

The 2013 Season

Our hopes for the 2013 season were better weather and better results, so not too much to ask really was it? We actually ended up, in general, getting both, which made for better cricket and a far more enjoyable season in 2013 than in 2012. Several matches were close and hard fought, with slim margins of victory both for and against, while a few matches ended with one side, more often than not, us, dominating and winning by wide margins.

The season started with the traditional fixture with the Wasing XI in early May, and continued with a traditional cancellation (at Bradfield) due to the weather. When the season proper got under way, we achieved an excellent 5-wicket win over Bucklebury, thanks to Mark Whitelock's unbeaten 99, in a match which could so easily have gone the other way given the position when he walked to the wicket.

Things didn't go so well in our next match at home to Ashford Hill, as a familiar pattern of us letting the opposition off the hook (they were 32 for 4 and then 60 for 5 with just 15 overs left before ending on 140 for 8) and then collapsing from a steady start -our scorecard, and our total of 71 all out did not make good reading.

Probably the less said about our first game against Woodcote in over 25 years, the better. On the plus side we did set the home side a target of 100 after plummeting to 4 for 3 in the 7th over, and we did take a flurry of late wickets to reduce the margin of defeat to 5 wickets, leaving us wondering what might have been if we'd managed to get another 20 or 30 runs.

We returned to form the week after at Mortimer, with Ed Pettit-Mills and Ben Hardy making the home side's decision to put us in a poor one, adding 109 in just 94 balls for the first wicket. Ed went on to make 119, his first century for us, and there was a further partnership of 97 between Ed and Garry Masters (51 not out). Some late big hitting from Mark Whitelock enabled us to reach 263 for 4 in 42 overs. It took a while for us to break through in the Mortimer reply, but once we did we managed to take regular wickets at important times, and 8 overs into the last 20 Mortimer were 100 for 8 and looking down the barrel. The last two wickets were proving elusive until Miller was run out, trying to take an unwise third run, and with 26 balls to go we needed one wicket. A short while later we claimed the final wicket and walked off deserved winners, with Mark Whitelock claiming 3 wickets and Mark Woodley and Ed Pettit-Mills 2 each.

The following week we headed to one of the most picturesque venues we play at, Englefield, a venue where I had somehow managed to not go to in 21 years. The weather was warm, muggy and damp, and the match was delayed by half an hour, before we were again put into bat and embarked on a 40 overs per side match. Ed carried on more or less where he left off at Mortimer, and there were useful contributions from Mark Whitelock (29) and Mark Woodley (20), but somehow a score of 171 all out (off the last ball of our 40 overs) didn't feel like quite enough runs. The home side started at a steady rate and a breakthrough took a while to happen - with the score at 48 in the 11th over. Wickets started to fall regularly, but Englefield were keeping up with the required rate. Even so, at 117 for 6 and one player down, we were still favourites with 11 overs left. But the game turned in the 36th over when Mark Whitelock, back on to complete his allotted overs, attempted a diving run out but slipped and twisted his knee, an injury which kept him out for the rest of the season and required surgery on ligament damage. With fill-in bowlers completing Mark's spell, Englefield's number 7 batsman, Gray, was able to guide the home side to the brink of victory, despite the loss of another two wickets which gave us hope until the end. The last over started with 6 runs needed, and the last ball arrived with the scores level and just a single needed, which Gray duly took, to seal the closest of wins for the home side.

