



A Century at Blackheath

This book is dedicated to all those men and women who have worked unselfishly in the interest of cricket at Blackheath during the last hundred years. Blackheath Cricket Club would like to thank the many people who have contributed the information and photographs presented in this account.

Details of the early years of the Cricket Club are scanty and much of our information has been gathered over the years in conversation with old members, many of whom are unfortunately no longer with us. Our records are complete only since 1949 and whilst it may be assumed that batting figures are substantially correct it is certain that many fine bowling performances took place in the earlier period that were not recorded. Every effort has been made to ensure that the details given are correct, but in a publication such as this it is inevitable that errors and omissions will occur. For any of these we apologise.

Blackheath Cricket Club offer sincere thanks to Supasports Ltd. and Stuart Surrige Ltd. for their generous gifts of cricket bats in support of the Centenary Season; we would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the valuable help and advice we have received over the years from the Surrey County Playing Fields Association and the Lords' Taverners.

**Introduction by
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President of
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The purpose of this booklet is to tell the story of the Blackheath (Surrey) Cricket Club up to the present time, and before it is forgotten, but it also records much of the early history of Blackheath and Blackheath Village.

We are reminded that though cricket was being played by the boys of the free school of Guildford when Elizabeth I came to the throne, Blackheath was then and remained for some three hundred years, a wilderness. When the Cricket Club was founded in or about the year 1878 the Village was still very small and remote and travel difficult and it must have required great enthusiasm to raise a team.

We appreciate, however, that the story of the Blackheath Cricket Club is not complete and we hope that someone who sees this booklet may have unrecorded information, especially relating to the early years and will have the kindness to make it available to the Club.

To those who have worked hard to produce what the reader will find within, our best thanks are due. It has plainly been no light labour, but we believe a labour of love, and the reward we all hope they will reap is that their work will be of interest to the present members of the Club, as well as to many inhabitants of Blackheath and to future generations.

One wonders what sparked the enthusiasm of a few Blackheath inhabitants, gathered in the tap-room of the old Forest King, an Ale House at the edge of the common land, to decide to level a strip of heather and start playing cricket. Was it just youthful enthusiasm helped along by cheap beer or was it the fact that the first Australian touring team had just beaten M.C.C. at Lord's in a single day on 27th May 1878? Whatever it was, it cannot have been the weather. An article on cricket, written in that year had this to say: *'The clerk of the weather has much to account for, inasmuch as from early May until late September the pall of gray rain clouds hanging low over our islands lifted but for one spell of real old-fashioned summer weather.'*

Origins of a community at Blackheath

Blackheath was referred to in the Doomsday Book as the Blachedfeld Hundred and is, in its oldest and widest sense, the name of an ancient Hundred, or division of a Shire, bounded on the north by Woking, on the west by Godalming, on the east by Wotton and on the south by the County of Sussex. It is also the name of a large area of heathland bordered by Wonersh, St. Martha's and Albury Heath. In its most narrow and local sense it is the name of a hamlet or village which grew up in the nineteenth century in what was then part of the parish of Wonersh and which is the subject of this book. The common at Blackheath is now within the authority of two local councils, Waverley District Council and Guildford Borough Council. Waverley District Council administers 258 acres and this is included in a regulation scheme made under the Commons Act 1899. A small piece of land owned by the National Trust is adjacent to the northern boundary.

The area is rich in its historical associations and relics. Stone age flints are still to be found on the heath and many examples of Roman weapons and pottery have been discovered there, no doubt originating from the nearby Roman site on Farley Heath, said to be one of the most clearly defined stations of a Roman encampment. The chapel of St. Martha, visible from the cricket ground, was close to one of the principal pilgrim ways and, in medieval times, became one of the best known points on the route to Canterbury. In the nineteenth century the chapel was wrecked by an explosion at the gunpowder mills in Chilworth but was completely restored in 1848. The Franciscan Friary, built on Chilworth Hill in the medieval style of the old Dominican Priory in Norwich, was dedicated in 1892, building having commenced two years earlier. It was in the garden of this Friary that Ketelby wrote 'In a Monastery Garden' when visiting one of the Fathers there.

The Angelus bell at the Friary can regularly be heard on the cricket ground at 6 p.m.

