

# English Cricket Crowds During the Victorian Age

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Although sports crowds have obviously formed a vital element in the great ludic upheaval which the modern world has witnessed, social historians have generally neglected them. In an excellent monograph on Association football, however, Tony Mason recently devoted a substantial chapter to an analysis of early soccer crowds in Britain.<sup>1</sup> He was particularly interested in their size, conduct, and social structure. He clearly proved that attendance at soccer matches spiralled dramatically after 1870, and concluded that this was due chiefly to increased participation by the working classes. He also suggested that, although there were instances of rowdiness, British soccer spectators were not disorderly, on the whole, during the period 1863-1915. The purpose of this essay, inspired by the conviction that a careful study of mass audiences can provide many useful insights into a society's *mores* and character, is to examine Victorian cricket crowds in a similar fashion.<sup>2</sup>

Notwithstanding Mason's comment about the paucity of his primary sources, there is perhaps more primary material on Association football than on any other British sport in the period on which he focused. Several football clubs became incorporated and formed limited liability companies towards the end of the Victorian age. As such, they had to keep records, however sparse these documents may now appear. Contemporary cricket clubs in Britain did not generally behave in this manner. Even the county clubs tended to be hand-to-mouth operations run by small committees with accountability to very few people. They published annual reports which were often printed in the local newspapers. Otherwise, cricket club records for the nineteenth century are virtually non-existent. The historian is therefore left to depend mainly on Victorian journalists when trying to assess the size, composition, and behavior of English cricket crowds in the nineteenth century.

In pursuing such a theme, the best sources now available are the files of the leading daily newspapers and the sporting press which flourished after 1875. For the early Victorian period, *Bell's Life in London* and *The Times* are per-

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haps the most useful. For the later, the *Athletic News*, *Cricket*, the *Cricket and Football Times*, and the *Cricket Field* are by far the most informative journals. Also indispensable is *Wisden Cricketers' Almanack*, which has appeared annually since 1864 and is universally regarded as the cricketer's bible. It is easily the most important single source for any serious study of modern cricket. There is also a massive volume of secondary material on cricket which has definitely spawned more books, and better written books on the whole, than any other sport. The Victorians, who, almost to a man, viewed the game as the most noble of all manly pursuits, left a huge corpus of cricket literature and memorabilia which few social historians have yet utilized. Cricket was unique in the sense that the Victorians considered it an important national symbol. All newspapers therefore included cricket items among their sports reports. It must be added, however, that in an age dominated by the cult of athleticism, as Bruce Haley and James Mangan have convincingly shown, most sports were well covered by the Victorian press.<sup>3</sup>

Attendance at cricket matches at all levels increased steadily during Victoria's reign. County games, which had generally attracted around two or three thousand spectators in the 1840s, drew about 4,000 on average in the 1860s. With the advent of Dr. W.G. Grace, perhaps the most dynamic sports hero in British history, these numbers generally doubled in the 1870s. By the 1880s, five digits on a daily basis were not uncommon—especially in the more popular contests, like Lancashire vs Yorkshire, and Nottinghamshire vs Surrey. By the end of the century, between fifteen and twenty thousand spectators often went to such matches. On special occasions, particularly the August Bank holiday, crowds in the 1890s sometimes exceeded 20,000. The Victorian record attendance for county cricket was set in 1892 when 63,763 people paid for admission over three days to watch the Nottinghamshire vs Surrey game at the Kennington Oval.<sup>4</sup> The total number of persons who actually saw this cricket match, including members, guests, journalists, and others, must surely have been close to 100,000.

This trend was in keeping with other aspects of Victorian life. The gradual reduction of the working hours for middle and working class Victorians, and the steady increase of their *per capita* income, allowed them to take a much keener interest in mass leisure than perhaps any previous society. Increasingly large numbers of people assembled to watch brass band concerts, classical music festivals, athletic competitions, and soccer matches.<sup>5</sup> It was really in soccer attendance that the crowd increase was most clearly marked. For whereas cricket had generally outdrawn soccer until the 1880s, the reverse gradually became true thereafter.

The urge to attend a sporting event in very large numbers was not a Victorian peculiarity. Thousands of Britons in previous generations had congregated even to witness public hangings at Tyburn. There is evidence also of an un-

usually large gathering for the famous cricket match at the Artillery Ground, Finsbury, on 11 July 1743. About 10,000 persons were estimated in attendance to watch the Three of Kent do battle with the Three of England on that occasion. A similar number were reported present for the England vs Surrey cricket game at Brighton in July 1827. The estimate of the crowd when the All England XI played against the Twenty of Sheffield at Hyde Park in 1846 was even placed as high as 16,000.<sup>6</sup> Considering what we know now about the difficulties of travel prior to the railway boom, and the condition of cricket grounds before 1850, it is safe to assume that these estimates were somewhat exaggerated. They do testify, however, to the increasing popularity of cricket in England.

For a long time, reporters covering cricket for *Bell's Life in London* or *The Times* made little comment about the crowd. When they did so, it was invariably to focus attention on the unique or the extraordinary. Thus, when *The Times* spoke of the aggregate total of 11,000 watching the charity game at Lord's on two days in late May 1863, it was marvelling at the unusual size of the attendance. The same is true of its report, a few weeks later, that as many as 6,000 watched the annual Oxford vs Cambridge university classic on 22 June at Lord's.<sup>7</sup> Smaller crowds than usual also attracted comment. Hence *The Times* could blame inclement weather for the fact that only an estimated 4,000 people watched the university game on 13 June 1864.<sup>8</sup> It also expressed surprise at the attendance of 2,000 spectators on 4 June 1863, despite competition with Ascot, when Surrey met Yorkshire at the Oval.<sup>9</sup>

It is from this kind of evidence that judgments must now be made about the average size of cricket crowds in the 1860s. The estimates for the popular cricket matches during this decade were consistently placed between four and six thousand by *Bell's Life in London* and *The Times*. It would seem therefore safe to conclude that the general average was slightly lower. It cannot, however, have been *substantially* lower than 4,000 for county cricket at that time, since even a frivolous game between two handicapped sides in 1865 attracted an estimated 3,000 spectators.<sup>10</sup> On that occasion, in late August, the One-Arm team went down to defeat at the hands of the One-Leggers at the Oval. Happily, however, estimates soon became totally unnecessary with the introduction of turnstiles early in the 1870s. Cricket grounds began to publish official statistics on the precise number of customers who paid for admission. What these statistics quite clearly indicate is that attendance to cricket matches in England kept on rising very steadily, in fact, until World War I.