The following week's visit to Goring On Thames was cancelled, so we finished June with a home match against Theale & Tilehurst, on a scorcher of a day at Wasing Park. We won the toss and fielded first and what followed was quite possibly the maddest, and most nerve-shredding game of cricket I've ever been involved in. It started serenely for the visitors when Puri hit the second ball of the match through midwicket for four, blocked the second ball and took a single off the third. His partner was then dismissed first ball, but even after this early loss the visitors moved to the dizzy heights of 16 for 1 in the 8th over before the chaos really started. In the 13th over they were 20 for 5, with Mark Woodley claiming 3 wickets, with the others falling to Kevin Rapley and some indecisive calling resulting in a run out. We then, of course, did our best to let T&T off the hook and they recovered to 38 for 5 before we struck again. This time though, we did manage to finish the opposition off and amazingly, the last wicket fell with the score on 49, almost an hour before the scheduled tea break. It was surely a matter of knocking off the runs and having tea at the end of the game. Wasn't it? Ed was out for 2 off the third ball of the first over, but some pinch-hitting from Kevin Rapley took us to the comfort of 21 for 1 in the 5th over before Kevin was out. Then Garry was out at 26, but surely there was still no chance of anything but a home win. A short while later we were 29 for 7 and coming off for tea, wondering where the next 21 runs would come from. After an anxious tea break Mike Palfrey and Mark Woodley resumed, and 2 runs came off the next over, and 8 off the one after that, which led to Mark being described as 'free-scoring' in the report on Theale's website!. Surely a match-winning over. 39 for 7. The score then moved to 41 in the next over before Mark was caught close in, the opening bowler's fifth wicket. Jerry Dobson joined Mike, and the pair ground out a further 8 runs in the next 4 overs, crucially without much swapping of the strike, starting with what looked like a match-winning boundary from Mike to take the score to 45. But with the scores level, Mike was LBW to Cooper for 10 off the final ball of the 19th over, bringing a terrified number 11 out to join Jerry, who was on strike for the next over, with the field in to discourage a quick single. So everyone was a little startled as Jerry casually drove the ball back over the bowler's head, which allowed us to canter through for the winning run. I don't think I've ever been so relieved to register a '0 not out' without facing a ball. Games of cricket do not get any closer, more nerve-wracking or downright insane than that.

The following Sunday we rolled up at Pangbourne college for our first look at their new pavilion and facilities, which got an instant seal of approval - very impressive, especially the electronic scoreboard. The home side batted first after winning the toss, in a 25 overs per side game, but with a couple of players down. Wickets fell regularly and the home side ended on 96, a couple of overs short of their allotted overs, with Mark Woodley and Paul Strong each claiming 3 wickets. We started our innings, slightly concerned that we'd need to score almost twice the number of runs as we'd scored last week while losing nine wickets, but we need not have worried, as Mike (20) and Kevin (10) added 35 for the first wicket before both were out at the same score. Craig and Garry added a further 20 before Craig was caught behind, and our fourth wicket fell at 73 to cause a minor tremor among our remaining batsmen. Kenny Rogers was next in and was in a bit of a hurry, as we won 19 balls later, Kenny having hit 4 fours in an unbeaten 18.

Next on the fixture list was a home match against Charlie Sinton's XI, who won the toss and batted first in a timed game. We were generally on top throughout their innings, the first wicket falling in the 3rd over and the next wicket, a brilliant catch at cover by Kenny Rogers at the end of the 8th over with the score at 23. A fourth wicket stand of 42 was about as good as it got for the visitors, and with the wickets being shared around, they lost their ninth and final wicket to end on 122. After tea the early wickets the visitors needed were not forthcoming, and Ed Pettit-Mills and Ben Hardy added 73 in 80 balls for the first wicket before Ed was bowled for 46. Garry now joined Ben and the pair took another 65 balls to knock off the remaining runs, Finishing on 37 and 31 respectively, and we won with one ball short of 15 overs to spare.

The baking hot weather continued the following week for our trip to Whitchurch On Thames. The home side won the toss, batted, and set off like a train, with the aid of some very short boundaries, reaching their 50 in the 8th over shortly before losing their first wicket. The arrival at the crease of Hill only increased the scoring rate, as the boundary was regularly reached and cleared. The 15th over went for 20 runs, the 18th went for 24 as Hill ran our bowling ragged. Mark Woodley returned for a second spell and bought us some relief by removing the other opener, Vaughan, for 69, and his final 3 overs went for a respectable 13 runs. We started to take a few wickets, and were helped and relieved by Hill reaching his hundred and retiring for 102. The last 9 overs bowled by Crag and Jerry went for 56 runs for the loss of 4 wickets, including two overs which went for 12 and 13. But the final total of 286 for 7 had laid waste to our chances of a successful chase as well as the sanity of our scorers. The tone of our tactics for this impossible run chase was to not go out wondering what might have been, and to make equal use of the short boundaries. In accordance with this, Ed began a habit of hitting the first ball of an innings for 4, but was out caught behind off the 5th ball of the over. In keeping with his tactics, Mike hit two fours before he was second out for 8 with the score at 17 in the 5th over. Craig joined Garry and added 47 in 55 balls for the 3rd wicket, before Craig was out for 25, which included 6 fours. Mark Woodley joined Garry and the pair added a further 46, Mark going for 24 (4 fours and a six). Runs were coming, but nowhere near quickly enough. Quinton Webster was out soon after and when Garry fell 13 runs after that, for exactly 50, the game was up. It was just a matter of if we could survive the remaining overs. Kenny Rogers provided a final flourish but was out for 23, but our final total of 155 was arrived at still with 20 balls left.

