

COUNTY CRICKET GROUNDS.

BY GEORGE A. WADE.

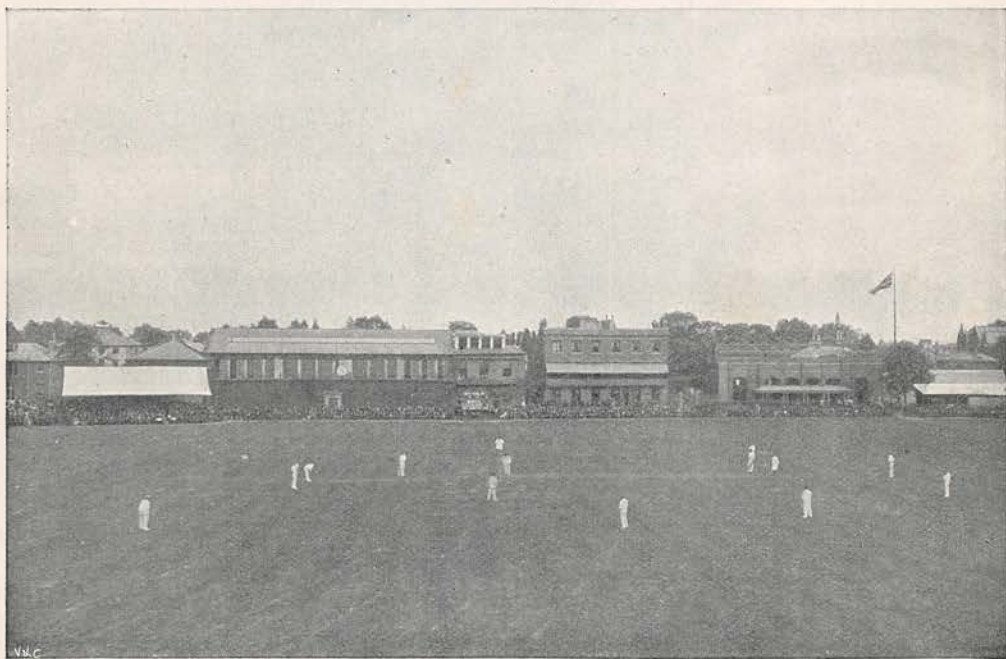


THE premier place amongst English county cricket grounds—indeed, amongst those of the world—must be given to Lord's, the famous ground of the Middlesex County Club.

It is only fair to say, however, that Lord's does not derive this pre-eminence from its being the county ground, but from its being the ground of the M.C.C., the recognised authority on modern cricket. Founded by one Thomas Lord in the last century, and

but only nine of these form the real portion of the field of play on the occasion of matches. Thus Lord's falls behind some other grounds in this particular. But it upholds its reputation in most other points. Its pavilion is superb; no other cricket ground has one that is even its rival. In extent it occupies nearly the whole of the Grove End Road side of the ground, and is capitally designed and fitted for the various uses it has to serve.

One noticeable thing at the Middlesex



From a photo by

A SNAP-SHOT VIEW OF LORD'S, THE COUNTY GROUND OF MIDDLESEX.

[Briggs.]

named after him, the enclosure at St. John's Wood is not only the oldest English first-class ground, but even to-day it is still one of the most beautiful in its surroundings and situation. Once inside the ground, you might easily suppose yourself to be miles away from the bustling city, the trees and flowers giving the whole place quite a country air.

Taken in its whole extent, Lord's is about the biggest of English cricket grounds, covering an area of nearly sixteen acres;

county ground is the care and comfort bestowed upon the spectators, as compared with many other similar places that will be hereafter mentioned. Comfortable seats go all round the ground, in most places covered by awnings which prove equally serviceable in sunny or windy weather, to say nothing of wet. And everybody can see; the field of play is not too great. As to the wicket—well, it is nearly always in the best of condition, as, of course, one expects from the M.C.C. But then they don't let Tom,

Dick, and Harry scamper over it on every available occasion, as so many other places do.

Lord's not only stands first in the matter of size, comfort and appearance amongst English cricket grounds, but naturally from its long career, its important position, and its relation to the M.C.C.—more than to the Middlesex County Club—it boasts some of the noblest traditions and records of English cricket. It is the only ground where there is habitually a large attendance of the fair sex of the fashionable world; and such matches as Oxford *v.* Cambridge and Eton *v.* Harrow could not possibly be the same anywhere else that they are at Lord's. All the University matches since 1851 have been played here, and it is surprising how keenly some ladies follow the game, though from others the poor inferior male spectator often hears some curious cricket tit-bits. Thus, when Middlesex played Sussex here last August, the writer happened to be near a sweet young thing of twenty, whose cousin of twenty-five was acting as guide and *chaperon*; and when C. B. Fry hit Cunliffe for four, amidst applause, she innocently asked "why they were clapping." When the cousin replied kindly that it was a fine hit, she sweetly smiled and said, "Yes, it was nice of that bowler to bowl him such a nice ball to hit so far, wasn't it?" And when all the men around grinned, the cousin looked as if he had made up his mind, and that it should be "Never more!"

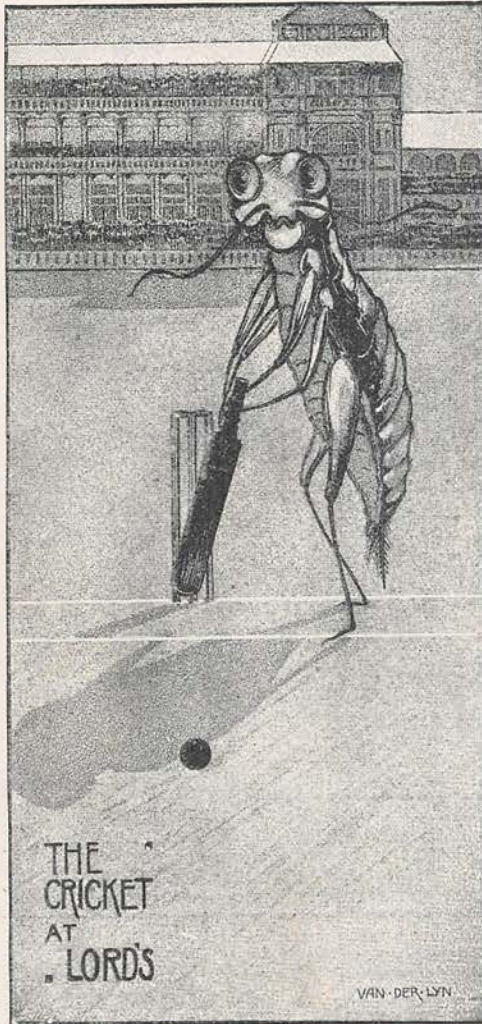
It was at Lord's in 1893 that Stoddart, for Middlesex *v.* Notts, scored over 100 in each innings, thus ranking among the noble

