

SPORTS AND PASTIMES

In the directories published in Victorian times it was stated that from time immemorial the villagers in Middleton had played a game called “tut-ball” on Shrove Tuesday but no description of the activity was given although it is known that medieval football was extremely violent. The “Oxford Companion to British History” states “in the form inherited by the early Victorians football was usually a calendar custom, often associated with Shrove Tuesday or Easter played between neighbouring villages or parts of towns, with no restrictions on number of players, few on duration of game and custom rather than codified rules dictating what was permissible”. It goes on to say that “rules and constraints were imposed through the playing of football of various kinds at the public schools”.

We do not know exactly when Middleton and other villages developed the more disciplined form of the game although the East Riding Football Association was founded in 1902.

Moving on to the more sedate game of cricket the first report of a match in Middleton is in 1856 when Middleton played Etton in the grounds of the rectory (The Hall). We do not know the result but the Middleton team consisted of Cass, Foster, Rev E.J. Hitchings, W Crosby, Ford, Park, Rev J Blanchard, Letherington, Norman, Vary and Crowe.

The following report which appeared in the Beverley Guardian on 6th July 1867 was however more conclusive:

“Cricket Match – a match was played on Tuesday on the ground of Captain Brooksbank between two elevens. The former gained an easy victory with ten wickets to fall. The score was as follows: Middleton first innings 36, second 12 (with losing a wicket), Wetwang first innings 17, second 27”.

Captain Brooksbank (later Colonel) encouraged sport in the village and made facilities available on his own land. Similarly when the Reading Room was provided by him at the end of the century, facilities were made for that other village passion, billiards. As with many of life’s activities the Victorian period was one of great change in cricket and it was in 1864 that after vehement controversies over-arm bowling was introduced.

At the end of the century Middleton’s cricket team was riding high as the following entry in the Parish magazine of August 1899 would confirm:

“The Middleton Cricket Club have opened the season extremely well. Out of ten matches played so far they have won 6, drawn 3 and only lost one. It is hoped they will keep up this record”.

The more brutal aspects of village activities received a setback just before the Victorian period when bear baiting was forbidden by law in 1833 and bull baiting in 1835 although how effectively the laws were enforced before an adequate police force was established is difficult to say. That there was still an interest in the “manly and exhilarating pastimes of old

England” is shown by a long report in that august metropolitan journal “The Illustrated London News” which appeared on the 4th July 1857 under the title “Old English Sports and Games in Londesborough Park” near enough for people from Middleton to have attended. The lengthy article, a copy of which is attached, is a fascinating piece of mid Victorian reportage. The Lord Londesborough referred to however was not as might have been expected, an outgoing, hearty type of chap but rather a withdrawn individual who late in life felt menaced even by the presence of servants and only lived for another three years after the events described.

Directories for the first half of the 20th century list the secretaries of the various sports clubs starting in 1905 with Harry Norman for Middleton Cricket and Football Clubs. In 1913 the Revd. E. J. Wilson MA, a former football player himself, was secretary of the cricket club. By 1921 the position was held by Henry Norman and in 1929 by William Eastwood. In that year W. Sterriker was secretary of the Football Club whilst Miss A. Dunn fulfilled a similar role with regard to tennis. The last of the directories published in 1937 still lists Miss Dunn for tennis whilst football has H. Baxter and cricket Percy Dove.

Following the second world war and as a memorial to the men and women who served in that conflict a committee was set up to raise money to provide a playing field and in 1950 the football and cricket pitches were ready for play.

A press report from the Yorkshire Times for 25th July 1953 stated:

“Sports activity – Well established and flourishing Middleton’s mixed tennis club have a membership in the region of 50 or 60. This season they have joined Drifffield Tennis League for the first time. Dr. P. Clements is the president with Mr and Mrs C. D. Wray as secretary and treasurer.

The football club steadily keep abreast of the competition which modern transport offers against village sport, and last year they had a successful season in Drifffield and District League, finishing at the top of the Division II (West) table and putting up a fine, though losing, fight against Filey (East champions) in the play-off for the divisional championship.

Cricket, too, has long had a hold on the village’s sporting element, but at present there is no Middleton team functioning – a state of affairs which it is hoped will speedily be put right in this happy and lively main-road village of the Wolds.”

In 1976 residents raised £15000 with the aid of grants for a new purpose-built pavilion and clubhouse for the recreation field. The club itself was run by a committee made up of representatives from the football, cricket and tennis sections and at that time the secretary and treasurer was John Ulyott.

With the coming of the playing field there was an attempt to start a bowls club, initially on the land where the tennis courts are now located and finally in its present position.

Jack Bentley however recalls another attempt to establish one in the grounds of the old rectory (Parklands) which failed after complaints from a visiting team that it did not come up to competition standard.