

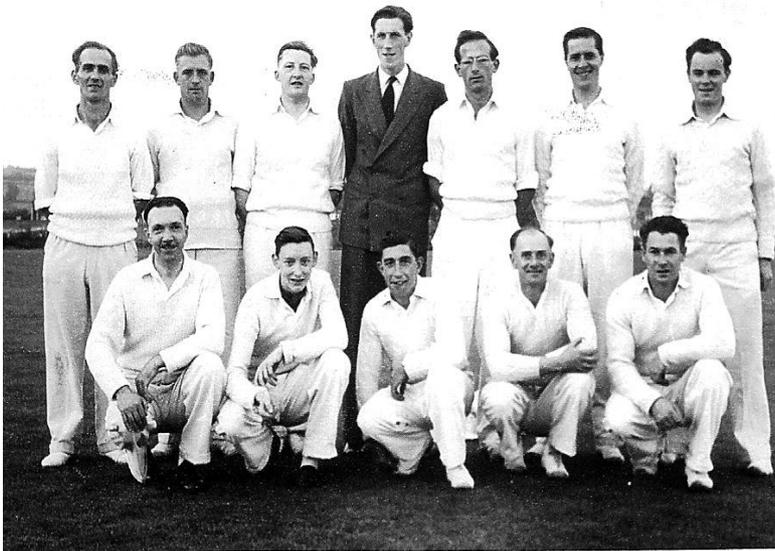
PILTON CRICKET CLUB

An account by John Norman

On leaving Barnstaple Grammar School in 1956, Basil Hargraves, our Geography Master and exceptionally good right arm very fast bowler, approached some of us with a view to playing for Raleigh C.C. at Broadmead, Landkey Road, the following summer. However, I seem to remember there was some sort of 'bust-up' at Raleigh about that time and Basil was to move to North Devon C.C, at Instow the following season. So I was persuaded to play there during 1957 but did not really enjoy the experience. At that time they were made up of chiefly professional and more 'well to do' people and I, and others, found it difficult to blend in there. I did play for one season only at Instow.

I remember one Saturday morning early season in 1958 I happened to be in Pilton Park and was approached by Maurice Huxtable of Pilton Cricket Club. They were short of a player that afternoon to play at Exwick, Exeter and would I care to play. I did and that was the start of over 50 years involvement with the club as a player, administrator, groundsman and now, having been elected, a life-member.

The club was originally formed as Pilton Bible Class before the 1939-1945 War. Names that come to mind of either founder members or those who joined just after the war are Maurice Huxtable, Les and Fred Webber (brothers), Les and Walter Rice (brothers), Jack Spry, George Somerfield, Arthur K. Goss and Len Goss (brothers), Bill Norman, Jim Brannam, Alfie Hobbs, Jack Roach, Bert Rooke, Alan Collins, Rees Milligan, Brian Pollard, Wally Down, Jack Abbott, Bob Loseby and Bert Edwards (scorer).



The club originally played in the fields at Bradiford belonging to Bill Hill at the rear of the Windsor Arms Public House. It then moved to Westaway in behind where the Youngs Drive houses have been build and Maer Top. The field was owned by Major Trechmann of Westaway and he was a Vice-President of the club at that time. The club then moved to play on the United Services Rugby ground at Pottington but sometime in the early 1950's moved into the adjoining ground which was once part of Pottington Farm. This was to be the club's ground for the next 50 years. The photograph (left) is of Pilton C.C. in 1957.

When I began, although we played on this new ground, there was no pavilion, so we changed and had our teas in the adjoining Rugby Club facilities. The scorers had a little wooden hut in the corner of the ground: this had previously been used in the taxi rank on The Square in Barnstaple. About 1960, a new Pavilion was built by some club members at little cost with bricks and other materials recovered from the Derby area of the town under the slum clearance scheme. The building still stands today and has many happy memories.