It is very difficult, in analyzing this socio-cultural phenomenon, to disentangle cause from effect. It can be said, for instance, that the transportation revolution emancipated the local cricket enthusiasts from their provincial chains by making it so much easier for them to travel to the great cricketing headquarters to watch the game in increasingly substantial numbers. But that in

itself would have availed them naught had the great headquarters of the game not also been transformed. The cricket crowds could not have mushroomed as they did if the Georgian grounds had not been expanded and new facilities introduced. Lord's, for example, for a very long time continued to allocate spaces for horses and carriages, thus imposing a severe limitation on the number of spectators. To cope with the increasing demand for spectator space, the Marylebone Cricket Club committee embarked on an ambitious program of expansion, rebuilding, and renovation which occupied the last four decades of the nineteenth century. The old pavilion was greatly enlarged in the 1860s; the old tavern was replaced with a much improved building; a new grand stand was built from scratch; a third pavilion was opened in 1890; and the Mount Stand was erected in 1898.<sup>11</sup> The Lord's of Edward VII's reign was a far cry from the Lord's which his father, Prince Albert, had known.

It is almost amusing now to read the public announcement which R.A. Fitzgerald, the M.C.C. secretary, felt obliged to make in 1864:

In consequence of the inconvenience experienced by the players in the School matches of the last two years, from the crowded state of Lord's ground, the Committee of the M.C.C. have determined to place all the arrangements of the ground under the control of the metropolitan police. . . . These regulations necessarily entail heavy expenses upon the club, the prices of admission will, therefore, be as follows on each day:— Persons on foot, 1/-; on horseback, 2/6; carriages, two wheels, 5/-; carriages, four wheels, 10/-.<sup>12</sup>

There had been too much confusion in 1862 and 1863 when more than 7,000 spectators had been admitted to the annual Eton vs Harrow game. The old Lord's ground simply could not cope comfortably with so many. By 1900, however, it could accommodate almost 30,000.

Similar expansion and renovation occurred at Kennington Oval, where the Surrey county cricket club played its home games. By the 1890s it could easily hold in excess of 25,000. Old Trafford, the headquarters of the Lancashire county cricket club, was already accommodating more than 15,000 by the end of the 1870s. Equally spacious at that time was Trent Bridge in Nottinghamshire. By the turn of the century, Lord Hawke, one of the most famous names in the history of Yorkshire cricket, was able to claim that there were three modernized cricket grounds in his county capable of holding twenty to thirty thousand spectators.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, in the populous north and the prosperous southeast, county committees deliberately tried to meet the new demand by extending their grounds and building modern pavilions. The other counties tried just as hard, but were conspicuously less successful. Essex, for instance, eventually moved from Brentwood to Leyton, but the latter ground was still not as spacious even as the Grace Road Ground in Leicestershire which, by the 1890s was easily accommodating 11,000. Gloucestershire, Hampshire, Kent, and Sussex all

continued to play on relatively small fields. There thus remained a considerable disparity between the counties which was naturally reflected in the attendance statistics and gate receipts. At all events, however, every county succeeded in building new pavilions, erecting scoreboards, and providing facilities for the customers and the press. By the end of the Victorian era, the first class counties, then sixteen in number, were playing cricket before crowds varying approximately from 8,000 to 24,000 per day.<sup>14</sup>

Crowd attendance in those days depended upon exactly the same variables that are operative now: the weather, the size of the ground, the current form of the home team, and the nature of the contest. The summer of 1879, for example, was miserably wet, and most clubs had cause therefore to lament a pronounced decline in their revenues.<sup>15</sup> The Nottinghamshire team was generally very popular during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, but a temporary slump on the field during the mid-1890s was reflected in their receipts. *Wisden* expressed the view that their stonewalling tactics and stodgy batting contributed also to their temporary eclipse.<sup>16</sup> There was a noticeable decline in Kentish crowds, too, when that county was achieving only moderate success on the cricket field in the early nineties.<sup>17</sup> There were always certain types of games which proved far more popular than the normal county match. Of these, the chief were the annual university and public school contests at Lord's, games involving the immortal W.G., those in which the Australians played, and the great festivals which were organized towards the end of each season.

Dr. W.G. Grace was, for a period of forty years, the most magnetic sports personality in Britain. Revered as a legend in his own time, he was lionized all across the kingdom.<sup>18</sup> Some county clubs capitalized on his magnetism by doubling the price of admissions for matches in which he participated.<sup>19</sup> Most professionals deliberately did the same by choosing the county game against his team, Gloucestershire, as their personal benefit match. To his everlasting credit, the Doctor seldom disappointed them. Several professionals like John Lillywhite, Joseph Rowbotham, H.H. Stephenson, and George Wootton, enjoyed enormously productive benefits because of W.G.'s participation.<sup>20</sup> When, in July 1885, Alec Watson's benefit yielded in excess of £1,200, *Wisden* sagely noted that "Dr. W.G. Grace's presence gave the fixture an importance and attraction unfortunately lacking in the North vs South contest for Richard Humphrey's benefit a fortnight previously at the Oval."<sup>21</sup> On this occasion, the Doctor's magic drew some 30,000 fans through the turnstiles during the three days' play. In July 1873, W.G. attracted an aggregate of 23,000 to Bramall Lane, in Sheffield. The crowd of 12,000 on the 28th was then a record for that ground.<sup>22</sup> Four years later, he again drew well over 22,000 to the same sward, according to the estimate given by *Bell's Life*.<sup>23</sup> When the Champion made his first appearance at Old Trafford in late July 1878, between fifteen and twenty thousand people, according to the *Athletic News*,

flocked thither on the Saturday. There was not enough space for all the customers, some of whom encroached upon the field of play and considerably reduced the distances from the boundary. The Manchester Cricket Club had not anticipated such a throng and consequently failed to control the crowd. But its gate receipts easily exceeded £750.<sup>24</sup>