half-dozen batsmen who have performed this feat. Barnes, the Nottingham man, for M.C.C. *v.* Leicestershire, 1882, scored 266; and this is the highest innings that has ever been scored at Lord's since 1820, when Mr. Ward scored 278. On this ground Jesse Hide, for Sussex *v.* M.C.C., took four wickets with four consecutive balls in 1890.

As may be gathered from its size and shape—Lord's is nearly square—boundary hits are not very long in some places, though diagonally they would allow, I believe, of a "six" being run. W. G. Grace has hit a ball more than once clean out of the playing area, and struck the clock on the south side of the ground, but without breaking it. A similar feat was done during a match last season. Lord's has many glories and a great past. All true lovers of cricket will desire that its future may be equally glorious.

Lancashire's two great cricket grounds for county matches are the well-known Old Trafford at Manchester, and the Aigburth ground at Liverpool. The former is by far the most important, since all the season's "home" matches, except about three or so, take place on it. It was in 1864 that contests first took place here under the name of the "County of Lancashire," and they have been continuous each season since.

The Old Trafford ground suffers, like that of Bramall Lane at Sheffield, from being in the centre of a large town. Like its Yorkshire rival, its wickets are not always as good as those on some other grounds, and like it, too, it has had a great and celebrated



A FANCY SKETCH IN "NATURAL HISTORY."

past. There is much similarity in another way between them. Just as the Yorkshire crowd most appreciate a contest with the Red Rose, so the Lancashiremen prefer to watch a struggle at Old Trafford against their great rivals of the past. Thus it comes that as the record attendance on a Yorkshire ground was at a match against Lancashire, so that of the Old Trafford enclosure was for Lancs *v.* Yorks in 1895, when 27,000 were present on the first day. The next record was at a similar contest in 1893, when 22,554 paid on the opening day.

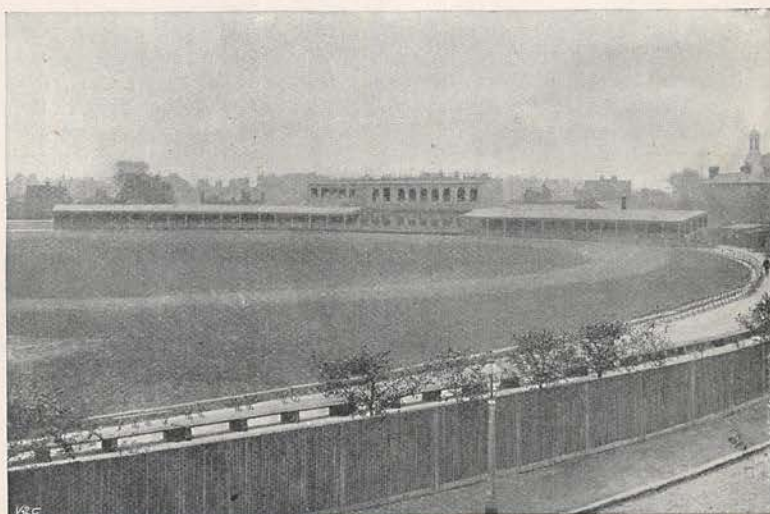
The playing portion of Old Trafford is about seven acres in extent, so that in size the whole ground will bear comparison with most others. Of course Old Trafford boasts a spacious pavilion. Many great feats, including some records, are connected with the ground. Here were made both the smallest innings Lancashire ever totalled, 25—*v.* Derbyshire, in 1871—and also the smallest innings ever made against the county, *viz.*, 17, singularly enough, by Derbyshire again, in 1888. At Old Trafford, in 1885, Mr. V. E. Walker, for Middlesex, took all the ten Lancashire wickets in one innings; whilst in 1888 Briggs performed a very remarkable feat against Derbyshire, by taking no less than 13 wickets for 35 runs in the two innings. It would seem that Derbyshire matches at Old Trafford are always exciting for somebody or other! But the greatest feat in bowling, since it constitutes a record in first-class matches I believe, occurred at Old Trafford in 1882, when G. Nash, against Somersetshire, took *five* wickets with five successive balls!

A laughable incident occurred here at the refreshment rooms one year, when a party of young men, having ordered some eatables, monopolised the windows, which commanded a capital view of the game, and, after their meal, refused to move, though other customers were waiting. Although policemen

were summoned, they could not be dislodged. But the proprietor hit on a happy expedient. Instead of using brute force, he simply engaged two men outside to whitewash the windows. The offending youths soon cleared out!

The Aigburth ground, at Liverpool—Lancashire's "understudy" of a county enclosure—can boast of having, at any rate, one record to its credit. Here, in July, 1885, Briggs and Pilling scored 173 runs for the last wicket, this being a "best on record."

This ground has generally a good wicket, and, though not largely used for county matches, is often in use for Lancashire's contests with the Universities, and for first-class matches *v.* so-called "Lancs" teams. It is somewhat surprising, considering the size of



From a photo by]

KENNINGTON OVAL, SURREY'S COUNTY GROUND.

[W. H. Bunnett.

the county, that Lancashire's matches never go to the north or central portion of it. But so it is. Old Trafford is the traditional Lancashire cricket ground, as for many years it is likely to be.

Probably no ground in the world is better known than the Oval, which has since 1854 belonged exclusively to the Surrey County Cricket Club. The latter had been remodelled, so to speak, in 1845, and when the Montpelier Club, which had transformed what was an old kitchen garden into the cricket ground now known as "The Oval," helped to form the new Surrey Club in 1854, the ground also was transferred to the County Club.

