A SPECIAL EXPERIENCE

County cricket has been played at Cricketfield Road for 103 years and some of the greats of the game have played here while the club continues to flourish, as Martin Read discovered.

Horsham has hosted county matches since 1908 when Essex were the first visitors and sizeable crowds have been enthralled by famous players down the years. In 1934 51- year-old Jack Hobbs retired after being run out at Horsham. Much later Viv Richards kept wicket for Somerset in a one-day game. Numerous other international players have provided rich entertainment down the years.

But it is Horsham's own sons like the Coxes and Oakes that really won local hearts. Long serving Sussex professionals George Cox Senior and Junior between them played over one thousand matches for the county, scoring almost 38,000 runs and taking over 2,000 wickets. Stalwart Sussex all-rounders Charlie and Jack Oakes were born in the cottage on the ground, now sadly derelict. Father, Alfred, played for Horsham and was groundsman for 47 years. Charlie once hit a six into his own garden and on retirement took over his father's duties.

Horsham has contributed a steady stream of players to the county side. More recently Chris Nash, playing with his brother Mark (their father Nick is the club squash coach), and Will Beer have both captained the club. Andrew Hodd, Robin Martin-Jenkins, Carl Hopkinson and Michael Thornely all played for Horsham and Sussex in the last decade while Australian test cricketers Tim May and David Hussey were overseas players at the club. Horsham has now entered into a partnership with Cricket New Zealand enabling a promising Horsham cricketer to develop his game there during our winter in exchange for Horsham recruiting an emerging Kiwi player for our season.

Horsham Cricket Club was founded in 1771 when George III was on the throne and America was still ours. Bats were curved and heavy, bowling was underarm and scores were notches on a stick. East Grinstead were our first opponents and 240 years later the two sides are still competing in the Sussex Premier League, which Horsham has won eight times. They have also won the cup competition on a record 11 occasions. 2005 was a particularly proud year when they carried off the Cockspur Cup at Lord's, with all but one of Horsham's team graduating through the coaching system. Today's young side uphold the club's tradition of playing challenging cricket.

The present ground was established in 1851 when a Sussex team played a side from Surrey. Originally, the pavilion stood by the footbridge over the railway. The ground had previously been covered by Horsham barracks occupying around 12 acres, part of the build-up of military bases during the Napoleonic threat. The range of buildings included eight blocks housing 2,000 troops, surrounded by the parade ground, a hospital, guardhouse and stabling.

"There are few more pleasant approaches to any ground from a town centre than down Horsham's Causeway through the churchyard and across the river."

Today, four Horsham men's sides play on Saturdays, one on Sundays and Thursdays and there is a Ladies' team and matches hours to prepare the ground, put up fencing, seating and marquees and provide electricity, water, toilets, first aid and other amenities for the comfort of up to 3,000 spectators. The aim is always to provide a special Horsham experience.

TMS commentator Henry Blofeld was married in nearby St Mary's Church and there are few more pleasant approaches to any ground from a town centre than down Horsham's Causeway through the churchyard and across the river. Outground county cricket is an endangered species. Horsham's festival has an enduring appeal that is well worth preserving. Long may it continue to be savoured.

"My real playing highlight was getting a 7 for 51 against Leicestershire, in 2002. But I never scored a hundred there, which was a disappointment."

Robin and his wife, Flora, now live in Hove. But Horsham was the family home – his father, Christopher, now president of the MCC, still lives there with his wife, Judy.

"It's such a lovely, sleepy, peaceful town. It was voted one of the best places to live in the UK some time ago," said Robin. "And the club has been so well run over the years, largely because of the legendary Dr Dew. Hopefully his legacy will run for a good long time."

What Robin most likes about Cricketfield Road is the festival atmosphere. "When you play in these out grounds everyone seems in a better mood, for some reason. Not just the players but the umpires and the coaches.

"Everyone seems to cheer up because there is a lighter atmosphere about the place. The same applies when we play at other out grounds, like Scarborough. Everyone seems to be in a holiday mood.

"The smaller crowds often look bigger than they are and there is a special buzz. At Horsham it often felt like a big crowd because the ground is so compact."

It helped, of course, that Sussex have enjoyed regular success at the Horsham ground. "I always enjoyed playing there and Sussex always seemed to do well. I can't remember losing there - I know we lost against Derbyshire one year, but I didn't play in that game.

