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Cricket has been played in Norfolk since the mid-1700s and often took the form of towns and villages challenging each other on village greens or open spaces. As the sport developed throughout the 1800s, clubs and facilities became more formalised. Indeed efforts began in 1826 to create a Norfolk County cricket club with its home ground located at Lakenham south of Norwich.

Cricket enjoyed its golden age from the late 1800s right up to the outbreak of the First World War. It was a sport enjoyed by all levels of society so it was not surprising that the landed gentry of the day with their wealth, big houses and large estates took up the fashionable past time of country house cricket. Old Catton was no different with the Buxton family hosting such cricket matches in the grounds of Catton Hall.

We are very grateful to Mr Barry Prime and to Mr Andrew Buxton for their contributions to this article.



Edward Gurney Buxton moved into Catton Hall when his father died. He was a very keen cricketer and he took great interest in country house cricket, organising several boys' matches between friends and relations. But he was also keen on cricket at county level and was President of Norfolk County Cricket Club for many years.

In 1903, the legendary W. G. Grace made his first visit to the city of Norwich. He was a member of the London County team that was to play Norfolk on the 3rd August at Lakenham. On the day of the match, W. G. Grace was the guest of Edward Gurney Buxton and he stayed the night in Old Catton at Catton Hall. Interestingly enough, the game itself saw W. G. Grace bowled out for a duck in his first innings and Norfolk went on to win the game by 62 runs!

Cricket at Catton Hall ceased upon the outbreak of the First World War but resumed again after the war. Sadly, it did not survive the Second World War. 1939 saw Catton Park ploughed up for food production and Catton Hall was requisitioned by the army. Whilst Catton Hall and Park were returned to the Buxton family after the war, it did not last. The Buxton family sold Catton Hall and moved away. Country house cricket had finished in Old Catton.



Catton Park cricket pitch in 1935 with Edward Gurney Buxton (inset).



Edward Gurney Buxton (left) with W.G. Grace (middle) at Lakenham Cricket Ground in 1904.



W. G. Grace in the garden of Catton Hall during his first visit to Norwich in 1903. Edward Gurney Buxton is standing at the back and the young Desmond Buxton is on W. G. Grace's knee.

Finally, on the next page, a personal account of cricket in Catton Park before the Second World War by Alfred Bunn, an Old Cattonian now sadly deceased. This is a copy of a letter he sent to Barry Prime of the Old Catton Cricket Club:



## July 1997

After hearing from Doug Day that you would like to hear of any memories I might have of Old Catton C.C. I thought I had better sit down and rack my brains. My memory is not as good as it used to be and it is now some seventy three years since I joined the club.

I used to enter the Park through the Oak Lane Gate. Scores of rabbits would bolt at our approach, then sit on their haunches, ears erect until we got too near, then they would scamper down their sandy burrows. The pitch was situated between two oak trees, some one hundred yards from the front door of Catton Hall. I can still picture Capt. Desmond Buxton, bat and pads under his arm, walking across the pitch on the odd occasion he played for us. He had just returned from India on the death of his father. One oak tree with a seat round its base and surrounded by steel fencing was used by players waiting to bat, with the scorer sitting on the seat.

The pitch was overlooked by the museum, a longish room, glazed roof to floor on its eastern side. The inner wall was lined with cases of stuffed animals, probably trophies of the sporting Buxton family. It was here that the ladies of Old Catton prepared and served tea for visitors and the home team. There was a concert platform at the far end. At one match I was invited to mount it to receive a wedding gift from the club members. In thanking them I said that I would continue playing cricket and would probably bring a supporter to the club. Geoff Badcock, standing below me, shouted out, "Make it a bowler, Alfred!" If my memory serves me right, the lady helpers included Mrs Lane, Lord, Badcock and Day. There were others too. In front of the museum a skating rink provided a playground for the children.

The playing pitch was surrounded by wheeled hurdles to keep the cattle off it. We arrived in time before each match to push them away. Earnie Addy always arrived in time to help push away the last hurdle!

Among the teams we played were Marsham, Bradenham, Mulbarton, Rackheath, Hoveton and Overstrand (whose captain was Ducky Swan, well known as a Sheringham Town footballer).

In 1927 we reached the final of the Norfolk Junior Cup and won it. The match was played at Lakenham Cricket Ground. It was a long walk from the pavilion to the wicket. When I reached the crease I took guard, noted the field placings, and settled down, bat in blockhole. An orthodox defensive stroke and bang - I was out first ball! It was an even longer walk back to the pavilion! However, I did have some satisfaction. From fielding at deep cover point, I was able to hit the wicket and get a run out. The unlucky player was Sam (?) Austin, the Norwich City right-winger, later transferred to Arsenal.

When captain Desmond Buxton took over at Catton Hall and Park he said he would give me permission to shoot rabbits on the Norwich end of the Park if I would keep gamekeeper watch over it. I declined. The local suspected poacher of our district was a certain Pittler Goodson!

Just after I joined the club two or three members retired. Albert Osborne the local builder - a very tall, quiet, friendly soul. Harry Harrowven who grew sweet peas for exhibition in the garden of his house at the corner of Church Street. Neville Howlett who ran the piano and music shop on the Guildhall corner of London Street. His chauffer, Mr. Addy umpired for us, and the two Addy boys were regular team members. Of the players I can recall Geoff Badcock was a son of the local blacksmith. Earnie and Olly Addy Capt. (cricket), Charlie Adcock (shoe manufacturer) and Len Parker (civil servant at Employment Office) had both experienced county cricket (not Norfolk). Ken Starling, Arthur Bullock, who always liked to have a daisy flower between his lips, Len Trowse, Les Moore (the Norwich Art School painter and headmaster who died a fortnight ago), Ashton Goose, Jack Messent, chimney sweep. Lionel Robertson, whose father ran a sweet factory in King Street, Dick Nicholson, Georgie Howard and Frank Johns.



I was elected captain in the thirties and my wife became our match scorer. A certain Bill Twite, a war wounded veteran who lived in the War Memorial Cottages on Mousehold Lane was a regular supporter in his self-propelled invalid chair.

Looking back over years of pleasant memories and friendships it was a dreadful shock when the Second World War started. The cricket pitch was ploughed up, the Hall was taken over and soon the Buxton era was over. Old Catton will never be the same again. Eventually Capt. Desmond Buxton moved out and bought Hoveton Hall, which, on his death, was taken over by his son.

I do hope there is something in this rather long harangue which may be of interest to you - that is if you can read my writing!

Yours sincerely,

Alfred Bunn