As everyone knows, the Oval is so called from its shape. It has an area of about

eleven acres, and is situated in that portion of London known as Kennington, close to Kennington Church, and near Vauxhall Station. The Oval has always had a good reputation for its wickets, and a Surrey crowd, too, is a thing that has become famous. But the most enthusiastic Surreyite could not describe the ground as "pretty," with those gasometers close by staring him in the face. The accommodation for the enormous crowds that gather here also leaves very much to be desired. Nor can the Oval be described as "comfortable" for the spectator. There is about as much shade on a broiling summer day as there is on the Sahara.

The old pavilion has been replaced this year by a new erection, which is a matter for congratulation. Few crowds are more enthusiastic (when Surrey is doing well!) than those at the Oval, and it must be allowed that on few grounds have the spectators more often cause for enthusiasm, since this ground has been the scene of some of the most memorable events in modern cricket.

There have only been six cases of first-class county matches ending in a "tie," and, singular to say, all six have occurred at this cricket ground, five of them when the match was Surrey *v.* some other county, and the other Gentlemen *v.* Players in 1883. Here also was the largest attendance on record at any cricket match, viz., that of Surrey *v.* Notts, in August, 1892, when 63,763 persons paid for admission during the three days, of whom nearly half, 30,760, came on the first day. The Oval also holds the record of the highest score for the first wicket, Abel and Brockwell making, in August last year, 379 for Surrey *v.* Hampshire, thus beating by one run the Sheffield record of Brown and Tunnicliffe a few weeks earlier.

Amongst other notable feats performed on the Surrey ground may be mentioned the great Caffyn's bowling record in 1862, of 24 overs, against Kent, for 7 runs and 7 wickets; Martin's taking 6 wickets for 11 runs, in 1872, *v.* M.C.C.; Lohmann's 8 for 18 runs, *v.* Hants, and Beaumont's 6 for 11 runs, *v.* Middlesex, both in 1885; and Richardson's bowling, *v.* Warwickshire, in 1893, when he took 4 wickets with 4 consecutive balls. In the season of 1868, Pooley the stumper, in the match Surrey *v.* Sussex, stumped 4 and caught 8, which is a record in first-class matches for the wicket-keeper; whilst in 1880, Surrey only made 16 in their first innings *v.* Notts, which score included no less than 7 "ducks"!

The Oval is a larger ground than many people would suppose on first seeing it, as its area given above will show; but this is further proved by the fact that only once has a ball ever been hit clean out of the ground by a batsman in a county match, and that feat was performed by Mr. K. J. Key when playing for Surrey *v.* Kent in 1887. Hearne was the suffering bowler.

No mention of the Oval would be complete without noting the fact that here first appeared, in 1861, the covered scoring box and the telegraph board, of which Surrey were the pioneers. Surrey were also the first to give "talent sovereigns," which used to be presented to the recipient at the close of his innings, on his returning to the pavilion; but as this often led to confusion, the later method was adopted. Only on two occasions has Surrey ever played "home" matches away from the celebrated ground, viz., in 1854, when the Notts match took place at Godalming, and, in the same year, when both Sussex matches were at Brighton.

In leaving the glories of the famous Oval, one cannot but recall the figure of Craig, the Surrey poet, so well known to every *habitué* of the ground. He comes up smiling every time Surrey plays, and is as much a fixture as the rest of Surrey's property. His quips and sallies *re* Surrey's glories and Abel's triumphs cause endless mirth and laughter.

Yorkshire has in recent years, and with much success, adopted the method of Kent and Gloucestershire, and played its matches in various parts of the broad-acred shire rather than on one particular ground. Still most of its encounters, and all the more important ones, are always relegated to Sheffield, Leeds, or Bradford.

Bramall Lane ground, at Sheffield, was at one time the regular county venue of all Yorkshire's "home" matches. But its turf has been wearing for years, and the sooty atmosphere of the cutlery town is not calculated to raise velvety turf on a ground surrounded by buildings on every side. For many seasons there has been reason to complain of the wicket there, and this, no doubt, aided in the development of other Yorkshire cricket grounds. But though some of its glories are departed, Bramall Lane will always be the classic ground of Yorkshire county cricket, for with it will ever be associated the names of Ulyett, Emmett, Ephraim Lockwood, and Freeman, and these will never die whilst cricket lives. It was at Bramall Lane, so the story goes, that George Ulyett, that terrific "hitter," once drove a

ball clean out of the ground, over the boundary street, over the row of houses, and into an attic window of a house in the next street, probably the biggest hit on record. This will impress one more after seeing Bramall Lane ground, which is not small by any means, the playing portion being over seven acres.

Here also Wootton, for All England *v.* Yorkshire in 1865, took all ten wickets in one innings; and here J. T. Brown and Tunncliffe—the Yorkshire “giant” and the Yorkshire “little’un”—made, *v.* Sussex last year, the enormous score of 378 for the first wicket, a record till the Surrey one of 379 a month or so later. Another record enjoyed by Yorkshire is that of the first three men in an innings each scoring over 100, which was done against Kent in 1887, by Hall, Ulyett and Lee.

The Bradford ground at Horton Park was the scene of the memorable benefits of Peel and Hunter. That of

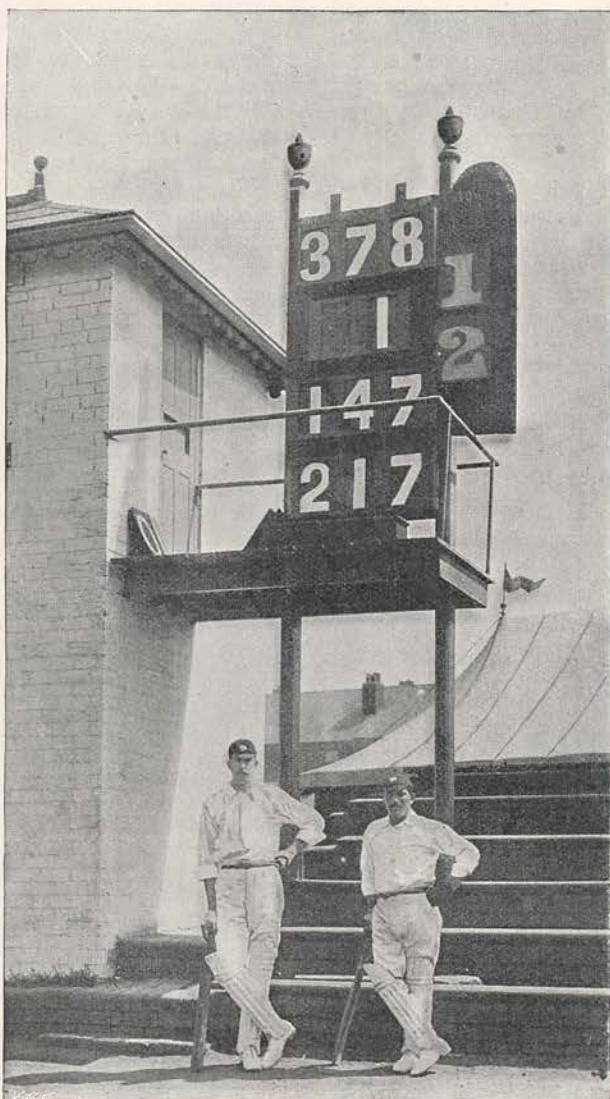
“Bobby” holds the record amongst benefits, above £2,000 being the amount handed over. Yet on the last day, owing to the early finish, only £65 was taken! Hunter’s benefit here last year realised over £2,000 for him, with subscriptions; for Yorkshire