"I quite enjoyed bowling there. It bounced, a tennis ball bounce, and carried more than it did at Hove. And it often turned on the third and fourth days, which was fun when we had Mushy around."

Robin played for Sussex between 1995 and 2010. He averaged 31.69 with the bat and 31.90 with the ball and the way he was playing at the end he needed only a few more matches to turn those figures the "right" way round for an all-rounder.

"I had the great fortune to land at the right time. By that, I mean I played for Sussex when they had the best time in their history.

"From the history point of view that first championship in 2003 beat everything else. But the most exciting day was winning in 2007, when we had to hang around all day waiting for the Surrey game to finish at The Oval before we knew we had won the Championship for the third time.

"I haven't missed playing that much. I miss the dressing room side of things, to a certain extent. But I haven't actually missed the playing.

"I've been back to watch a few times but I haven't had the pangs to be out there again. So I think I made the right decision to stop when I did.

"I'm loving my second career, teaching. I come home every evening exhausted, but very happy. I haven't had to use my brain in an intellectual capacity before."

> "I've been back to watch a few times but I haven't had the pangs to be out there again. So I think I made the right decision to stop when I did."

NO REGRETS

Robin Martin-Jenkins made his Sussex debut on his home ground at Horsham. A year after retiring, he tells Paul Weaver, of The Guardian, that he is enjoying his new career in teaching.

Robin Martin-Jenkins is unlikely to forget his final match for Sussex at Hove in July last year. Supporters sang "Milli Vily Lord" to the tune of Kumbaya

"He's old, he's posh, he's got a lot of dosh," they chanted. After 16 summers in the county colours he deserved a bit of a fuss. The match was on TV too. "I know what it feels like to be Luke Wright for a day," he grinned afterwards.

Martin-Jenkins, 35 , who is now teaching geography and religious studies at Hurstpierpoint College, says he doesn't miss playing cricket that much. But Horsham week always brings a wave of nostalgia for the bearpole all-rounder.

"I used to go up to Cricketfield Road every Wednesday evening from the age of nine," he says. "They had a junior cricket evening run by the famous Dr John Dew.

"I remember the excitement of playing there for Horsham for the first time, as a teenager, and in some of the Sussex junior matches

"And then I made my Sussex debut there in a Sunday League match, in 1995 it felt wonderful to make my debut in surroundings that I was so familiar with, going out to bat or field and being cheered on by family and friends.

"It was on Sky TV as well, which was quite exciting in those days. And I remember getting Alec Stewart out, my first wicket for the club. That's a really good memory. It was a filthy, leg-stump half-volley, from what I can remember, and he played a pretty average shot, straight to Keith Greenfield at midwicket, which was very nice of him.

MAMMA MIA!

SUSSEX CCC MOVIE AND PARTY NIGHT

SUSSEX SHARKS
CLUB FOUNDED 1839

FRIDAY 19TH AUGUST 2011
AT THE PROBIZ COUNTY GROUND
GROUND OPENS AT 7PM
FILM STARTS AT 8:30PM
BAR OPEN UNTIL MIDNIGHT
(Times are approximate)

- Bring a picnic & blanket
- Food & drink available
- Licensed bars
- **Fancy dress welcome & encouraged**
- Prizes for the 'Best Dressed'
- Fun & activities around the Ground

FOR TICKETS CALL:
CALL 0844 264 0206
Hospitality options available, please contact the club for more information.

Subject to licence

VISIT WWW.SUSSEXCRICKET.CO.UK FOR MORE INFORMATION

Johnson & Sons

Don't Move...

We can increase the value of your home NOW!!
Composite doors fully fitted from only £900 inc VAT
We will price match most like for like quotes

See our full range of composite doors on our website & design it there and then!

We specialise in replacing and repairing.

For over 30 years experience in this family run business and for your peace of mind contact Johnson & Sons.

Local authority & trading standard approved. Fensa Registered.

www.johnsonandsons.co.uk

LEWIS ROWELL

Chartered Accountants & Registered Auditors

- Free Initial Meeting
- Accounts & Audit
- Partnerships
- Personal/Company Tax
- Bookkeeping
- Business Plans & Forecasts
- Payroll/VAT Service
- Business Start Ups & Formations
- Proactive Advice

01293 542244

Email: info@lewis-rowell.co.uk
20 Springfield Road, Crawley
West Sussex RH11 8AD

www.lewis-rowell.co.uk

C M Y Bk JOB : 68210_Img_festival_brochure, Section : 5 - Outer Date Friday, August 05, 2011