Overcast skies and a blustery breeze replaced blazing sunshine for our next match as Reading Lawyers visited Wasing Park. The visitors won the toss and put us in to bat, with Ed Pettit-Mills and Ben Hardy adding 112 for the first wicket in 140 balls. After that though, it was another case of too many wickets falling for not enough runs – Our top three were Ed Pettit-Mills (68), Ben Hardy (43) and Garry Masters (34) but the next seven batsmen added just 20 and although 187 in 40 overs was a decent score, we possibly should have had a few more. And our score was put into context by the visitors opening stand of 79 and second wicket partnership of 39. At 118 for 2 in the 27th over, they were well on course. At 174 for 2 in the 37th the match was all but sewn up. Then Losemore was out, caught by Jerry Dobson off Ben Hardy, who had started the innings as wicket-keeper. He then nipped out Nassau-Lake caught and bowled the next ball and suddenly we had just a sniff. The next over from Kevin Rapley went for just one run and for good measure Kevin removed Khaliq for a duck, leaving 13 needed off the final two overs. Ben removed Baker for a duck to claim his third wicket and the final over started with the visitors needing 6. Englefield all over again? Not this time – the Lawyers managed just two singles off the final tight over bowled by Kevin, and we had achieved an unlikely victory by 3 runs, as the visitors lost 4 wickets for 2 runs in 9 balls at the end.

With the start of August, the weather naturally took an immediate turn to the autumnal, as we headed to Woodland St Mary, a venue where our one previous visit ended in an abandonment. The conditions were oddly similar as we rolled up, and the start was delayed by an hour due to rain and an impromptu cutting of the pitch. Ed and Ben just continued as if they'd not been dismissed the previous week and took full toll of the bowling, and the gaps in the field caused by the home side having eight players plus substitutes provided by us. They added 168 for the first wicket in 26.5 overs before Ed, on 97, decided to take a sharpish single, a decision which Ben obviously did not agree with! Ben was stumped soon after, and as the rain began to fall horizontally, eventually forcing an early tea after 33 overs, with our score at 192 for 2. When play eventually resumed, Woodlands began their pursuit of 193 in 33 overs – the suggestion of a Duckworth-Lewis adjusted target having caused one of our scorers to nearly choke on his Swiss roll. But Woodlands seemed in no hurry, and crawled to 8 for 0 after 7 overs. Then Les Woodley bowled Gidley and the flood gates started to open as the drizzle came and went, and they lost their final wicket with the score on 50, that after the bowling had been shared around. So we trudged off home having achieved a big but somehow not entirely satisfying win.

The sunshine and warmth returned the next weekend (although not in previous amounts) for our trip to Ashford Hill. The home side batted first and initially made their intentions clear as they set off at a healthy lick, but after 4 overs they found themselves 18 for 2 and things didn't really improve for them as we put the home side under a tight reign and chipped away with regular wickets. They were all out for just 81, with 'Mr Extras' making another solid contribution of 30, comfortably their highest score. Our best bowler was Ben Hardy with 4 for 15 in 8 overs. Kevin Rapley claimed 3 for 11 and Mark Woodley 2 for 20. Ed opened the innings with his customary four off the first ball, but was caught at slip off the fourth. Any ideas Ashford Hill may have had about causing us a few panics quickly vanished as Kevin Rapley engaged 'pinch-hitter' mode, and accompanied by Tom Vare they knocked off the runs at an astonishingly rapid pace, the winning runs struck from the first ball of the 13th over, with Kevin finishing on 56, while Tom offered steady support to end on 23 not out.

Pangbourne were the next visitors to Wasing Park, for a 35 over match. After winning the toss and batting the visitors batted solidly, but we managed to keep their scoring rate under control, and it was the 29th over before they reached their hundred. From that point they upped the scoring rate and closed 6 overs later with a score of 141 for 4. But after tea, with Ed and Ben once again opening the innings, the visitor's total was swiftly put into perspective as the pair built yet another big stand. Ben was eventually out for 68 with just 8 required, Two boundaries (plus a wide) later, we won the match with 35 balls to spare, and with Ed unbeaten on 61.