people seem to think that the acme delight of a cricket match is to have a “benefit,” at Bradford ground, for one of their “pets,” with Lancashire as the opponents. The Wars of the Roses are not over yet.

The Headingley ground, at Leeds, is now probably Yorkshire’s finest ground, as well as one of the prettiest of county grounds. The turf and wicket are always good, but a drawback to the ground—or at least batsmen think so—are the long boundary hits that are necessary in order to score four. This militates much against such big scores being made here as on some grounds. The area of the cricket ground is about eight acres, and there is a very fine pavilion. It is rather far from the centre of Leeds, and so somewhat inaccessible to the stranger, though there is a good service of trams, brakes, etc.

Owing to the few years that county matches have been played here, few very notable events are connected with

it. One of the most striking is that of Yorkshire *v.* Gloucestershire in 1894, when 9 Yorkshire wickets had fallen for 19 runs in the second innings, and then, Yorkshire being only a few runs on, Hirst and Hunter went in for “smiting” with such effect that



From a photo by]

[Jasper Redfern, Sheff.eld.

BROWN AND TUNNICLIFFE, AFTER THEIR RECORD STAND FOR FIRST WICKET, AT BRAMALL LANE, SHEFFIELD.

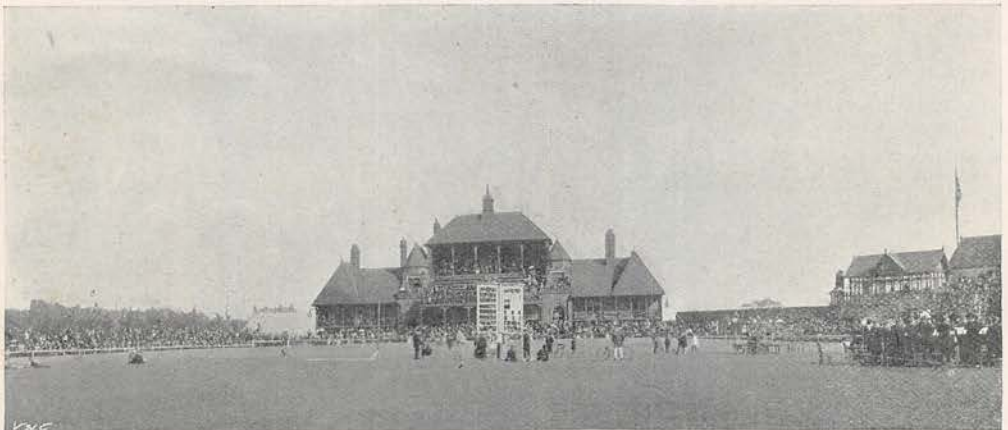
they brought the total to 61. Gloucestershire, wanting only 78 to win, found this task utterly beyond them, owing to the magnificent bowling of Peel, Hirst & Co., and departed vanquished by 26!

Of minor Yorkshire grounds the most noted is Huddersfield, though its wicket is not at all perfect. Here Yorkshire *v.* Somerset, in 1894, was finished in a day; and here, in 1897, was the memorable match with Essex, where the latter won by 1 run, after Yorkshire had only wanted 16 with 3 wickets to fall.

Like Surrey's "Craig," Yorkshire is not without its noted follower, and most of the Tykes know him. "Now they're *numbered* on the *card* in the *order of going* in!" The beautiful cadence with which he sings this—accenting the syllables italicised—on all

the record of being probably the smallest of any first-class cricket ground, certainly of county grounds. Hence "boundary hits" are frequent, and the scoring naturally high. This tendency is increased by the second—the peculiarity of the ground, viz., its substratum of chalk, which makes the wicket dry rapidly, even in the wettest seasons. So that again points to high scores. Sussex has a first-class pavilion, splendidly fitted up, and the situation of the Hove ground, with the sea breezes fanning one, is probably as fine as any in England.

Naturally, with such aids to high scoring, no other cricket ground can show such a long array of big figures in that line. A full list of them would fill a page or two of this magazine. Only a few of the chief ones can be mentioned here. At Hove, in



From a photo by

YORKS COUNTY GROUND, HEADINGLEY, LEEDS.

[Owen Brookes, Leeds.]

(Photographed when athletic sports were in progress.)

Yorkshire's grounds during county matches is a thing to be remembered. But, unlike Craig, he doesn't compose poetry; he attends strictly to business, with a jovial remark *re* "Tunny," or "Bobby," or "J. T.," or "Ted" thrown in now and again.

Few cricket grounds are more beloved by county cricketers than that of Sussex, which is known as the "Hove" ground at Brighton. Sussex has another ground at Hastings, which has, on more than one occasion, been the scene of renowned encounters; but for all practical purposes the Brighton ground may be taken as being the regular venue where the southern county entertains its visitors. There are two things which endear this ground to the heart of every cricketer who has played on it; the first is its size—or rather its "want of size"—since it has

1893, Notts made 674 in one innings against the home county, in which innings Shrewsbury scored 164, Gunn 156, and Barnes 102. In 1891 the match Cambridge University *v.* Sussex produced a "record" aggregate of 1,402 runs for a first-class match. Here, in 1892, George Brann joined the select band of those who have scored "double hundreds," doing the trick in the match against Kent.

