

## Memories of Geoffrey Wills



From Jonathan Wills, Geoffrey's son: Many kind words have been written about my father and I would like to add my own reflections regarding what the Old Cicestrians meant to Pa. While he has described his proudest cricketing moment and I am also sure there was a degree of pride in his role in re-establishing a place for former pupils at the High School to come together, you would never describe Pa as 'a proud man'. Self-congratulatory, self-important was never his thing. He never looked for praise. For him it was simply seeing people come together with a shared interest, having fun and preferably with some food and a drink or two, that he loved.

In one of his old Chichester school reports he was described by the boxing teacher as being 'a plucky little fighter' and while this might suggest an aggressive quality, anyone who met Pa knows he was definitely a lover rather than a fighter. But

it did show that whatever he was asked to do, he did with everything he had; with zeal, passion and commitment; be that at school, as a student, lecturer, surveyor, husband, father, grandfather, cricketer, footballer or friend.

On the cricket pitch, as well as great skill and incredible reflexes he could always be picked out when he was batting by the speed that his arms and legs moved up and down the pitch as he racked up the runs. Behind the stumps as wicketkeeper, he was brave and fearless, as his hands would later testify; every finger and thumb broken or dislocated at least once, a badge of honour for a brilliant player who would stand up to the fastest of bowlers and whip off the bails in a single movement in a blur down the leg side, that amazed his own team as well as the poor victim who trudged off, unable to work out how he had been undone.

As has already been written, Pa achieved great things as a cricketer as a schoolboy and then with Sussex, Hampshire (where he won the Second XI County Championship) and then Sussex again from the 1950's to the 1970's. This he did alongside a playing career with the Sussex Martlets, an amateur side that shared the sporting ideals he stood for; strong but fair competition on the pitch, great fun off it; principles he carried on when he came to live in Jersey and where he established the Over 50's side in the County Championship. Pa played his final game at the age of 68, fittingly at a ground made famous by another player who loved the game with a passion, Bowral in New South Wales, Australia, home to none other than Don Bradman.

In cricketing and professional retirement Pa still followed the game and gave great insight into what he saw, but anyone who came across him watching from the boundary rope would never have known the talent he had once possessed. He would talk about how fast the bowlers looked; this from someone who faced the likes of John Snow and a young tearaway called Bob Willis or mention how tricky wicket keeping appeared; despite having led the England schoolboys out at Lords.

Geoffrey Wills, Pa, 'A plucky little fighter', to the end.

He wasn't, but I am proud; proud to call him my wonderful father.

From Robin Wills, Geoffrey's brother:



The most vivid childhood memory I have of my brother Geoffrey, is a photograph of him leading England schoolboys out at Lords as their captain. The photograph was put up in the dining room of our family home in about 1950 when I was only 11 or 12. Geoff has described the occasion as the proudest moment of his career. I remember how proud our parents were, particularly our Father who never missed an opportunity to watch him play; going to venues far and wide from Lords to Hove County Ground and back to Amberley where it all began. One of Geoff's favourites was the Duke of Norfolk's beautiful ground at Arundel where he played on many occasions. To a degree I believe that he owed a debt to our Father for getting him started in the sport. Before the War we lived at Thornton Heath, in a typical suburban house with a small garden which was just large enough to put up a wicket and get started on the basics. I never knew much about our Father's cricketing history although he certainly had played Club cricket as a young man and loved the game. Also, our Mother was no stranger to a cricket tea however I do believe that she was quite pleased when they stopped!

My memories of Geoff's sporting achievements at the High School are somewhat limited as there was 5-year age gap between us and he left school 3 years after I started. I do however remember well the Head announcing at assembly that Geoff had been selected to play and captain England Schoolboys. I also recall that in his final year having obtained his colours in cricket and soccer, he decided to have a crack at rugby. The outcome was no surprise, and he became one of the very few boys to achieve this triple.

Cricket was, and continued to be, his main love and I remember him telling me that in his career he played on no less than 61 different grounds in Sussex and Hampshire. His son Jonathan will tell you more about his subsequent career.

From John Child:

I first met Geoff Wills when in the year 2000, as Deputy Head at Chichester High School for Boys, I was asked by Diane Dockrell, then Headteacher of CHSB, to join her in a meeting with Mr Geoffrey Wills who had written to her asking if he could meet to discuss the reforming of the Old Cicestrians Association.

Geoff immediately impressed us both with his great enthusiasm and disarming charm. He briefly explained the great 'love' that so many of the former CHSB pupils had for their school, its staff and the skills and opportunities it had afforded them for future life. We immediately agreed that we would be very pleased to support such a venture and I was asked by the Head to function as the school link. Little did I know that 23 years later I would still be on the Old Cicestrians Committee!!!

Geoff was very good at encouraging former High School Old Boys to get involved and an 'Old Cicestrians Committee' was soon formed to meet regularly at CHSB on Friday afternoons, initially to establish the Aims and Constitution of The Old Cicestrians. Geoff was quick to resurrect a formal Christmas Lunch event (prefaced with a brief AGM) and on the 2nd December 2000, 44 Old Cicestrians attended a splendid luncheon at Goodwood Golf Club. This was the start of the annual event that continues to this day, on the first Saturday in December, and is now held at Chichester Park Hotel. Geoff was very good at encouraging former O.C's to be Guest Speaker at these events, a tradition which has continued to this day.

Geoff was always very enthusiastic and introduced 'The Old Cicestrians Summer Event'. This continues to this day and has brought many fond memories to those O.C's who have taken part. In more recent years we even Travelled Abroad! We went over to Jersey for a few days to take in all that it could offer including a coach trip around the island, lovely evening meals together and even a visit to Boulivot Farm, Geoff's residence on the island' where we were generously treated to tea and fine cakes in his lovely garden. A memory never to be forgotten by all who attended.



With Geoff's active encouragement and support the O.C's have been able to rely on many former pupils to give up their time to sit on the O.C's Committee, help organise events such as golf days, a trip to the South Downs Planetarium, fascinating historical walks around Chichester and Portsmouth,

Bill Allen adds:



A final view of Geoff in a railway carriage on The Isle of Wight Steam Railway when The Old Cicestrians visited on a summer event. It was a pleasure to have known Geoff and to have had his encouragement and wise advice when I became Chairman of the Society. The tributes from Son, Brother and close friend reflect the affection and respect we all held for him.