EUMCC: A HISTORY

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Introduction

The 2014-15 Club captain, James Rimmer, has asked me to try to put together a history of the Club – that is, of what was Exeter University Cricket Club but is now known as Exeter University Men’s Cricket Club. His reasoning may be that I am still an academic historian of sorts and that I have in my possession some recent records and statistics or simply that I seem to have become, somehow, the village’s ‘oldest living inhabitant’ and so have a longer memory than anybody else. If the last, any historian would feel queasy about too much reliance on personal memory, so I have tried to search out records. They are, though, disappointingly sparse. BUCS doesn’t seem to have kept the records of its predecessors, UAU and BUSA, Cricket Archive provides patchy help only back to 1980, and our Athletic Union doesn’t seem to have bothered much about the University’s sporting history, except through maintaining lists of colours and awards back to the late 1940s. Simon Tyson of the Sports Office has, though, collected an invaluable cache of Guild and AU Handbooks and other reports dating back to the 1970s and I am grateful for the chance to inspect them. I have scorebooks for the 1st XI back to 2002 (none for other teams) and I have tried to use contacts with some alumni. They have my thanks for their help, but I still hope the alumni source may produce further insights and information in time. My coverage is far more of the 1st XI than of the Club’s other teams and that is a weakness. I am well aware how distinguished a record the 2nds have, even though often playing the 1st XIs of other universities, but so far the lack of records is insurmountable. For the Club as a whole, I am also aware how many names there are in its history deserving at least a mention or two, so many that the work could easily have become over-long and unwieldy. The dividing line between a mention and no mention is obviously a somewhat arbitrary one, so I offer apologies to all past and present members of the Club who feel that I have neglected their own (perhaps notable) contributions to its history. At least the advantage of a work on the web (which is where this compilation will appear) is that it can easily be modified as new material appears. I hope to go on extending and updating it, so the present offering may not be the last word. No history is ever The History and that is surely so of one of the University’s great sporting clubs with a record over a century long and a future beckoning ahead.

Towards the 1970s

When I came to Exeter, as a lecturer in the History Department, in 1969, I hadn’t expected to play much serious cricket, but Deryck Fairclough (of whom more later) persuaded me to join his club, Exeter, and to take an interest in the University team. It was quickly clear that the Cricket Club was well established as one of the University’s leading, oldest and most popular sports clubs. Precisely when the Club had come into existence is uncertain, but almost certainly it was in the first few years after 1900, the year that the Royal Albert Memorial College (colloquially known as University College, Exeter) was officially designated. (The College’s original building is still there in Gandy Street.) The Edwardian years were something of a golden era for sport in general and cricket in particular. In 1902 the new County Ground was opened to give Exeter its first (and perhaps only) top-grade outdoor cricket facility. One knock-on effect was that Gras Lawn, previously occupied by Exeter CC, became available; the University College took on the lease in 1903 and bought the ground outright in 1912. Gras Lawn, situated in Barrack Road on the far side of the City centre, remained the College’s only cricket ground until Top Field was laid out in the 1950s. By 1903 the College had established a Central Sports Fund to raise money for student sport and the Athletic Union was established in 1906 (student subscription 10 shillings – 50p to us). The College was small; in 1912 it still had only 230 full-time students, about half of them women, so the men’s sports clubs had only a modest pool of talent to draw on. They still seem to have established themselves pretty well in only a few years, partly because the teacher training course the College offered attracted many students from Wales, a feature of Exeter that persisted down to the 1980s. The most distinguished sportsman of these years was one Willie Davies, a Welsh rugby international three-quarter who also topped the cricket club’s averages for both batting and bowling (41 wickets for 222 runs) in 1912. The University College did not play in any inter-university competitions (which didn’t exist as yet) and all games seem to have been against local sides, but particular meaning lay in the regular fixtures against Exeter rivals, the much older St.Luke’s College, the Church of England teacher training college. In these years the University College seems to have got the better of the encounters. According to Brian Clapp’s *The University of Exeter: A History*  (1982), the students had established a reputation for staging initiations for freshers, a mock medical examination being one of them. One can’t believe the Cricket Club was involved!