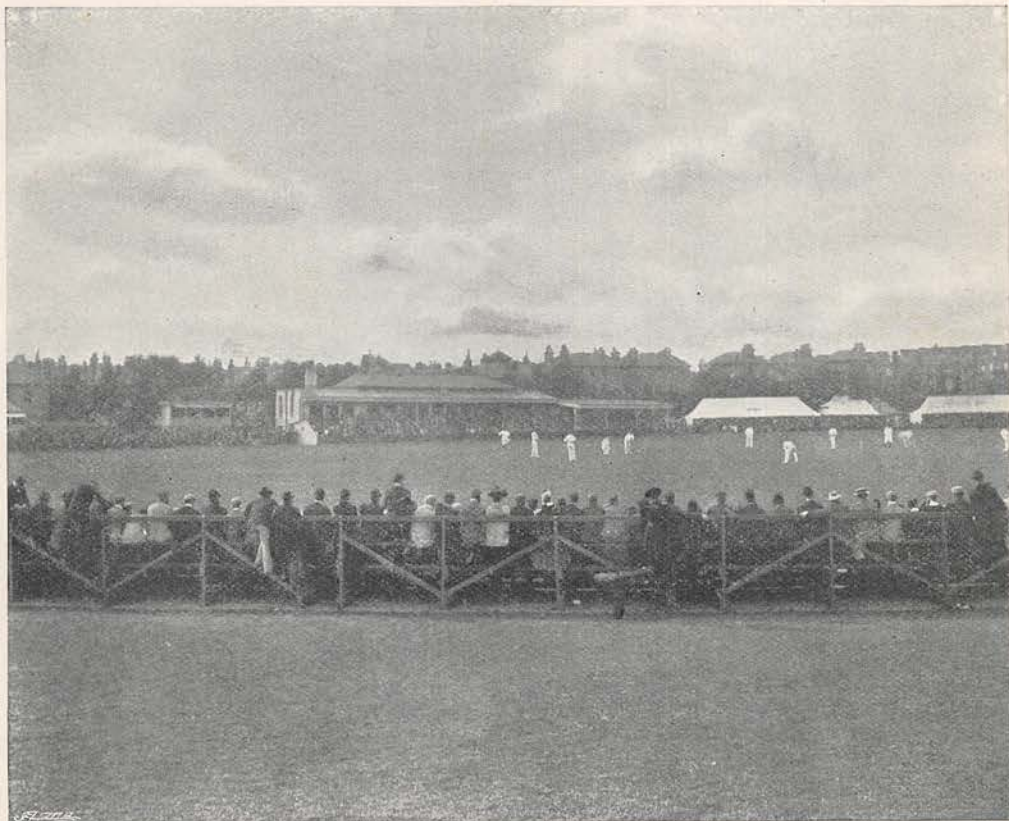
One of the most curious incidents here was when Surrey beat Sussex in 1887 by one wicket. Adams, the last Surrey man, was making his *début* for that county, and when he came in 7 runs were yet needed. Henderson, who was in with him, whispered to him to keep up his "end" and leave the run-getting to him (Henderson); but Adams was ambitious to shine at this first attempt

for Surrey, and letting go lustily, got all the 7 runs himself, amidst great laughter and excitement.

Like Surrey, Nottingham County Cricket Club can boast of its allegiance to its "one" love, for since 1840, when the first county match took place at Trent Bridge ground, in Nottingham, almost all the "home" fixtures of this famous cricketing county have been played there. There are many people who look upon Nottinghamshire as one of the original homes of the noble game,

ball was not recovered for over an hour, during which time the batsmen had run some hundred runs or so, as the fielders could not cry "Lost ball!" knowing perfectly well where it was!

The most striking object at Trent Bridge is the fine pavilion, which is only second to that of Lord's in its beauty and arrangement. The committee undertook to build one in 1871, at a cost of £1,500, which was done. But Notts cricket so progressed that in 1886 a new one was built—the one now



From a photo by]

SUSSEX COUNTY GROUND AT HOVE.

[E. Hawkins, Brighton.

and hence to them Trent Bridge is a classic spot. It has, in any case, a great reputation. From its first opening, under the auspices of Mr. W. Clarke, its wickets have been noted for their high state of "goodness." It is, as cricket grounds go, one of the larger size, covering an area of eleven acres. On one side it is bounded by the railway, and it is of this ground that the well-known story is told—whether true or not I do not venture to say—of how a batsman once hit a ball into the carriage of a passing train, which

standing—at a cost of £5,000. It is of red brick, with red tiles, and has ample balconies and vestibules, giving it altogether a most imposing appearance.

Trent Bridge cricket ground has never been famous for its large "gates." Curiously enough, the county which more than any other, except perhaps Yorkshire, has produced great cricketers from nearly every village green, and has a club in connection with every little Sunday-school, never seems to get up enough enthusiasm to rival the Oval,

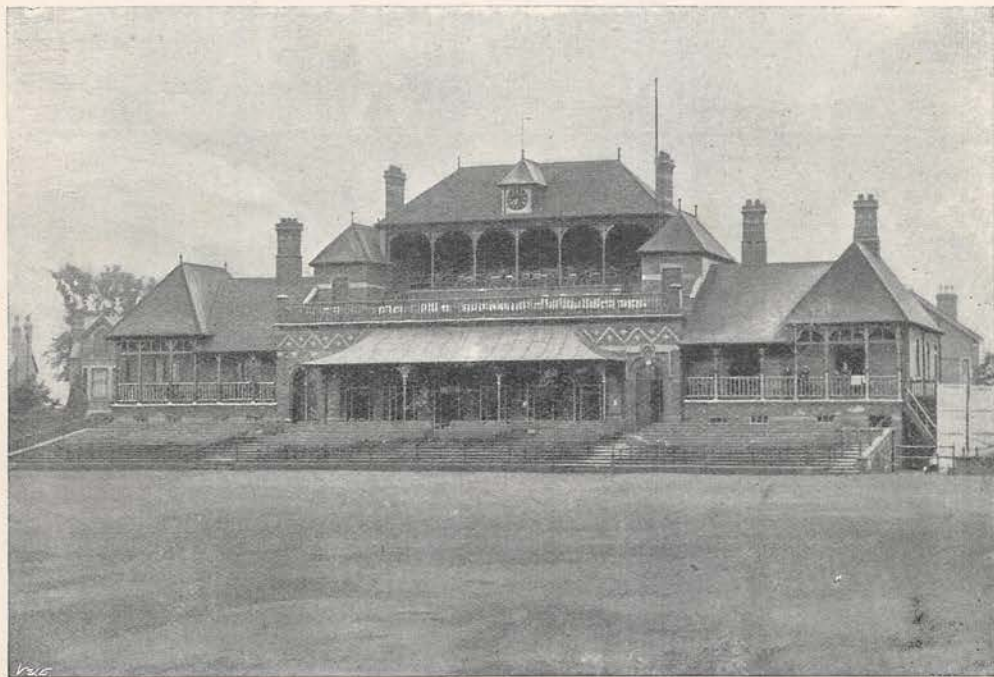
Manchester, or Bramall Lane in the matter of record gates. The Notts crowd is generally an average one of a few thousands, and, whilst strongly appreciative of the game, it takes the "ups" and "downs" of its favourites very quietly on the whole.

