  
*K[ip]s* crush'd his *Stumps*, before the Youth could turn.  
The rest their unavailing Vigour try,  
And by the Pow'r of *Kent*, demolished die.

Awaken'd *Eccho* speaks the *Innings* o'er,  
And forty *Notches* deep indent the Score.

Now Kent prepares her better Skill to show;  
Loud rings the Ground, at each tremendous Blow.  
With nervous Arm, performing God-like Deeds,  
Another, and another chief succeeds;  
'Till, tir'd with Fame, the conqu'ring Host give Way;  
And head by *thirteen* Strokes, the toilsome Fray.

Fresh rous'd to Arms, each Labour-loving Swain  
Swells with new Strength, and dares the Field again.  
Again to *Heav'n* aspires the chearful Sound;  
The *Strokes* re-eccho o'er the spacious Ground.  
The *Champion* strikes. When, scarce arriving fair,  
The glancing Ball mounts upward in the Air!  
The *Batsman* sees it; and with mournful Eyes,  
Fix'd on th'ascending *Pellet* as it flies,  
Thus suppliant claims the favour of the Skies.  
O mighty *Jove!* and all ye powers above!  
Let my regarded Pray'r your Pity move!  
Grant me but this. Whatever Youth shall dare  
Snatch at the Prize descending thro' the Air;  
Lay him extended on the grassy Plain,  
And make his bold, ambitious Effort vain.

He said. The Powers attending his Request  
Granted one Part, to Winds consign'd the rest.

And now illustrious *S[ackvill]e*, where he stood,  
Th' approaching Ball with cautious Pleasure view'd;  
At once he sees the Chiefs impending Doom,  
And pants for mighty Honours, yet to come:  
Swift as a *Falcon*, darting on its Prey,  
He springs elastic o'er the verdant Way;  
Sure of Success, flies upward with a Bound,  
Derides the slow Approach, and spurns the Ground.  
Prone slips the Youth; yet glorious in his Fall,  
With Arm extended shows the captive Ball.  
Loud Acclamations ev'ry Mouth employ,  
And *Eccho* rings the undulating Joy.

The *Counties* now the Game triumphant lead,  
And vaunt their Numbers fifty-seven a *Head*.

To end th' immortal Honours of the Day  
The *Chiefs* of *Kent*, once more, their Might essay;

No trifling Toil ev'n yet remains untry'd,  
 Nor mean the Numbers of the adverse *Side*.  
 With doubled Skill each dang'rous Ball they shun,  
 Strike with observing Eye, with Caution run.  
 At length they know the wish'd for Number near,  
 Yet wildly pant, and *almost own* they fear.  
 The two last *Champions* now are in,  
 And but three Notches yet remain to win.  
 When, almost ready to recant its Boast,  
 Ambitious *Kent* within an Ace had lost:  
 The mounting Ball, again obliquely driv'n,  
 Cuts the pure *Æther*, soaring up to Heav'n.  
*W[eymar]k* was ready: *W[eymar]k*, all must own,  
 As sure a Swain to catch as e'er was known;  
 Yet, whether *Jove*, and all-compelling Fate,  
 In their high Will determin'd *Kent* should beat;  
 Or the lamented Youth too much relied  
 On sure Success and Fortune often tried;  
 The erring Ball, amazing to be told!  
 Slipp'd thro' his outstretch'd Hand and mock'd his Hold.  
  
 And now the Sons of *Kent* compleat the Game,  
 And firmly fix their everlasting Fame.<sup>31</sup>

This is a celebration of the game and of a glorious victory, so the author chose not to disclose that:

At the great Match at Cricket in the Artillery-Ground, on Monday the 18th instant, between the County of Kent and all England, it was observ'd by the Noblemen and Gentlemen then present, that there was great Disorder, so that it was with difficulty the Match was play'd out; therefore it is order'd for the future, that each Person pay for going into the Ground Six Pence; and there will be for the better Conveniency of all Gentlemen . . . a complete Ring of benches, that will hold at least 800 persons. And it is further desir'd that no Person whatever, except those appointed to keep Order, and the Players engaged for the Day, be admitted to walk within the Ring.

*The Daily Advertiser*, 30 June, 1744

The result of raising the entrance fee from 2d. to sixpence was that not above 200 persons turned up to see a match on 5 July, when previously there had been crowds of between 7,000 and 8,000.

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31 The score sheet of this match is reproduced in Marshall, *The duke who was cricket*, p. 123





**Fig. 26** A cricket match at the end of the 1780s in Marylebone Fields, now Regent's Park.

Away from the capital, in villages and country towns, cricket had long been a much gentler activity. David Underdown in *Start of play* cites diary evidence from the first quarter of the eighteenth century of friendly games in rural settings. Here cricket was 'most likely to achieve the social mix and harmony for which it was already being celebrated. Prints of games often show knots of spectators around the ground, with marquees for refreshments, and with women and children, often in family groups, prominent among those present. Positive attempts were made in the catering arrangements . . . to attract women spectators.'<sup>32</sup> Fanny Burney describes one such occasion in her Teignmouth Journal:

Friday [6 August, 1773] . . . was also destined to a grand double Cricket match. M<sup>r</sup> Rishton is a very good Player; & they have an Excellent Ground on the Den.<sup>33</sup> . . .

The Cricket players Dined on the Green, where they had a Booth erected, & a Dinner from the Globe, the best Inn here, to which M<sup>rs</sup> Rishton added a *Hash*, which M<sup>r</sup> T. Mi[lls] assured her was most excellent, *for* Mr Hurrell himself Eat three Times of it! & t[hat,] he remarked, indisputably proved it's goodnes[s].

The Cricket match was hardly over, befo[re] the *Ting Mouth Games* began.<sup>34</sup>

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32 Brailsford, *op. cit.*, p. 133

33 An area of ground near the sea-front, still in use

34 *Early journals and letters of Fanny Burney*, I, pp. 290–91