The Australians were always a source of considerable curiosity. They consistently attracted greater crowds than the normal county clubs. Their frequent visits after 1878 thus served not only as stimulus to the game but as a boon to the various county committees. Even lowly Leicestershire was able to boast of a new attendance record of 12,000 when the Australians invaded the Grace Road Ground in July 1878. This record was destined to remain intact for sixty years before the Australians broke it again in Bradman's time.<sup>25</sup> Some 20,000 are reported to have watched the Aussies play against England at the Oval on the first Monday in September 1880.<sup>26</sup> Preparations for this game, in the words of the *Cricket and Football Times*, were "totally inadequate to meet the requirements of the unprecedented attendance of spectators of both sexes and of all ages."<sup>27</sup> The *Athletic News* considered that, at a modest estimate, close to 40,000 individuals must have paid for admission over three days to see the Australians vs Lancashire at Old Trafford in June 1884.<sup>28</sup> In 1886, on a dull and overcast Friday morning in mid-May, over 13,000 went out to see the tourists play against Lord Sheffield's XI at Sheffield Park in Sussex.<sup>29</sup> In the second Test match at Lord's in July 1886, there were over 33,000 paying customers, of whom 15,663 passed through the turnstiles on the 20th alone.<sup>30</sup> During the three days of the Lord's Test in July 1890, 30,279 spectators paid for admission. That number would doubtless have been much higher had the attendance not fallen rather noticeably on the third day, when the result was no longer in doubt and the match ended early in England's favor.<sup>31</sup>

All of these statistics are better than the average county cricket attendance and attest eloquently to the popularity of W.G. and the Australians. It is easy to understand why the Victorians flocked in such large numbers to watch Dr. Grace play cricket. He, quite simply, played the game more proficiently and more flamboyantly than anybody else. He was a charismatic sports idol in the same class as Muhammad Ali, Bobby Orr, the Brazilian Pelé, and Gary Sobers of a later generation. Nor is it hard to see why the Victorians showed such a keen interest in the Australian cricketers. The latter, after all, played the game extremely well. Their bowling, as a rule, was tighter than the English variety, and their fielding was always spectacular. They also provided the extra dimension of international competition, which certainly explains why, even in Scotland, they attracted as many as 7,000 to the small park at Titwood when they competed against the Eighteen of Clydesdale in September 1880.<sup>32</sup>

It is much more difficult to account for the Victorian approach to the Oxford-

Cambridge and Eton-Harrow matches. It is true that these rivalries were firmly established in the Georgian period, but neither the standard of play nor general interest was originally very high. Even as late as 1848, *Bell's Life in London* devoted no more than a few lines to the university cricket match at Lord's.<sup>33</sup> By the 1860s, however, the situation had changed dramatically, thanks largely to the ascendancy of the cult of athleticism which was so vigorously promoted by the muscular Christians then in charge of England's religious and academic institutions. Muscular Christianity triumphed to such an extent that organized sports gradually became a compulsory and essential feature of the curriculum in all public schools.<sup>34</sup> The notion that sports encouraged the development of sterling spiritual qualities led to a remarkable cricketing craze in late Victorian academic institutions. The successful cricketer thus became the hero of Eton and Cambridge, while the frail scholar was despised. These attitudes helped substantially to create the climate of opinion in which Eton-Harrow and Oxford-Cambridge matches could assume almost transcendental significance.

By the 1870s the annual classics between the academic institutions had already superceded in popularity and importance the old Gentlemen vs Players and the North vs South confrontations. Even the contemporary *Athletic News* was much puzzled by such a phenomenon. Its temptation was to attribute it solely to that plague of idiosyncracies by which Londoners were congenitally afflicted. Here was a bustling metropolis with millions of inhabitants of whom only a measly dozen or two could bother with the Ten Miles Amateur Championship in athletics. Yet, thousands of them were eager to get down to Lord's to watch juveniles play cricket, and not very well at that.<sup>35</sup> The editor of the *Athletic News*, who had long been promoting track and field, was also revealing his acute disappointment with the failure of the athletic championships in London in 1886.

In fact, the great clashes between the academic institutions at Lord's had, by the 1860s already become more than cricket events. They were significant social occasions, in addition to fashion shows, which the wealthiest Victorian families were expected to attend. The great highlight of each summer was the Eton vs Harrow cricket match which attracted royalty as well as the nobility. The Prince and Princess of Wales often appeared and were, in 1876, for instance, accompanied by the King of Greece and some 1,200 carriages "conveying the *élite* of English society."<sup>36</sup> This annual encounter had apparently appealed to the proletariat as well, but the M.C.C. thought it necessary to impose restrictions on them. In 1864, it brought in the metropolitan police. Ten years later, it raised the price of admission beyond the means even of the lower middle class. The masses were blamed for the unruly behavior of 1863 and 1873 and were therefore deliberately excluded.<sup>37</sup>

In the first seventeen games after the introduction of turnstiles at Lord's, the

Oxford-Cambridge match attracted 377,449 paying spectators during 1871-87. Between 1871 and 1886, about 244,000 people paid for admission to sixteen Eton-Harrow games.<sup>38</sup> As these statistics do not include the thousands of M.C.C. members, relatives, and guests, they are even more impressive than they seem on the surface. Such was the popularity of the Eton-Harrow game that over 40,000 persons altogether went to witness it in July 1873. A record number—27,082—paid for admission that year. The crowd was obviously too large and it soon became unruly. The result was the celebrated M.C.C. resolution in 1874:

That it is desirable to make arrangements for diminishing the numbers of persons at the Eton and Harrow match, on July 10 and 11, and that, with that view, the price of admission on that occasion for each person on foot be raised from 1s. to 2s. 6d.