The "record" gate of Trent Bridge was probably at R. Daft's benefit in 1876, and that is going far back. Daft got over £500, which is, however, small compared with Peel's at Bradford, or Maurice Read's at the Oval.

Yet Trent Bridge has seen great sights and wonderful things in cricket, though I

bowled the three cracks for 1 run, and Notts won by 11!

Ten years later occurred one of Nottinghamshire's most curious finishes. It was in the match with Surrey at Trent Bridge. It is thus described: "The most violent storm ever known in Nottingham! To say it rained would be ridiculous; it came in torrents, and not only flooded the ground, but, aided by wind and lightning, tore down the refreshment (and other) tents and made them mere shreds as if they had been paper!" At the close of the third day, therefore, Notts had only three wickets down with the



NOTTS COUNTY GROUND, TRENT BRIDGE, NOTTINGHAM.

question if it holds one single "record." It was in 1844 that Alfred Mynn, Fuller Pilch, and Hillyer—good gracious, what a trio!—played for All England *v.* Southwell District, for whom George Parr played. Parr hit a ball to long leg, the ball dropped on the canvas of the tent, and was caught by a fielder as it rolled down. Barker, the umpire, on being appealed to, gave Parr "not out." What the decision would be to-day is rather an interesting question. In 1862, Hayward, Carpenter, and Tarrant, of Cambridgeshire fame, played R. Daft, Jackson, and Clark a single wicket match, here. Truly a battle of giants! Jackson

score at 180. It was in 1876 that Notts disposed of Surrey here for 26 runs. What a sensation that would cause to-day! But how much more if it was followed up by Yorkshire being dismissed—as Notts did then dismiss them—for 32!

One of the county's most anxious moments was in 1877, when Notts played Middlesex on this ground. When the last Nottingham man went in, there were still some twenty runs to get, and a few minutes to play. The batsmen managed to keep up their wickets and make a draw of it, though when time was called Notts were still 10 runs to the bad.

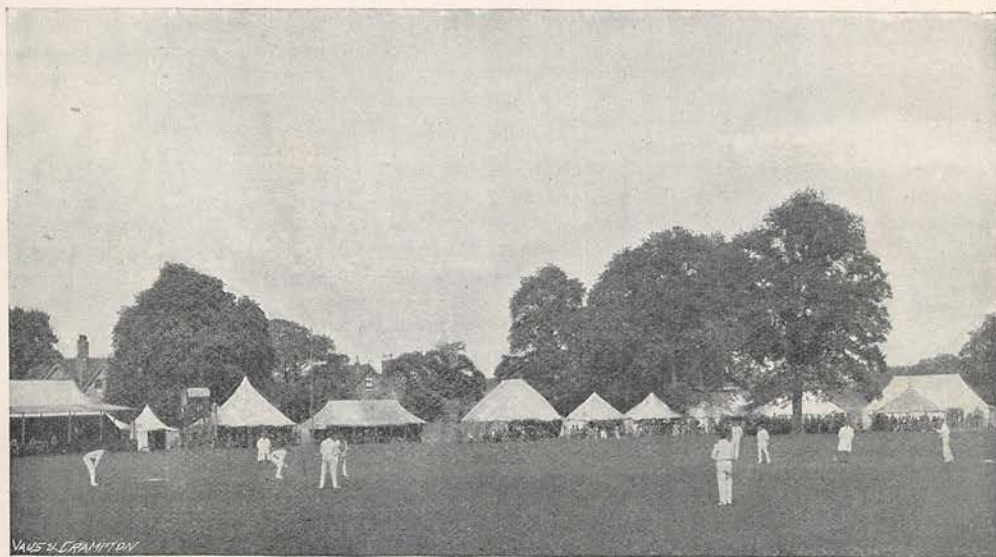
In bidding farewell to Trent Bridge we

must recall Shacklock's performance *v.* Somerset, in 1893, of taking 4 wickets with 4 balls consecutively.

No county regularly plays its engagements on so many different grounds as Kent, unless we except Yorkshire. Kent may be said to have three very good grounds and two or three inferior ones. The chief grounds are those at Maidstone, Canterbury, and Gravesend; whilst occasionally the venue of county matches has been at Beckenham, Tonbridge, and Catford. Of the three latter grounds it is not necessary to say more than that the wickets have never been very good, the balls bumping up and down in most erratic style. If a really good wicket could be prepared at Beckenham, this ground might

tea are recognised institutions during the festival, and it is safe to say that no other cricket ground in England—saving Lord's during the Universities' or Public Schools' matches—can at all rival the brilliant scene displayed by the St. Lawrence ground, at Canterbury, during this week. The ground is situated outside the town, and, as might be supposed, is exceedingly picturesque. Moreover, it is of fair size and provides good wickets. Certainly, if tents, and flags, and trees, and pretty dresses are aids to cricket, Kent should be unrivalled in its "Canterbury Week."

Of really great feats in cricket, Kentish grounds—especially when one recollects that Kent is one of our very oldest cricket centres



KENT *v.* LANCASHIRE, 1897.
ST. LAWRENCE GROUND, CANTERBURY.

probably become an important one, since it is extremely charming in its surroundings, and is not too far from London to admit of many people going down there when a good match was on.

