

THE GOOD OLD DAYS

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We used to get out two stools for our wicket, a tennis ball, and a thin wooden bat. We always had to have a good supply of bats and tennis balls, but the bat was always breaking and the tennis ball was lost and found at least two or three times during the course of a game.

It wasn't really a game. It was more like practice or learning the rudiments of the game as there were usually only three of us playing — a batsman, a bowler and someone for behind the wicket.

Two of the players were already playing for the 'Vale and they were trying to teach the youngster the finer points.

There were various ways of getting out apart from those mentioned in the laws of the game. To encourage the batsman to "play with a straight bat" he was out if he hit the ball into the ditch (which was no more than six feet from the wicket and ran parallel to the pitch) more than five times.

Another way for the batsman to get himself out was to hit the ball over the hedge into the next field.

The pitch was, of course, the street outside our house. The windows were always in danger of being broken, but one feared the prospect of being out (that was another way) more than the wrath of the unfortunate occupant.

SUMMER RITUAL

The youngest player always get "three lives" until he became better at the game and didn't require them. And so this ritual was played out most nights during the Summer months — there wasn't many other distractions because television was not yet within the reach of the ordinary people.

This scene must have been repeated on many streets and it laid the foundations for many of the 'Vale cricketers of today. These street games or practices were usually a supplement for the matches played at primary school.

Our local school was one of about six in the area which played ~~either~~ each Summer term and such was the enthusiasm that, whereas a player may have been "too ill" to go to school in the morning, he always made a miraculous recovery for the afternoon match.

Unfortunately those days are long since gone—partly due to our education system and partly due to the social changes that have taken place during the past 20 years. Unfortunately television is here to stay and one cannot do much about it, but there is something our education system can do.

The good old days had boys at primary school until they were 15 and this enabled each school to build up a good cricket team. When secondary education took its hold the over-11s moved on to these schools, which of course had no tradition of any sport, nevermind cricket.

CHANGE

School teachers change as well. Today they just don't appear to be prepared to spend an afternoon taking practice. In fact very few of them can play the

23

game. It was probably easier for the primary school in a village as it had tradition behind it.

Even now it is not too late to reverse a situation that now sees even our grammar schools giving the game the "cold shoulder".

The cricket clubs themselves, can do more, but they are fighting a losing battle when school-children are not encouraged to play the game.

The young players of today will never know the joy and the pride which came from playing the game of cricket during the good old days.