This declaration only led to an increase in the applications for carriage spaces, and the secretary had to announce a week before the game that all the carriage spaces had been disposed of.<sup>39</sup>

Fitzgerald expressed satisfaction with the results of the resolution. He told the editor of *Bell's Life in London* that the "increased tariff admission fulfilled the expectations of the Committee; it not only tended to check the attendance of several thousands, but it was especially conducive to the good order that prevailed."<sup>40</sup> For the Eton-Harrow match of 1874, 15,364 persons paid for admission, whereas more than 27,000 had done so in each of the previous two years. In 1871, almost 25,000 had also gone through those turnstiles.<sup>41</sup> *Wisden*, however, felt that the M.C.C. measures had been unavailing in 1874 and that "for aught it would have affected the wonderful attraction of the match, the admission charge might as well have been raised to half a guinea as to half a crown."<sup>42</sup> The annual Eton-Harrow game, in fact, remained a very popular fixture throughout the century. In 1898, for example, it was still producing a net profit of £1442 at a time when most of the county games were being played at a net loss.<sup>43</sup>

The university and the public school contests attracted a large number of alumni and their relatives, mainly because of the Victorian sentimental attachment to the *alma mater*. An ex-Harrowian's loyalty to Harrow was as important to him as such basic virtues as parental affection and filial piety. The crowds were not always cricket enthusiasts and they were attending the game for the electrifying atmosphere rather than the cricket itself. The truth of this was emphasized in a scathing editorial which appeared in *Cricket* in the early 1880s. "It is not altogether a pleasant reflection," the editor of that journal wrote, "but a large proportion of the thousands, more especially of that part which occupies the front seats of the drags or carriages so closely investing quite one-half of the ground, do not go to Lord's to see the cricket."<sup>44</sup> He also rightly observed that the Eton-Harrow game had become a glorified fashion show. It attracted thousands of ladies who knew nothing about the game.

There was a distinctively festive and carnival quality about these classics that rendered them far removed from the more serious business of county cricket. This may very well have sprung from the simple fact that the participants were all young gentlemen-amateurs whose livelihood did not depend upon their performance on the field. This is not to say that the competition was not keen. These rivalries, after all, stretched too far back into the past to have been otherwise. But the matches were essentially of the same genre as the great festivals which had sprung up in the later Victorian period. They were, in effect, London's answer to the Canterbury, Hastings, and Scarborough cricket festivals which flourished at that time.

The oldest of these festivals was the Canterbury Week which began in 1842 and attracted huge, gay, and light-hearted crowds very often in defiance even of dull weather. By the 1870s, daily attendance in excess of 10,000 had become a regular feature.<sup>45</sup> The great Hastings Festival, inaugurated in 1887, traditionally became the last cricket carnival each season in the south. It was a financial success from the start, yielding a net profit, in 1889 for instance, of £170.<sup>46</sup> The Cheltenham Festival was first staged in 1878. It survived despite the limitations imposed upon attendance by the physical dimensions of the ground. It was one of the most successful of the smaller cricket festivals. By far the most celebrated of these affairs was the great Scarborough Festival, established in 1876. It represented the grand finale each year to the cricket season in the north. It consistently attracted all the more colorful players and has remained a great financial triumph. It began with gate receipts slightly in excess of £150 and very soon doubled its intake. It actually yielded a profit of £365 in 1885, and £475 in 1889.<sup>47</sup>

While statistics, however reliable, are available for the attendance at first class cricket, it is much more difficult to judge the size of crowds at the lower levels. There is enough evidence to suggest that a steady increase in attendance occurred at least until World War I; that the majority of the spectators were working class people; and that some of the clubs in the northern leagues were successful enough to have improved their pavilions and other facilities after the manner of their soccer counterparts.<sup>48</sup> As the *Athletic News* so often pointed out, cricket was not a financially viable proposition in the Victorian age. Most clubs had to play soccer in the winter to avoid financial embarrassment.<sup>49</sup> But a few cricket clubs, like Burnley and Nelson in the Lancashire professional league were reported to be playing before audiences of approximately 6,000 in the early 1890s.<sup>50</sup> Enfield also occasionally drew a similar number towards the end of the century.<sup>51</sup> In fact, S.M. Crosfield, the captain of the Lancashire county cricket team, was able to wax very enthusiastic about the popularity of the game within his county in 1892. "It is not at all an uncommon thing," he remarked, "to find 5,000 or 6,000 spectators at a purely local match, and even at quite small villages there are often as many as a thousand."<sup>52</sup> As early as the 1870s, Haslingden and Bacup were reporting

in excess of 2,000 fans in regular attendance.<sup>53</sup> A similar number also frequently attended purely local cricket matches in a small South Yorkshire village like Wombwell, whose total population at the end of the century was still only approximately 17,000.<sup>54</sup>

Although by the time of Queen Victoria's death cricket attendance had grown far beyond the levels of 1870, the game was by no means as healthy as a superficial reading of the scanty statistics might indicate. As a spectator sport in Britain, cricket had no real rival when the F. A. Cup Final was first held in 1872. To that game, indeed, no more than 2,000 spectators went.<sup>55</sup> The full significance of this statistic can best be appreciated when placed alongside the report of a local cricket match at Dorking in 1870 when, "despite cold, showery weather . . . over 3,000 attended."<sup>56</sup> But in relation to other spectator sports, cricket steadily lost ground in the last three decades of the nineteenth century. This trend was very clearly perceived by the editor of the *Athletic News* as early as 1885. Much impressed by the enterprise and initiative of the soccer organizations in Lancashire and Yorkshire, he foresaw the eclipse of cricket by soccer as the more he observed "of football crowds this winter, the stronger becomes my conviction that the game has not yet reached the height of its greatest prosperity."<sup>57</sup> His prediction was based on the fact that the northern soccer clubs were directing their efforts increasingly towards working class support and they were obviously succeeding. In the long run, as Eric Midwinter has rightly pointed out, the post-Victorians would struggle to sustain seventeen first class county cricket clubs while almost a hundred soccer clubs would be in effective operation. Already, by the end of the nineteenth century, there were at least ten professionals in soccer for every one in cricket.<sup>58</sup> To illustrate vividly the manner in which soccer had by this time superseded cricket as a sports attraction in Britain, it is necessary to mention only one telling statistical item: the F.A. Cup Final record attendance in 1901 was almost 112,000.<sup>59</sup> That, incredibly, was more than five times the normal size of good Test match crowds at the turn of the century, even if, as Richard Binns recalled, a crowd "variously estimated at between 35,000 and 40,000 persons" turned up at Leeds in June 1902 for the opening day of the match between the Australians and Yorkshire.<sup>60</sup>