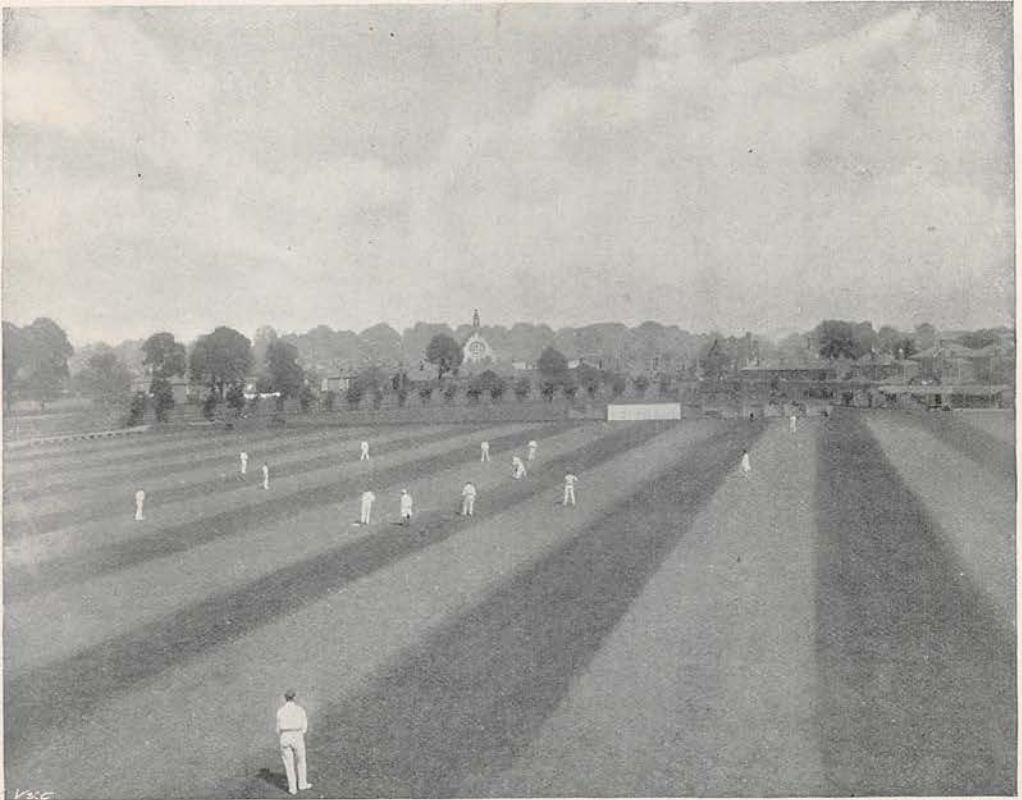
Of the three other grounds it is only necessary to speak in detail of that at Canterbury. There is little of importance to chronicle in connection with the other two; both are well situated, that of the "Bat and Ball," at Gravesend, especially so. But Kent's chief ground is at Canterbury. Here takes place the festival of the "Canterbury Week," when Kent plays its two matches, and all the county notables entertain their friends. Tents on the ground are as thick as possible. Cricket and afternoon

—boast singularly few. Two of the most notable ones at Canterbury happened long ago. In 1862, Dr. E. M. Grace took all the ten wickets in one innings for M.C.C. *v.* Gentlemen of Kent; whilst in 1876, the great champion, "W. G.," scored 344 for the M.C.C. against Kent.

Gloucestershire is another county whose "home" matches take place on many different grounds. Especially in use during the past season or two have been those at Bristol, Cheltenham, Clifton, and Gloucester. Matches are not now, and have not of late years been, played at Moreton-in-the-Marsh, though formerly several took place there. This is said to be due to the scanty attendance of the public, owing to the rural

character of the district. It seems a pity, however, that matches were wholly dropped there, since the general opinion of the wicket, both by friends and opponents, was that it was a very good one. Indeed, on the celebrated occasion when Yorkshire defeated Gloucestershire here, the rival captains, Lord Hawke and "W. G.," both specially complimented Mr. Rouse, the secretary, on the splendid wicket he had obtained. The ground is of fine extent, not less than sixteen acres. In connection with Moreton-in-the-Marsh

pavilion and grand stand. There is little, however, specially striking about the ground, which is not nearly so famous as those at Cheltenham and Clifton in the cricketing world. Both these are situated amidst lovely environment, and both provide excellent wickets. The Cheltenham ground strongly rivals Canterbury's in its fashionable "cricket week," and the aspect and "doings" are very similar, though probably there is less "tea" and entertainment, and more—if possible—fashion and dress.



From a photo by]

ESSEX COUNTY GROUND AT LEYTON.

[Clarke, Romford.

ground two noteworthy matches must be noticed. The first one is that above, often known as "Peate's match," since the noted Yorkshire bowler took 6 wickets in Gloucester's second innings for 13 runs! The "home" county presented him with the ball, mounted in silver, as a tribute to his great prowess. The other match was one in which Kent were all dismissed, on a wet wicket, for 27! Both these memorable matches were in 1884.

Many of Gloucestershire's matches now take place at Bristol. Here they have a ground of some sixteen acres, with a fine

The Clifton ground has the unique record of being the spot where twice a batsman has made over 100 runs in each innings. Need we say it was the grand old Gloucester cricketer, in 1887, *v.* Kent, and, in 1888, *v.* Yorkshire. Thus "W. G." has the record—not likely to be broken yet—of doing this feat three times so far in his career.

After half an hour's travel from Liverpool Street Station, you arrive at the cricket ground of the Essex County Club, situated in one of the best parts of Leyton. It is a pretty ground on the whole, though not

the prettiest in England, as some of its frequenters are so fond of believing. But the Essex County Club is to be congratulated on the way it has endeavoured to make its ground suitable for the game and comfortable for the spectators. Thanks to the raised seats all round the ground, a fine view of the game is everywhere obtainable, and as the playing area is not too large one can watch a match without straining the eyes, as one has to do at the Oval, or at the Leeds ground of Yorkshire. The wicket is generally in capital trim, and good scores are not uncommon on this ground.