What happened to sport during the Great War is unclear, but in 1922 the institution’s name was changed to University College of the South-West, a title it retained until 1955, and at the same time it started to receive some direct public funding via the University Grants Committee. The 1920s saw growing interest nationally in creating a structure for inter-university sport and the UAU (Universities Athletic Union) was established in 1930. That change did not affect Exeter which was not as yet a full university. Cricket was continuing, though possibly not flourishing. When the University College made a public appeal in Devon in 1930 to raise funds for development on the newly-acquired Streatham estate, one fundraiser complained that ‘Many of the families … are keen cricketers and the name of our team is mud here owing to its unsporting way of scratching at the eleventh hour for no reason’. The early 1930s saw the creation of a staff cricket club, the Erratics, and soon an annual match between staff and students was being played. In 1936 and 1938 the Erratics beat UCSW. (The latter year was the first for which the Erratics kept their scorebooks. They have much better records than the student clubs and two volumes have been published on their history.) Though the 1930s saw grandiose plans (largely unachieved) for the development of the Streatham site, none of them seems to have included any sports facilities.

Again it isn’t clear how sport fared during the Second World War, but it was under way very soon afterwards. The Erratics recorded that their very first match after the war was against the students’ 1st XI which won a low-scoring game. Until 1958 most male students would do their National Service between school and university and so come up to the University College rather older than modern students. Deryck Fairclough (a legendary figure in Devon county cricket and in the University, where he became the first Director of the Sports Hall) told me that he had become the President of the student’s Club around 1948-9 soon after arriving on the College’s staff. He had ambitions for UCSW sport: one was the infilling of the Hoopern Valley to provide additional playing fields and another was for collaboration with Exeter CC in sharing use of the County Ground. Neither came to fruition. What was achieved was the development and laying out of Top Field as the 1st XI cricket pitch (it remained so for over thirty years) and the building of a sports pavilion, the Taylor Pavilion (opened 1954), to serve it and adjacent rugby and hockey pitches. This was the first sports development on the Streatham estate. Soon after this, in 1955, Fairclough himself took 8-76 for the Erratics in the traditional match against the students. Ambition worked in other directions too and in 1955 the University College of the South-West was granted full university status by royal charter and became the University of Exeter. This upgrading helped its student recruitment but also enabled the new University to play in UAU competition for the first time. What now became Exeter University Cricket Club was, though, a continuation of a club already about half-a-century old. Clearly it had already or soon achieved some standing, as the 1st XI played the touring Pakistan Eaglets team in 1958 and 1959. How Exeter fared in UAU competition in these early years is unknown, though the impression is that it achieved a reasonable record. It seems, though, that the UAU title was not won for the first time until 1979-80.

A glimpse of the Club in the 1960s has been provided by a group of alumni who came up to the University in 1964, have kept in contact and last year celebrated fifty years on with a re-union in Exeter. It is clear from their recollections how closely-knit and enjoyable the Club was. One of its members, Chris Wilshere, who played mainly for the 2nds, has shown me various mementoes (an indicator in itself). The Club’s fixture list for 1965 shows the 1st XI with 24 games, 18 of them in June. The opponents include a number of Devon (mainly local) clubs as well as St Luke’s College and a variety of touring teams, but only two games (against Southampton and Sussex) seem to be UAU matches. The 2nds had fourteen matches, ten in June, and only one (v. Sussex) that was obviously UAU. The fixtures listed are overwhelmingly home ones, so it is possible some away fixtures were omitted, but, even so, the list shows how much the Club’s standard fare was friendly or social games rather than inter-university competition. Chris Wilshere also provides the names of the Club Captains for his years: Tony Parker in 1965, Alan Williams (who first introduced the Club cap) in 1966 and Gerry Elias in 1967. The last is now, after a distinguished legal career, Sir Gerrard Elias, QC, chairman of the ECB’s disciplinary committee. The fixture list shows Top Field as the 1st XI ground and Gras Lawn as that for the 2nds, but Chris’s notes surprised me by stating that a number of 1st XI games were in fact played on the County Ground (probably a result of Fairclough’s influence). Among the mementoes were photographs of the crest on the Club shirt of the time. Intriguingly, it does not figure the coat-of-arms of the post-1955 University but what I suspect to be that of the previous University College. If that is correct, then Exeter in the 1960s was somewhere where tradition died hard.