Nor did the threat come only from soccer. In April 1880, approximately 15,000 spectators were in attendance at the Northumberland Cricket Ground to watch a 100-mile cycling race, which was eventually won by the long-distance champion, G.W. Waller, in a record time of six hours, 22 minutes, 27 seconds.<sup>61</sup> This crowd would then have been considered an excellent one even for a Test match. Ominously, "fully ten thousand" people were also reported in attendance at the Widnes Athletic Sports in late June 1880, just two days before about 5,000 went in good weather to watch the M.C.C. vs Cambridge University cricket match at Lord's.<sup>62</sup> In 1895, a critical commentator in the *Realm* was left to regret that cricket was then being followed only

by old men who had played it in their youth, while the younger generation were more interested in cycling, golf, and soccer.<sup>63</sup> Even the mystique of the venerable Grace failed to make Crystal Palace a lucrative cricket centre in the Edwardian age.<sup>64</sup> Cricket's inability to compete with soccer as a money-making enterprise can be explained in a variety of ways. It can be argued, for instance, that, unlike soccer in the winter months, cricket had to contend in the summer with emerging rivals like field hockey, golf, polo, rowing, swimming, and track and field. There is also some validity in the claim that, with so many cricket clubs operating at so many levels all at once, cricket remained *par excellence* the great popular national pastime by attracting thousands of active participants rather than passive spectators.

The relative failure of cricket as a sporting spectacle was variously explained by individual Victorians. H.T. Hewett, for instance, the captain of the Somersetshire county cricket team, much regretted that Taunton was so unfortunately placed. It was not as attractive as some of the cricket centres further west, and still it was too far from London for its own good. He was prepared, in short, to blame geography for the failure of his county as a cricket region during the 1890s.<sup>65</sup> In the same decade, the editor of the *Cricket Field* offered an even more intriguing explanation for the eclipse of Kent as a cricketing centre. He argued that the common people in that county were not as devoted to sports as their counterparts in the north, and even the Saturday half-holiday had not yet become a tradition there.<sup>66</sup> Arthur Wilson, a former secretary of the Derbyshire County Cricket Club, stated his conviction, in 1894, that the game had languished in his region during the past ten years for basically economic reasons. "Trade," he explained, "has been very bad in Derby, and men cannot spare the time that is required to see cricket properly, whereas a football match only takes them away from work about a couple of hours." Wilson was thus left to lament that the "County football club often takes more in one match than the Cricket Club during a whole season."<sup>67</sup>

These three commentators had thus emerged with different explanations for cricket's general *malaise* in three separate districts. But the problem lay much deeper than any of them perceived. The fundamental cause of cricket's relative decline as a sport spectacle in the Victorian age was the deliberate refusal of its administrators to modernize it. Cricket, in essence, stifled itself by remaining too true to its pre-industrial origins. Throughout the long Victorian period, the M.C.C. sanctioned only minor repairs to the rules governing the follow-on, the declaration, and l.b.w.<sup>68</sup> These minimal changes did not alter the structure of the game in any way. It is true that the Victorians produced a more scientific brand of cricket than the type they inherited from the Georgians; but, in the final analysis, their refinements revolved mainly around the legislation of over-arm bowling in 1864.<sup>69</sup> In the same way, the new industrial technology was allowed to bypass Georgian cricket almost completely. The basic implements of the game—bat, ball, stumps—remained incredibly simi-

lar to their eighteenth century models. A more sophisticated seam in the ball and a cane-handle in the bat represented the totality of technological interference with the cricketer's fundamental tools. This, of course, was strikingly different from the experience of other sports.<sup>70</sup>

It is interesting, in this connection, to reflect that cycling, golf, basketball, football, ice hockey, rugby, soccer, and tennis were completely revolutionized, if not indeed created from scratch, by new manufacturing techniques in the rubber and metal industries during the Victorian age. New forms of synthetic and vulcanized rubber practically begat the majority of modern ball games. The invention of novel balls, irons, and woods also made a mockery of ancient forms of golf.<sup>71</sup> To the Victorians, it simply was not cricket to introduce a vulcanized rubber ball which might have travelled much faster and farther than the traditional implement made of cork, leather, and twine.

By refusing to tamper with the traditional rules and tools of the game, the Victorians preserved Georgian cricket in a more or less mummified form. It thus became a somewhat quaint and rustic anomaly in a highly urbanized age. It remained too much a leisurely and protracted affair geared to meet the needs of pre-industrial gentlemen-farmers. This reactionary approach on the part of cricket's administrators was accompanied by an almost dogged refusal of the leading county cricket club committees to sell the game to the rising urban proletariat as aggressively and as effectively as the first division soccer clubs so obviously did. Some of the cricket clubs in the northern professional leagues tried to solve the problem by making the game more attractive. They attempted to bring to cricket some of the explosive excitement which was soccer's major appeal. A league game, like a soccer match, was expected to be completed within a single Saturday afternoon. This placed a much higher premium on attacking strategies than a first class match which was scheduled to last three days. But even the most successful of these competitors in league cricket could not come anywhere close to matching their counterparts in soccer.

It is tempting to attribute this partly to differences in ticket prices. In fact, however, it was generally more expensive to watch a good soccer match than a league cricket game. As Mason has shown, it cost between 3d and 6d to watch Association football during the 1870s and 1880s. No one could hope to see a good league game in the 1890s for less than 6d.<sup>72</sup> In cricket, meanwhile, the normal charge throughout the period remained between 2d and 4d for league matches. Even for the final in the Bolton and District Cup competition in 1889, the price of admission was no more than 3d.<sup>73</sup> Thus the charge of 3d and 6d by the Haslingden club in the 1860s was somewhat higher than the norm. Ladies, however, were admitted free.<sup>74</sup> Throughout the century, the price of admission to the majority of county cricket grounds remained surprisingly fixed, like the laws of cricket in general, at 6d—even at Lord's. This

standard fee was doubled on special occasions, like a Test match against Australia or a visit by W.G. Surrey's charge of 1s was therefore unusual, although a similar fee obtained for most of the great cricket festivals. The M.C.C. also charged 1s for admission to the university game, and (after 1873) 2s 6d to see the Eton-Harrow annual classic.<sup>75</sup> Towards the end of the century, the various county committees catered to the Victorian obsession with order and degree by segregating the classes. The modern cricket headquarters included members' pavilions, balconies, grand stands, and open areas—each denoting, through price and usage, a certain social status.<sup>76</sup> Whether this kind of snobbery discouraged working class attendance at county cricket is, of course, very difficult to determine. It certainly did not seem to have done so in soccer, where similar conditions prevailed. It is also arguable, of course, that such an arrangement increased attendance since classes tend to feel more comfortable in a segregated setting.