We returned to Wasing Park for our bank holiday weekend match, the return fixture with Mortimer, who batted first in a 35 overs per side game. We took two early wickets, and the visitors were 34 for 2 in the 13th over, but they were a much changed side from the one we played at Mortimer earlier in the season, and were 135 for 3 with 3 overs still to go, so to keep them to 153 for 6 was a decent effort, especially being one player down, and with the noise of a thick edge to the 'keeper somehow evading the ears of the umpire. Jerry was out for 6 with the score on 16 in the 8th over, which meant we had to do a bit of work to keep up with the required run-rate. Garry Masters joined Ben Hardy and the pair added 73 in 82 balls, Ben then being dismissed for 39 with 65 still needed in 14 overs. Thanks to Mark Woodley we needed only another 38 balls to knock off the remainder of the target, with Mark hitting 5 fours and a six to end on 36 not out, while Garry finished unbeaten on 63. The visitors walked off at the end not quite knowing what had hit them

We started September with cooler, more autumn-like weather, as Kingsclere visited Wasing Park. Ed was back to open with Ben and again hit the first ball of the match for 4, and again the pair set about the bowling, and added 91 for the first wicket, inside 16 overs, Ed falling for 48. But we reverted to old habits spectacularly after the fall of the second wicket at 134, and where we should have scored around 200, we ended up with 170 for 9, with the visitor's Mitesh Patel taking 5 for 22. Kingsclere set off like a train, the first wicket falling in the second over with the score at 14, and the 50 reached without further loss in the 7th over. Soon though we started to put a reign back on the visitors a little and chipping away at the wickets, and by the end of the 16th over the visitors were 100 for 9, with Ben Hardy having taken 5 for 14 in 4 overs, plus two catches. A win was now only one ball away, but the ball kept disappearing to the boundary off the bat of Hanney, who was batting low down for him at number 10. The next four over went for 32 and heads started to be scratched. With the scoring rate so fast, the visitors weren't going to run out of overs so we needed to remove that final wicket. But the runs kept on flowing and the home side swept to a one wicket victory when the 25th over of the innings went for 13 runs, leaving Hanney on an unbeaten 51. It was our turn to wonder what had hit us.

We regrouped the following week at Sulhamstead, for a 35 over match on a cool and slightly drizzly late summer's day. After a sedate first over, I found myself retrieving the first ball of the second over from the pub car park across the road, and the home openers continued their fairly effortless scoring until the last ball of the ninth over, when Aruna was spectacularly caught on the boundary by Pete Malendrome. After a couple of relatively quick

wickets, the home side were 75 for 3, but only in the 16th over. That was about as good as it got for us as Booth and Knapp made batting look easy, although there was a good comeback from Pete Malendrome, whose first two overs went for 22, but conceded just 13 in his next five. The rain was soon back, and finally drove the players off the field with the score at 157 for 3 after 30.4 overs. Tea was taken and it was decided that 158 in 30.4 overs would be our target. With Ed absent, Ben's opening partner was Kevin Rapley, but the pinch-hitter tactic didn't work this time as he was caught behind for 3 with the score at 11 in the second over. Ben and Garry had added a further 20 when Ben was caught behind for 11, and at 33 for 2 in the 8th over the innings could easily have gone either way. Garry was joined by Mark Woodley and built the first of two match-winning partnerships – 55 in just 51 deliveries to put us right back in the running. When Garry was out we still needed 70 from 88 balls, which on paper looked simple but this was the sort of target we'd struggled with before. But we shouldn't have worried as Mark was joined by Lewis Starkes, for a match winning partnership of 57 in 63 balls, before Lewis was bowled for an increasingly confident 19 in his first innings for us. There was a wobble as Mark edged to the 'keeper for 49, causing murmurings of 'jug avoidance'. Pete Maldendrone cracked his second ball back down the ground for four to ease the tension, but Kenny Rogers offered a return catch to the bowler for a duck, leaving us still 8 short of victory with 12 balls left. Mike Palfrey's square cut for four took us to within three runs, reduced to two with a single off the next ball, before an edge along the ground past the 'keeper for 2 by Pete secured us the winning runs and a tense victory. Pete had played one match for us previously in 2002, but after the influence he had on this game I hope he won't wait another 11 years before he pays for us again!

That was to be the last action of the season for us as the next two games were called off due to a combination of weather and end-of-season lack of numbers, a pity to end with a couple of cancellations but at least our final result of the season was a win.