In 1969, when I came to Exeter, the University had some 3800 students, about a quarter of its present numbers, and about half of them women. By today’s standards it was still fairly small and face-to-face as an institution and, as an active cricketer, I soon got to know many of the 1st XI. Several names stand out in my memory, among them Mike Wagstaffe, Peter Thackeray and Ian Murray, all talented players. Thackeray and Murray played for Exeter CC, my club, and Wagstaffe and Thackeray went on to do PGCEs and gain blues (and so play first-class cricket) at Oxford. The cricket set-up was much more modest than present students can expect. There was no Cricket Centre or Director of Cricket (though Fairclough kept a watchful eye on cricket as he did on all University sport) or other coaches and the Club was run almost entirely by the students themselves, though there was the Athletic Union and its Permanent Secretary to provide administrative back-up. There had been one recent gain: in 1967 the Sports Hall (built on the back corner of the Taylor Pavilion, which it dwarfed) had given the University a major facility, though its only direct contribution to cricket was that it could be used for indoor nets. The surface gave a poor bounce, but at least now and for decades to come the Club could run winter nets on Saturday mornings and even, much later on, contemplate some indoor games. EUCC played in the UAU competition (with two XIs) but a long list of fixtures through the summer term (then ten weeks long) was probably little different from that in 1965 with games against local clubs and touring teams predominating. Competitive matches in UAU (which included all universities except Oxford, Cambridge and London) were relatively few. The grounds were Top Field (now covered by the hockey water-based astro and the Cricket, Tennis and Fitness Centres) for the 1st XI and Gras Lawn, since sold off for housing development. There was no ground at Topsham and St Luke’s College was still an entirely separate institution from the University. There were a couple of outdoor hard-surface nets in a corner of Top Field (about where the corridor to the Cricket Centre is now) but they were best avoided for serious practice. The 1975-76 AU Handbook has a photograph of the Taylor Pavilion, which stood about where the Tennis Centre office and coffee spot are now. It has, of course, long been submerged beyond recognition in the extended Sports Centre. One thing would be easily recognizable today, though; green was already Exeter’s sporting colour. The 1960s alumni confirm that it was so then and, so far as they knew, had been long since.

My most vivid memories of the 1970s relate to the long-established and celebrated annual game between the University 1sts and the Staff. The Erratics put out a very different team for the big match from its regular one that played village teams at weekends and it pulled in staff players who turned out for senior clubs in Devon, names like Bill Jordan, Tony Wragg, Jeff Stanyer and me, as well as the now elderly Fairclough himself. It would be hard now to imagine a staff team that could take on the University 1sts, but in fact the Erratics beat the students several times during those halcyon years. The Top Field wicket was slow with a hint of stop which suited a Staff spin attack good enough to make the students struggle. The games tended to be low-scoring, though one or two saw good totals. Forgive the boast: the present writer scored the only century ever made for the Staff against the University (100\* in 1975) and was given out lbw (a dreadful decision!) on 99 on another occasion. The 1975-76 AU Handbook has a photo of play during the University v. Erratics match on Top Field. Soon, within a few years and partly thanks to the merger with St Luke’s, the University team became much too strong for the Staff, whose stars were ageing and not being readily replaced, and the great annual game lapsed sometime in the mid-1980s. My associations with the students’ Club were not just adversarial. I played one game for it – versus Devon – in 1972 and when Fairclough retired in 1977 I succeeded him as the President of the Club. With the 1st XI playing on top Field I became a fairly regular supporter and spectator, wandering up the hill from Queen’s Building when I had an hour or two spare on match days. Over the next few years I would see some good cricket.