Crowd composition is much easier to judge. The Victorian reporters were so conscious of class-distinctions that they seldom referred to the attendance without also commenting on its social structure. It is therefore well known that the great festivals were monopolized by the cream of the society. The *Sportsman*, for example, reported in August 1865 that a very successful Canterbury Week had drawn "full and fashionable audiences."<sup>77</sup> The *Kent Herald*, in describing briefly the aristocratic throng which assembled for the Canterbury Week in 1876, also thought it necessary to add that "the effect of the charming costumes of the ladies made altogether a brilliant scene."<sup>78</sup> Similar comments were invariably made about the university and public school games at Lord's. A typical example of this kind of reporting was provided by the *Cricketers' and Sporting News*, when it remarked that the Eton-Harrow match in 1867 "was attended on both days by that great assemblage of the aristocracy that has for years made this match unique amongst the displays on this famous ground."<sup>79</sup>

Contemporary journals also leave the impression that the northern counties enjoyed stronger working class support than their counterparts in the south. That the standard admission fee of 6d per day was not beyond the workers' means in Yorkshire is made clear by at least one serious complaint about the effect of important cricket engagements at Bramall Lane on the absenteeism of local workmen from their jobs.<sup>80</sup> In the south, the county cricket crowds would seem to have been largely middle and upper class. So many wealthy families belonged to the M.C.C., Middlesex C.C.C., and Surrey C.C.C. that the membership alone could often have accounted for a sizeable gathering.

Victorian cricket crowds behaved very well indeed. They were certainly less rowdy than contemporary gatherings at other sports. The newspapers found it necessary to comment on the behavior of the cricket audience only when the local officials had failed to anticipate the numbers which eventually turned up,

or when the crowd felt that some unjust or unsportsmanlike act had been committed by the players. Negative observations on crowd behavior came mainly when more customers were admitted than the cricket ground could comfortably accommodate.

This was the case, for instance, on 17 June 1878, when too many people were admitted into Prince's Cricket Ground to watch the Australians. There was a resultant raid on the reserved seats which "created great and general dissatisfaction."<sup>81</sup> Similarly, the spectators proved unmanageable rather than rowdy at Old Trafford in July 1878 because, as the *Athletic News* pointed out, the Manchester Cricket Club had not prepared adequately for the throng of almost 20,000 who went to see the great W.G. *Wisden* noted that the attendance on that occasion was "enormously large," and that "at times the people so inconveniently encroached on the fielding ground as to stop the play."<sup>82</sup> The same was the case with the overflow crowd at the Oval on the August Bank holiday in 1887 when 24,450 paid for admission to see Nottinghamshire vs Surrey. The security forces were too few and the boundaries were inevitably encroached upon.<sup>83</sup>

On a few rare occasions, the Victorian cricket crowd drew attention to its conduct by heckling the players. This happened only when the spectators were upset by what they regarded as improper cricket. Hence the general uproar on that day when E.M. Grace, the Champion's brother, dislodged a tenacious Henry Jupp with a high underhand full toss which sailed over the batsman's head and fell on the bails. The situation grew somewhat tense, as W.G. later recalled, because, in the spectators' view, E.M.'s tactic had all too literally been an underhand and ignoble one.<sup>84</sup> During the Scarborough Festival in 1895, one of the captains, H.T. Hewett, was blamed by the crowd for what it felt had been an unduly long delay for rain. So vigorously was he heckled that he withdrew peremptorily from the game and took no further part in it.<sup>85</sup> During the university match at Lord's in 1896, the Cambridge XI "came in for a very hostile demonstration at the hands of the public," because their captain, Frank Mitchell, had instructed one of his bowlers to give up twelve byes and thus reduce their lead to 117. This tactic was intended to prevent Oxford from batting again immediately and was really rendered necessary by the inflexibility of the old law governing the follow-on. As it was, the M.C.C. shortly revised the law, but the spectators apparently felt that Mitchell's strategy was not in keeping with the spirit of the game.<sup>86</sup>

These, however, were isolated and irregular occurrences. There were far fewer complaints by the press and the public about the conduct of cricket spectators than there were about soccer crowds. The newspapers also complained much more frequently about rowdiness on the race track.<sup>87</sup> Wray Vamplew, in an interesting article on sports crowd disorder in Britain, suggested that large cricket audiences in the Victorian age were composed mainly

of upper and middle class persons. He also concluded that they were better behaved than their soccer counterparts because, on the whole, there was much less drinking and gambling at cricket games. Most of the cricket spectators remained seated and there was therefore less body-contact among them than among those who normally watched soccer. All of these factors, in Vamplew's judgement, conspired to make soccer crowds more disorderly. Soccer rowdiness, in his view, also sprang from the nature of the game itself. It was much more explosive than cricket, which proceeded at too leisurely a pace to evoke emotional responses from the audience. Vamplew's conclusions are eminently sound. It is difficult, however, to accept his implied suggestion that cricket spectators were less frustrated, and therefore less prone to violence, because they represented as a rule the more socially respectable classes.<sup>88</sup> The Victorians who watched the game at the club and village level were less well-to-do than those who frequented Lord's and the Oval, but there is still no evidence to show that they were any harder to control. If the *Bacup Times* once found it necessary to regret the "deplorable ill spirit and ungovernable excitement on the part of the spectators" during the Bacup-Haslingden matches of the 1870s it must not be forgotten that, in the same decade, the M.C.C. committee had to appeal publicly to the alumni to set a better example in the pavilion during the Eton-Harrow game to prevent the recurrence of lawless conduct at Lord's.<sup>89</sup>