The earliest settlers of Blackheath moved there in 1833. Before that the area was referred to as 'A large waste of heathland' and was inhabited only by itinerant sheep stealers, known as 'heathers' or 'heathens' whose reputation was so bad that, if a sheep stolen from a farm was traced in their direction, pursuit was given up because the owners knew that the animal was unlikely to be recovered. Eventually the sheep stealers were rounded up and sent to Botany Bay. The first inhabitants, twelve in number, filched their holdings from the common by squatters' rights and built themselves mud huts, subsequently described by Mr. F.H. Elsley, for nearly sixty years lay reader, Sunday school teacher and constant visitor to Blackheath, as 'thatched and tumbledown cottages'. The occupiers eventually must have obtained their copyhold rights from Lord Grantley as Lord of the Manor. By 1867 the number of dwellings had increased to 26 and in 1873 there were 39 cottages as well as two public houses.

The Volunteer Review brings brief fame

It was on Easter Monday 1864 that the Volunteer Review was held which was to make Blackheath known beyond Surrey, however briefly, for the first and only time until 1976 when its cricket team reached the closing stages of a national competition. Political unrest had been growing on the continent where the French and the Prussians had powerful well-trained armies. Military efficiency was detested in England and the size and strength of the army had been seriously run down since the fiasco of the Crimean War. Eventually, however, it was decided that the militia would have to be strengthened and a camp for Volunteers was set up on Blackheath.

The Review attracted much notice at the time. There were pictures in the Graphic and in the Illustrated London News. Even Punch had a cartoon showing a Volunteer returning home all tattered and torn. The operation was on a considerable scale with a grandstand on Rosemary Hill and an area set aside for public refreshment booths. Spectators were supposed to watch from a line near Littleford Lane while the attacking troops advanced from the direction of Albury and the defenders formed up just to the east of what is now the cricket ground. Contemporary prints show a smartly turned-out and disciplined force deployed in the straight lines and squares successful at Waterloo nearly half a century earlier. Unfortunately the proceedings got somewhat out of hand. The Rev. W. Earle was shot by a portion of ramrod and died. There were a number of other accidents, mostly caused by the public encroaching between the two sides.

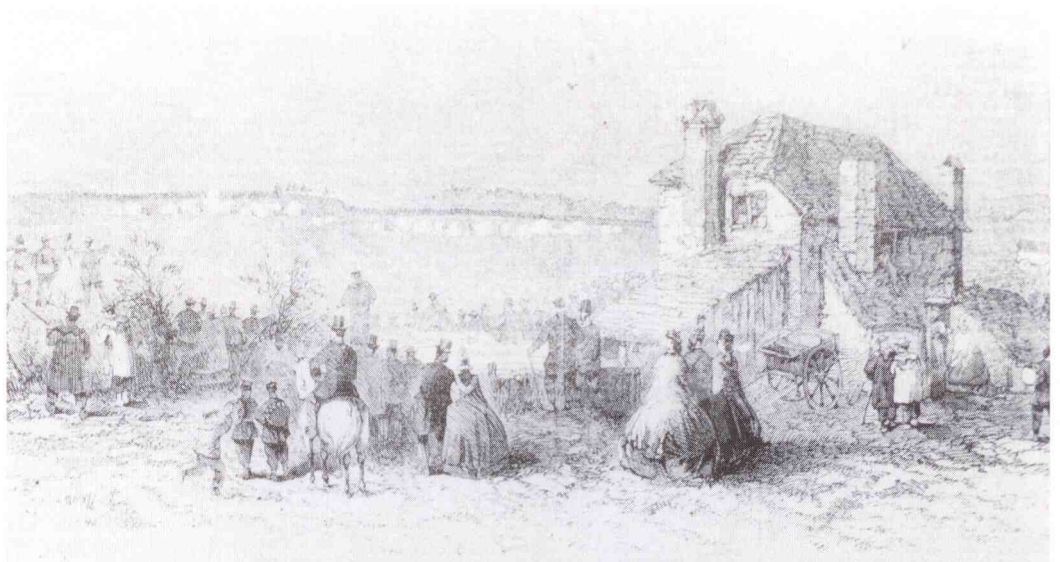
THE VOLUNTEER REVIEW

An illustration published in the London 'Illustrated Times' on April 19th 1864. It was printed by woodcut from an original water colour.

