

1934-46: Growing Pains

The period between 1934 and 1946 was a traumatic time for S.B.C.I. and its members, but at the end of the club was stronger and more independent, able to steer its own course to the thriving club it has become today.

Prior to 1934 the cricket club was funded by nominal match fees and a 'cut' it received from the Institute's fund raising activities. The cricketers contributed to events such as bazaars as they were primarily members of the Institute, not just the cricket club.

Part of the club's commitment was to pay an annual rent to the Institute's Management Committee. These payments had, apparently, lapsed and in 1934 this committee adopted the resolution:

'That the Cricket Section be not allowed use of the playing field unless they can guarantee their rent'.

The cricket section replied:

'We regret that the Management Committee have seen reason to censure that section ... the Cricket Section has always been more or less subsidised from the Institute funds, further, up to 1934, the Cricket Section were not allowed to organise events for the purpose of raising funds, owing to the existence of a Social Committee.'

Although still subsidised by Institute events such as jumble sales and the Christmas Club, the Cricket Section needed more funds. The cricket committee requested a 12 month abeyance before any action was taken and embarked on frantic fund-raising preparations. Their meetings immediately increased from two per year to six, the extra time taken up almost exclusively by fund-raising as financial necessity drove the club onto a more commercial footing. Motivated more by survival than aspiration, the committee began to adopt the methods of clubs with much greater manpower, financial turnover and security.

Bi-annual 'Whist Drive and Dance' were organised for February and October, membership cards and fixture lists were printed, their costs covered by advertisements, old members and friends were cajoled to renew their interest in the club and 'prominent gentlemen' were approached and asked to become vice-presidents – although the club had only one of these, a local vicar, by 1937.

The first Whist Drive and Dance was held at the Victoria Assembly Rooms on 2 February 1935. 200 tickets and 50 window bills were printed, the Five piece New Astoria Band was booked at a cost of 50 shillings and a profit of £2 14s 6d made it the most successful of the new initiatives.

By 1936 annual rent for the field was £8 8s and the club's ongoing financial struggles are hinted during the winter of 1937-38. The pitch was re-turfed 'using

sods from our own field' and bitter objections were raised to an invoice for 13 hours rolling over two days when the committee had only requested eight hours rolling on one day.

To pay for this work the club embarked on a 'mile of pennies' scheme and a thousand envelopes were printed and distributed around the district.

The war was a mixed blessing for S.B.C.I.. With little infrastructure or manpower to fall back on when it lost men to the forces, continuity disintegrated and after 1939 the club limped along on sporadic enthusiasm rather than structured planning. There was no committee meeting between March 1940 and September 1941, at which point the club ceased to function and the ground fell into five years of neglect.

Symbolising a return to normality, team sports, particularly football and cricket, were embraced by communities as never before in post-war Britain. At S.B.C.I. this enthusiasm re-kindled the flame which has glowed ever brighter over the last 60 years.

The cricket club was already underway when the Institute re-started its other activities at an Extraordinary General Meeting on 26 June 1946. With the Reverend RW Scott presiding, billiards, snooker, table tennis, dominoes, draughts and cards were re-started.

The advent of counter-attractions facilitated by technological progress, particularly the car and television, saw the erosion of many traditions, including Sunday as exclusively a day for family and worship. By the end of the 1950s support for cricket was dwindling, but support for the church was floundering.

In 1960, the cricket club's secretary, Walter Birkby, and treasurer, Fred Bates, were instructed 'to act for the Institute' during a period when the rest of the organisation, including all the indoor activities, shut down.

Today the letters SBCI are synonymous with cricket in the locality. The cricket club has outlived its parent body the institute's social club and, with the opening of its £228 000 pavilion in 1999, is utterly transformed from the vulnerable adolescent of seventy years ago. The hardy band who nurtured the club through its acute growing pains of the 1930s and 40s would be delighted and amazed.