It is impossible not to detect that the Victorians treated cricket, cricketers, and cricket crowds with much greater respect than other sports, sportsmen, and spectators. This is perhaps the offspring of their snobbery, as they supposed that cricket simply attracted the better sort of people. This prejudice is reflected, for example, in the contemporary opinion of the crowd disorder at the Oval in August 1887. It was simply assumed that those who threw bottles onto the field were a holiday crowd rather than a cricket one.<sup>90</sup> When the Australians attracted 25,414 customers through the turnstiles at Lord's on 22 June 1896, the crowd overflowed the boundary and obstructed the view of other spectators. Their behavior was therefore less becoming than was usual at Lord's. But *Wisden* reacted sympathetically. It regretted that the ground was too small and concluded that "under the circumstances it would hardly be fair to criticize the conduct of those present," even if "there was certainly an absence of the quiet and decorum usually characteristic of the Lord's ground."<sup>91</sup>

This kind of report is very instructive. It not only helps to explain why cricket steadily ceased to be the major sports attraction in Victorian Britain, but it also leads to a better understanding of the difference between cricket and soccer crowds. Urban workers in an industrialized society do not generally go to a sports event for "quiet and decorum." Subconsciously or otherwise, they seek, through sports, an escape from the tedium of industrial labor. The sports event provides them with an opportunity to give vent to their emotions and to

identify in an overt fashion with the local team or group. The stodgy atmosphere surrounding county cricket for so long must have served as a deterrent to a significant number of them. The soccer tradition was refreshingly different from the very beginning. No reporter has ever had occasion to refer to the quiet and decorum characteristic of Wembley Stadium.

## Notes

1. T. Mason, *Association Football and English Society 1863-1915* (Sussex, 1980), pp. 138-74.
2. This article has been made possible by a grant from the Research Board of the University of Manitoba. It has also profited from the valuable suggestions of my colleagues, Professors Peter Bailey, John Finlay, and Morris Mott.
3. B.E. Haley, *The Healthy Body and Victorian Culture* (Harvard, 1978); J. A. Mangan, *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School* (Cambridge, 1981).
4. *Wisden 1893*, p. liiii.
5. E. Midwinter, *W.G. Grace: His Life and Times* (London, 1981), p. 58. J. Walvin, *Leisure and Society, 1830-1950* (London 1978), p. 98.
6. M. Golesworthy, *The Encyclopaedia of Cricket* (Sportsmans Book Club, 1964), p. 23.
7. *The Times*, 26 May 1863, p. 14; 27 May 1863, p. 12; and 23 June 1863, p. 14.
8. *Ibid.*, 14 June 1864, p. 7.
9. *Ibid.*, 5 June 1863, p. 9.
10. *The Sportsman*, 2 September 1865, p. 2.
11. Golesworthy, *Encyclopaedia of Cricket*, pp. 138-9. Sir P.F. Warner, *Lord's 1787-1945* (London, 1946), p. 90.
12. *The Times*, 25 June 1864, p. 14.
13. *Cricket*, 12 May 1898, p. 114.
14. Best on grounds are J. Marshall, *Lord's* (Sportsmans Book Club, 1970); *Headingley* (Newton Abbot, 1972); and *Old Trafford* (Newton Abbot, 1973). I.A.R. Peebles, *The Watney Book of Test Match Grounds*, (London, 1967). E.W. Swanton. ed., *The World of Cricket* (London, 1966), pp. 233-51.
15. *Wisden 1880*, *passim*.
16. *Wisden 1895*, pp. 116-7.
17. *The Cricket Field*, 30 July 1892, p. 232.
18. W.F. Mandle. "W.G. Grace as a Victorian Hero," *Historical Studies* 19 (April, 1981), 353-68.
19. G.D. Martineau, *They Made Cricket* (Sportsmans Book Club, 1957), p. 143.
20. W.G. Grace, *Cricketing Reminiscences and Personal Recollections* (London, 1899), pp. 114-7, 132-3.
21. *Wisden 1886*, p. 174.
22. *Wisden 1874*, pp. 143-4.
23. *Wisden 1878*, p. 170.
24. *The Athletic News*, 31 July 1878, p. 4. Marshall, *Old Trafford*, p. 22-3.
25. B. Chapman, "Following Leicestershire," *Wisden 1964*, pp. 152-3. B. Green, ed., *Wisden Anthology 1864-1900* (London, 1979), p. 664.
26. *The Cricket and Football Times*, 9 September 1880, p. 242.
27. *Ibid.*
28. *The Athletic News*, 11 June 1884, p. 4.
29. *Wisden 1887*, p. 6.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
31. *Wisden 1891*, p. 172.