The Essex County Club has had the ground since 1886, and it has persistently struggled, often against very great difficulties, in trying to improve both the position of the club amongst the other county clubs, and also the ground. In each case it has succeeded. The position of Essex on the Championship list of last year is a testimony to the one; the good attendance of the public at many matches here is a proof of the other. It was for a long time objected by some Essex supporters that the ground at Leyton was too far from London to ever become much patronised; but the persistency of the genial Essex secretary, Mr. Borradaile, and the groundsman, Freeman, whose motto has been, "If the public find we're worth coming to see, they'll come," has had its reward, as the three days' attendance of an aggregate of over 25,000 people to see Essex *v.* Lancashire last year amply proves.

The Leyton ground, though young as county grounds go, has had its noteworthy incidents. Here, when the Australians played some years ago, the giant Bonnor lifted a ball from the far wicket clean over the pavilion—a straight drive—and into the neighbouring road! Mr. E. C. Streatfeild on another occasion did ditto; whilst the late F. M. Lucas, a left-handed batsman, sent a ball out of the ground, over the road, over a garden, and into the red house that is so prominent a feature from the ground!

None of the "new" first-class counties has tried harder during the last few years to bring itself well up to its rivals than Warwickshire, in all that pertains to the possession of a good team and a good ground. Warwickshire's county cricket ground is situated in that suburban district of Birmingham known as Edgbaston. It is one of our largest grounds, covering an area of quite twelve acres. But it has an even greater claim to notice than this, seeing that

the wickets are almost always perfect. Authorities have long considered it probably the best "wicket" in the country, or, at any rate, one of the best three. It is no wonder, then, that scoring runs very high on the Edgbaston ground; and, if anything like fine, dry weather prevails, the side losing the toss knows when its opponents go in, but doesn't know when they are coming out! For such teams as Lancashire, Yorkshire, or Surrey to get fairly set on this ground means something, as Warwickshire have found out to their cost before to-day.

It was here that in Yorkshire *v.* Warwickshire, in 1896, the first-named team made 887 runs, this being the "record" score for any first-class match; whilst another record was made in the same encounter by four men on one side scoring over 100 each in one innings, viz., Jackson, Wainwright, Peel and Lord Hawke, whilst Hirst only fell a few runs short of this performance in the same innings.

At Edgbaston, too, Shilton, for Warwickshire *v.* Leicestershire, in 1888, accomplished the unusual feat of taking 4 wickets with 4 consecutive balls. A crowd of 15,000 can be capitally accommodated here; in fact, that is the "record" gate of the Edgbaston ground, when Warwickshire played the Australians in 1896. The pavilion has recently been enlarged, and is now one of the best arranged in the country. Besides all the usual rooms and offices, there is a capital dining-room which will seat 100; and in every way the Warwickshire committee has tried to make its ground an ideal one. To a very great extent it has succeeded.

The county ground of Somerset, at Taunton, carries the enviable reputation of being at the same time one of the prettiest of English cricket enclosures, and of having usually one of the very best wickets. It is bounded on one side by the River Tone, from which the town takes its name; and few more delightful views are available from any cricket ground than is here presented to the eye. As to its reputation for first-class wickets, it has good proof of this in the fact that on it was made the highest score ever totalled by one man in a first-class match, viz., the superb 424 of Mr. A. C. Maclaren, for Lancashire *v.* Somerset, in 1895. Lancashire's innings on this occasion totalled up to 801, which is the largest that county ever made, and though not a record, is well on the way towards Yorkshire's later total of 887.

Naturally, from the comparative smallness of Taunton, and the scattered nature of Somerset's population, there are not, and cannot be, the crowds at the Taunton ground that one sees in London or in the North of England. But the Taunton spectators wax great and enthusiastic sometimes, as when their county made a "tie" with Middlesex, in 1890, after a severe fight. Somerset was not then a "first-class" county. And later, when, in 1897, between the same counties, the last Somerset man going in with the score tremendously in arrears at twenty-five minutes to the "drawing time," managed to play out time, though bowled by a "no ball" some four minutes before the appointed hour, the scene was of that kind named "indescribable."

Yes, Somerset men are proud of Taunton ground, as well they may be, for a more

the usual appurtenances of a good cricket ground. Whilst usually well attended, it has never had the "gates" that one would expect from an old cricket county like Derbyshire. The wicket is soon affected by rain; indeed, a few sharp showers during a match often make a world of difference in the cricket. It was on this ground, in 1881, that Lancashire's great cricketer, R. G. Barlow, took six wickets for three runs, doing the "hat" trick in this performance. Probably this is a "record" in county matches.

Leicestershire County Club has a good ground, nicely situated and well arranged, at Leicester. Here again the attendance is usually small. The ground is of average size, and the wicket is fast and true, fairly high scoring being the rule rather than the exception. Owing to the very recent inclusion of Leicestershire amongst first-class



From a photo by]

WARWICKSHIRE COUNTY GROUND.

[H. J. Whillock, Birmingham.

glorious turf is not to be found on any cricket field. It is, perhaps, worth noting that the ball is often hit out of the field by the terrible "S. M. J.," Vernon Hill, and Mr. Phillips. The latter, twice in one match last season, hit the ball not only out of the field, but clean across the River Tone!

One of the most memorable scenes of Taunton ground was at last season's close, when Somerset managed to defeat Surrey for the second time that season, and robbed her of the County Championship, to Lancashire's great delight. Didn't the crowd line up! They might almost have been taught how to do it at the Oval!

There are three counties of whose cricket grounds, so far, nothing has been mentioned, but of which a few words must be said.

That of Derbyshire county, at Derby, has nothing specially significant about it beyond

counties, however, there has scarcely yet been time for the Leicester ground to take that position and fame amongst its rivals that the play of some Leicester batsmen gives promise of in the future.

Most of Hampshire's "home" matches take place on the Southampton cricket ground. Here, as a rule, scoring is good, and this is undoubtedly owing to the excellent wicket, for when a batsman can score 125 against such bowlers as Hirst, Wainwright and Peel, the wicket must be good. There is every hope that, as the county club progresses, the county ground will be further developed, until it becomes in reality one of England's "first-class" grounds. As with that at Leicester, and one or two others, its comparatively recent attainment to that class has not yet given it the chance of being enrolled in the list of those grounds where the feats of the century have been performed.