We shared the ground for many years with two other clubs, Barnstaple C.C. (originally formed as a Post Office side) and Barnstaple Nondescripts C.C. At that time Pilton C.C. never played on Sundays, so we shared the ground mainly on Saturdays with Barnstaple who in turn shared with

the Nondescripts on Sundays. Pilton C.C. also played regularly at home on Tuesday evenings, when you could usually hear the bells of Pilton Church being rung on practice evening and also the lovely smell of fresh bread being baked at the nearby North Devon Bakeries on Braunton Road. At the end of the season, each club paid its share of the (then) £100 ground rent levied by the Council based on the actual amount of games each team had played. In those earlier days, the Council would do all the work on the ground, cutting the outfield on Fridays with tractor and gang mowers, also rolling and cutting the square and marking the wickets.

League cricket came into being in 1978 with the formation of the North Devon League. Up until then all games were friendlies. Afternoon games would start at 2.30 and the team batting first would continue until the tea interval at 5.00. Play would then resume at 5.30 and carry on until 7.30 unless, of course, a definite result had been obtained beforehand! Evening games would usually be played on a 22 overs per team basis. Over all the years that I played, we always enjoyed splendid teas which were kindly arranged and organised by the ladies, wives, girlfriends and mothers. Wherever we played this really was such an enjoyable part of the cricket scene, as indeed it still remains.

For about 25 years before league cricket arrived, the cricket scene did not change too much. Pilton was always an average strength side and would play most of the local teams on a home and away basis. I remember well visiting Braunton, Bishops Tawton, Bideford, Westward Ho!, Chumleigh, Ilfracombe, Westleigh, North Molton, Newton Tracey and, of course, the truly glorious settings of Filleigh and Lynton & Lynmouth at the Valley of Rocks – goats and all! My favourite place on earth. Three of our longer journeys took us to Whimble and Whiteways, Bovey Tracey and Tiverton Heathcote and the beautiful setting of Knightshayes Court.



Over more than half a century, many dozens of valued friendships have been made throughout the area as a result of these cricket matches and left me with memories I shall always treasure.

By 1980, Barnstaple Nondescripts C.C. had disbanded and Pilton C.C. was sharing the facilities at Pottington with Barnstaple C.C. By now Pilton were also playing on Sundays and some Tuesday evening games also continued. The photograph (left) shows Pilton C.C. in 1980.

In addition to the North Devon League, the North East Devon League came in to being and eventually in the 1990's the Devon Cricket League with its various divisions was formed much as it is today involving travelling to all parts of the County.

My last season as a player was in 1991, my last game being at Westward Ho! when the start of a knee injury put paid to my playing days.

I like to think I was a reasonable average player; I scored only one century, 102 not out against Bideford at Pottington in 1972. I also took many wickets over the years as a medium pace bowler but always enjoyed fielding, as I had done at school.

As well as being a player, I was Hon. General Secretary of the Pilton Club from 1967 – 1984. Also fixtures Secretary from 1964 – 1982. I was honoured to be elected Club Captain in 1961, 1971, 1972, 1979 and 1980 and Vice-Captain in 1964 and 1978.



In the mid 1970's indoor league cricket was introduced to the area being played on Tuesday and Thursday evenings in the Sports Hall of the North Devon College. Teams consisted of 6 players. I was privileged to captain Pilton C.C. When we won the league in 1978/79 (photograph left), the other members of the team were Dave Osborne, Rodney Bowden, Dave Rowe, Steve Webber and Neil Worth. Indoor cricket

still continues in the winter evenings and is now played in the fine facilities at North Molton.

There came a time when both Pilton C.C. and Barnstaple C.C. began to struggle for players and a decision was made to amalgamate the two clubs in 1993, thus now being known as Barnstaple and Pilton C.C. The club moved after so many tremendously happy years at Pottington to the new ground at Raleigh Meadow in 2004, the official opening being on 30th August by Nick Harvey M.P. At this time I was honoured to be elected an Hon. Life Member of the Club.

I still have in my possession many of the club's fixture/membership cards from 1948 into the 1990's together with many team photographs taken over the years. Many photographs can be seen in the new pavilion where also almost all the Pilton C.C. score-books from 1948 onwards are kept.

So many happy memories as a result of that chance meeting with Maurice Huxtable in Pilton Park way back in 1958!

John Norman

*For details of the players in each of these and for more photographs from Pilton Cricket Club please search **The Pilton Story** archive.*