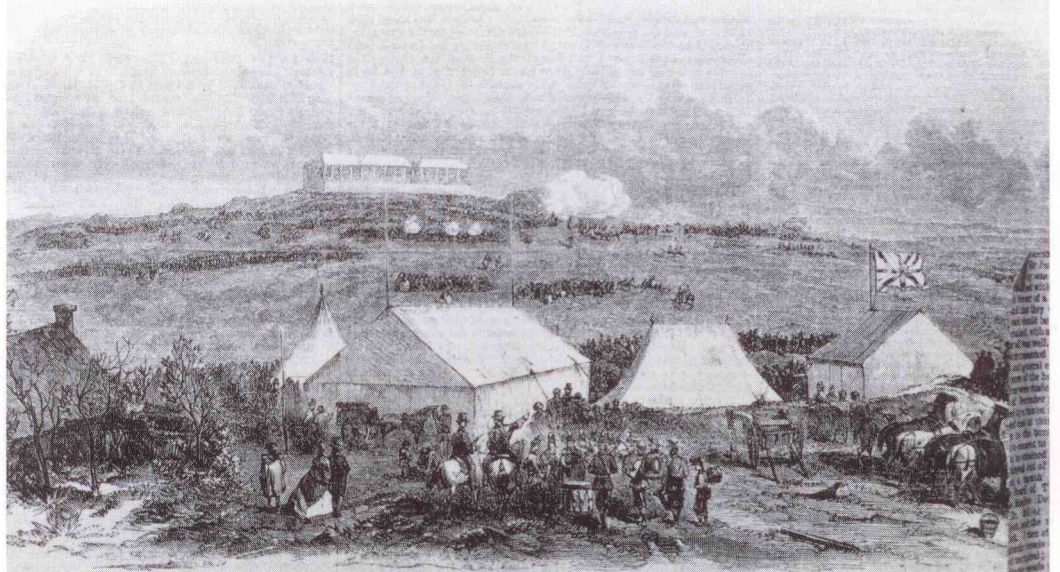
'Position of enemy as seen from the valley in front of the grandstand'.

The grandstand was on Rosemary Hill near the present War Memorial. The cottage is 'Top Cottage', later occupied by James Atfield.

'View showing the grandstand: the contending forces firing their last rounds'.



POSITION OF THE ENEMY AS SEEN FROM THE VALLEY IN FRONT OF THE GRAND STAND.



VIEW SHOWING THE GRAND STAND: THE CONTENDING FORCES FIRING THEIR LAST ROUNDS.

ILLUSTRATED TIMES APRIL 9, 1864



The ceremony 'Crowning of King Coffee' by patrons of the old 'Forest King' at Blackheath early 1900's.

The ale house and cricket – an enduring partnership

The Volunteer Arms (since renamed The Villagers) dates from this period and the original Forest King (not the present building) was built in 1867. It was here in the tap-room that the Blackheath Cricket Club had its beginnings. The Forest King, which was to become the headquarters of the Cricket Club, was an ale house with low ceilings, a sanded floor and a cobblestone yard in front with posts to tie up the horses. It was lit by paraffin lamps as there was no electricity, gas, water or main drains in those early days. At one time the beer was delivered weekly by a Foden steam wagon all the way from Ashby's Brewery at Staines in Middlesex. The sing-songs and occasional free fights which took place at chucking-out time on a Saturday night are still remembered. There was one local cricketer who went home minus his ear, bitten off by one of the supporters in a free-for-all at closing time. It was said that he never felt the inconvenience of this until later in life when he had nowhere to hang his spectacles.

Local industries at the turn of the century

The largest employer in the area towards the end of the nineteenth century was the Chilworth Gunpowder Company. Gunpowder had been manufactured at Chilworth for over three hundred years when the industry was revived with the formation of the Company in 1885. Many of the early cricket matches at Blackheath were played against the Gunpowder Works team who had their own ground at a site adjoining the Dorking Road in Chilworth. Men from Blackheath were also often to be found playing for the Gunpowder Works team.

William Cobbett described the Tillingbourne Valley at Chilworth as '*One of the choicest retreats of men*', but he raged against the manufacture of gunpowder and banknotes in such a beautiful place. Houses for the workmen were provided by the Gunpowder Company up the hill at Blackheath where street lighting was also installed. Perhaps those lucky enough to live there were glad to get away from the constant danger of explosions. In the early nineteenth century an enormous