32. S. Courtney, *As Centuries Blend: One Hundred and Six Years of Clydesdale Cricket Club* (Glasgow, 1954), p. 35.
33. H.S. Altham and E.W. Swanton, *A History of Cricket* (London, 1948), p. 124.
34. N.G. Annan, *Roxburgh of Stowe* (London, 1965), p. 13. R. Bowen, *Cricket: A History of its Growth and Development Throughout the World* (London, 1970), p. 82. L. Cust, *A History of Eton College* (London, 1899), p. 244. Mangan, *Athleticism*, pp. 68-96. P.C. McIntosh, *Physical Education in England since 1800* (London, 1952), pp. 26-40. W.S. Patterson, *Sixty Years of Uppingham Cricket* (London, 1909), pp. 48-69.
35. *The Athletic News*, 13 July 1886, p. 1.
36. *Wisden 1877*, p. 72.
37. *The Times*, 25 June 1864, p. 14. *Wisden 1874*, p. 43; and *1875*, pp. 53-4.
38. *Wisden 1887*, p. 98; and *1888*, p. 235.
39. *Wisden 1875*, pp. 53-4.
40. *Bell's Life in London*, 25 July 1874.
41. *Wisden 1875*, p. 58.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
43. *Cricket*, 4 May 1899, p. 106.
44. *Ibid.*, 20 July 1882, p. 164.
45. e.g., *Wisden 1875*, p. 71; and *1879*, p. 66.
46. *Wisden 1890*, p. 28.
47. *The Athletic News*, 27 September 1882, p. 1. *The Cricket Field*, 15 September 1894, p. 467. Sir H.G.D. Leveson Gower, *Off and On the Field* (London, 1953), p. 221.
48. These impressions result from a study of such works, e.g., as J.A. Adamson, *Denstone Cricket 1874-1952* (London, 1954); H. and F. Bagshaw, *Great Oakley Cricket: The History of a Village Club* (London, 1969); D.H. Benson, *Harborne Cricket Club 1868-1968* (Birmingham, 1969); D. Bradfield, *A Century of Village Cricket* (London, 1964), *A History of the Box Cricket Club* (London, 1970), and *The Lansdown Story* (London, 1971); S. Canynge Caple, *Thornbury Cricket Club 1871-1971* (London, 1972); K.J. Cole, *Two Hundred Years of Dorking Cricket* (London, 1969); A. Day and D. Cox, *The History of the Hornsey Cricket Club 1870-1970* (London, 1970); B. Devereux, *A Century of Cricket: Nottingham Forest Cricket Club* (London, 1976); G.L. Eames, *Bromley Cricket Club 1820-1970* (London, 1970); G. Harbottle, *A Century of Cricket in South Northumberland* (London, 1969); F. Higgins, *Findon Cricket Club 1867-1967* (London, 1967); F.R. Monro, *The History of Hampstead Cricket Club* (London, 1949); A.L. Parsons, *Durham City Cricket Club History* (London, 1972); G. Quinn, *Cricket in the Meadow* (London, 1956); J.H. Rees, *Gowerton Cricket Club 1880-1980* (London, 1980); D. Roberts, *Midland Bank Cricket Club: A Centenary History* (London, 1970); A.W. Thomas, *Cardiff Cricket Club 1867-1967* (Cardiff, 1967); B.J. Wakley, *The History of Wimbledon Cricket Club 1854-1953* (London, 1954).
49. e.g., *The Athletic News*, 20 April 1886, p. 1; and 11 October 1887, p. 1.
50. *Ibid.*, 6 June 1892, p. 1.
51. *The Sports Telegraph*, 4 June 1898; and 23 July 1898.
52. *The Cricket Field*, 20 August 1892, p. 292.
53. C. Aspin, *Gone Cricket Mad: The Haslingden Club in the Victorian Era* (Manchester, 1976), pp. 28, 30, 32.
54. A. Woodhouse *et al.*, *Cricketers of Wombwell* (Bradford, 1965), pp. 1-2.
55. G. Green, *The Official History of the F.A. Cup* (Sportsmans Book Club, 1960), p. 20.
56. Cole, *Dorking Cricket*, p. 34.
57. *The Athletic News*, 20 January 1885, p. 1.
58. Midwinter, *Grace: His Life and Times*, pp. 58-9.
59. P.M. Young, *A History of British Football* (Sportsmans Book Club, 1969), p. 142.
60. R. Binns, *Cricket in Firelight* (Sportsmans Book Club, 1955), p. 9.
61. *The Athletic World*, 16 April 1880, p. 234.
62. *Ibid.*, 25 June 1880, pp. 388, 392.
63. *The Cricket Field*, 22 June 1895, p. 211.
64. Midwinter, *Grace: His Life and Times*, pp. 136-44.

65. The *Cricket Field*, 27 August 1892, p. 313.
66. *Ibid.*, 31 March 1894, p. 34.
67. *Ibid.*, 28 July 1894, p. 325.
68. The follow-on involves the right of the side batting first to compel its opponents to play two consecutive innings if they fail in their own first attempt to make an adequate reply. The declaration is the act of voluntarily closing an innings before all the batsmen have been dismissed. Leg before wicket (l.b.w.) is a method of dismissal which prevents a batsman from defending his wicket with any device except his bat.
69. Altham and Swanton, *A History of Cricket*, pp. 131-2. C. Brookes, *English Cricket: The Game and its Players Through the Ages* (Newton Abbot, 1978), pp. 93-6.
70. H. Barty-King, *Quilt Winders and Pod Shavers: The History of Cricket Bat and Ball Manufacture* (London, 1979), pp. 19-127.
71. J.R. Betts, "The Technological Revolution and the Rise of Sport, 1850-1900," in J.W. Loy and G.S. Kenyon, eds., *Sport, Culture, and Society* (Toronto, 1969), pp. 145-66.
72. Mason, *Association Football*, p. 150.
73. The *Athletic News*, 19 August 1889, p. 1.
74. Aspin, *Gone Cricket Mad*, p. 15.
75. The *Athletic News*, 14 August 1878, p. 4; and 8 July 1889, p. 1. *Cricket*, 20 September 1900, p. 428. The *Cricket Field*, 9 July 1892, p. 171. *Wisden 1877*, pp. 17, 81.
76. Midwinter, *Grace: His Life and Times*, p. 117.
77. The *Sportsman*, 19 August 1865, p. 2.
78. Cited in *Wisden 1877*, p. 84.
79. The *Cricketers' and Sporting News*, 16 July 1867, p. 2.
80. The *Cricket Field*, 31 August 1895, p. 449.
81. *Wisden 1879*, p. 104.
82. *Ibid.*, p. 180. The *Athletic News*, 31 July 1878, p. 4; and 14 August 1878, p. 4.
83. G. Ross, *The Surrey Story* (London, 1957), pp. 46-7.
84. Grace, *Reminiscences and Recollections*, p. 29.
85. The *Cricket Field*, 14 September 1895, p. 482. *Wisden 1896*, p. 67.
86. *Wisden 1897*, p. 282.
87. e.g., The *Athletic News*, 2 June 1885, p. 1; 9 June 1885, p. 1; and 5 January 1886, p. 4. *The Sporting Mirror*, 25 July 1892, p. 6. *The Times*, 3 May 1871, p. 12.
88. W. Vamplew, "Sports Crowd Disorder in Britain, 1870-19 14: Causes and Controls," *Journal of Sport History*, 7 (Spring, 1980), 5-20.
89. Aspin, *Gone Cricket Mad*, p. 30. *Wisden 1875*, p. 25.
90. Ross, *Surrey Story*, p. 47.
91. *Wisden 1897*, p. 230.

