

Stage

Founded: 1931



by Brian Jackson

Phone most club match managers or skippers on the day of a match or even the evening before a fixture, to say you've got a last minute voice-over job or an audition and 'can't make it' and you might never play for that club again. This probably would be the case should you be a member of the average cricket club with its own ground and particularly so if your withdrawal from the relevant match happened be a vital league game. Not so with Stage Cricket Club.

Can you imagine a vital fixture where the outcome could make your club top dog of the league and your side is batting second and one of your best bowlers, who can't bat for toffee, asks to 'go in early' because he has a show to do that evening? This happens with us and there you have it, the essence of why Stage Cricket Club exists.

Stage CC print two Shakespeare quotes on its fixture card. One, inherited through at least fifty years, is from Act One of *Coriolanus*: "What works, my countrymen, in hand? Where go you with bats and club?" The second quote, from Act One of *Love's Labour's Lost*, was decided on because of the ever-increasing tendency, surprisingly so for friendly matches, for some batsmen not to 'walk' even after a snick is heard in the pavilion: "... and, as I am a gentleman, betook myself to walk."

The chairman's pre-season homily to members always repeats two reminders: the first that we are, in the main, guests and must always behave as such, even though the opposition's umpire may be obviously as blind as a bat; the second, if a ball has been tickled, 'Stage walk' despite the umpire being as deaf as a post and as blind as a bat in adjudicating a 'not out.'

Stage CC was born the same year as me, in 1931, and, like the troubadours of old, its players were destined ever to wander the village greens of England. Our club was created out of necessity by a collection of actors who had a simple love of the game and, with actor-like modesty about their skills, displayed some ability with bat or ball, sometimes both; they simply got together and sought out like-minded opposition, particularly host clubs, which provided 'a good tea'. Another necessary governing factor for founding member cricketing actors was, and still is, that in the world of theatre, Saturdays are usually occupied with two performances, a matinée and evening show, so our fixtures have to be played on Sundays and midweek.

In the early days, Stage CC's weekday fixtures were rarely played on Wednesdays, again because Wednesday was the favoured day for West End theatre matinée performances. The midweek fixture was usually a day match starting at 11 with the important proviso of a decent lunch as well as requisite good tea, was available at tolerable cost, and that stumps would be drawn in good time to travel from wherever the green sward happened to be, to theatre-land for an evening show.



Stage CC, 1931 or 1932

Second left, standing, is Atholl Fleming, who later founded Stage and Radio Cricket Club in Sydney. He is said to have been 'a useful bat, a good slip fielder and a Machiavellian captain'.

Third from the left is Nigel Porter, fifth is Rex Harrison, sixth is Aubrey Dexter.

Seventh, next to the umpire, is Boris Karloff.

Seated are (first) Evan Thomas, (second) Abraham Sofaer, (third) Garry Marsh, (sixth) Errol Flynn and (seventh) W Earle Grey, the prime motivator in the forming of Stage CC.

The club would love to hear from anybody who can identify any of the others.

Even today, the physical theatre stage is referred to as The Green, a reference back to when wandering players performed Miracle Plays on village greens. In most theatres there is a communal back stage area specifically designated for actors in which to relax and take refreshments, which is always known as The Green Room.

We have had opportunities to acquire our own ground, but this has never been seriously entertained by different committees, the reasons being manifold: you may persuade an actor to open and even run the bar but to get him to prepare a wicket which hasn't been mown or to paint a popping crease, or discover the assigned actor has taken the pavilion keys with him to South Africa at short notice to film a television commercial, were factors in declining such heavy responsibility.

When people first hear the words 'Stage Cricket Club' they visualise its players being stars of stage, screen, theatre and television. We see this expectancy whenever we are invited to play a new fixture and, on arrival at the ground, find a good turn-out of the opposition's families and supporters who are expecting to set eyes on at least someone from *Corrie* or *Strictly*, but mostly they are disappointed and the star struck are not seen again the following season, providing, always, the venue is renewed.

We have always maintained a club rule that Stage CC cricket should be played as cheaply as possible; the rule is important because the very nature of the acting profession creates a high percentage ratio of actors who may be ‘resting’, something which is perhaps particularly true of our members, the majority of whom are jobbing actors and not highly paid ‘stars’.

Over the years, many notable actors have appeared in Stage CC sides, many of them so-called stars; one of our players won *Celebrity Mastermind* recently and his specialist subject was, naturally, cricket. But in the main we are cricketers for the working day and our prowess is good enough to renew fixtures year after year with top clubs in the Home Counties and Greater London area, culminating with a match at Lord’s, a fixture which I know has been held since the late 1940s when Stage CC thrashed Cross Arrows. (The following year the Arrows took revenge by playing a ‘ringer’ by the name of FJ Titmus. I have the scorebooks.)

In recent times members of Stage CC have literally ‘sung for their supper’. It happened in the season 2000 when an event known as Oxford 2000 – the International Millennium Cricket Festival for Wandering Clubs – took place on the many splendid grounds gracing the City of Oxford. It was like this: we received an invitation to take part in this cricketing jamboree but then discovered that the fees to participate in this princely shindig were high, too high for us poor players to strut our stuff midst Oxford’s spires; what to do? We offer to put on a show? Yes! The deal was done; we paid only a modest fee in return for an in-house Stage CC Revue – it was *A Load of Old Bails* and very successful it was too. The performance was a resounding success, which provoked invitations to present the show for other clubs together with invites for fixtures, one of them a semi-sponsored swatch of matches at the home ground of Gentlemen of Philadelphia, USA.

Stage CC has two tours each season; currently we have a four-day tour in Kent starting off with a popular fixture against Provender and a happy Gallic long weekend knock-about in Entrecasteaux in France. Both tours seem set to continue.

“Time!”

Website: stagecc.co.uk



Cartoon by Bill Tidy