Through the 1970s,, though, UAU games left little mark upon my memory. The impression is confirmed by AU Handbooks of these years that the Club was still largely focussed on local cricket, rather than inter-university competition, and that it retained a strong social dimension. The 1974-75 Handbook entry for the Club noted that the Club now had three teams and proclaimed that in early July ‘the club’s long-subsidised tour of Sussex takes place – the ideal culmination to a two-month cricketing idyll’. In the following year’s Handbook the idyll was fleshed out: ‘we play two and a half months of continuous cricket and never travel more than a few miles.’ ‘When the exams are over in early June, it is possible to play almost a month of cricket, seven days a week, more than even the county pros manage’. At least it added that ‘the real spice and edge is given to the season by the UAU championships’ in which Exeter regularly reached at least the quarter-finals and re-assured prospective members that the Club’s match fee (tea included) was only 15p. The 1978-79 Handbook entry celebrated Paul Downton’s selection for England’s winter tour and assured readers that UAU competition was ‘the most important part of the season’, but went on to boast that the 1st XI had 35 fixtures each year and ‘is now one of the strongest sides in Devon’! The Club had a ‘reputation as one of the most social clubs in the University’ and, welcoming the willingness of members of touring teams to treat hard-up students to drinks, concluded ‘A game doesn’t end when the stumps are drawn, but when the bar shuts, or the curry-house closes’. The end-of-year tour to Sussex was still going.

Golden Years

There seems to be no record of the University’s fortunes in UAU competition for most of the 1970s or earlier. One suspects, as the Handbooks claim, that the University fared well in the SW division of the competition, where Bristol, Bath, Southampton and Reading provided the regular opposition and where success would lead on to the knock-out stages of the quarter-final and beyond. In 1978 the University reached the UAU final, ‘a game which we should really have won’, the AU Handbook recorded mournfully. By then, though, something was changing. The merger with St Luke’s College in 1978 brought a powerful sporting tradition and some very useful individual players into the University. In fact sport at St Luke’s in the post-war period – and above all in rugby – had been stronger than that of the University. Soon AU Handbooks were noting that competition for places in the cricket teams had intensified and that standards had risen with cricket, rugby and basketball being the main beneficiaries of the merger. One student in the new School of Education, the main academic fruit of the merger, was Richard Ellison, a fine fast-medium bowler and hard-hitting batsman, who played for Kent and later England in eleven Tests and 14 ODIs. All told he took 475 first-class wickets at 28.99 and scored 5046 runs averaging 23.8. Now, after a few years as part-time coach to the University, he is a housemaster at Millfield. A little earlier Paul Downton, also of Kent (later Middlesex) and a wicketkeeper-batsman, had arrived on the Streatham site. Picked for an England tour while still an undergraduate, he played in 30 Tests and 28 ODIs. His first-class career accumulated 8270 runs at 25.3 and 779 victims behind the stumps. After a career in the City, he is now the Managing Director of England Cricket. I watched some of the Ashes Test at Edgbaston in 1985 in which both Exeter graduates were playing. That game won the Ashes for England and Ellison took ten wickets. In 1980 the University also benefitted from the presence of Brad Green, a formidable all-rounder who had captained Young Australia and was doing a Masters in Child Care here. He won the Man of the Match award in a one-dayer he played for Devon against Warwickshire. Some expected him to go on to captain the full Australian side but he decided to quit cricket for a career in child care. With such players and others of note, the University was almost unstoppable. In 1980 we reached the UAU final against Liverpool, having disposed of Durham and Loughborough on the way, and won; Cricket Archive records the game but without venue, result or scorecard. Ellison, who played but was unable to bowl because of back trouble, remembers it as being at Trent Bridge and that Exeter won a close game. Brian Clapp’s history of the University, published two years later, includes a photograph of a rather proud 1st XI captioned ‘UAU Champions 1979-80’. In 1982 we reached the final again and beat Loughborough convincingly: Exeter 151-7, Loughborough 70 all out. Ellison took 3-35 off 20 overs straight – no over limits for bowlers then. We reached the final again in 1983 – v. Leeds at Bath –and won again, though Cricket Archive (which has the 1982 scorecard) provides no details. Three championships in four years was a remarkable achievement and there were also successes for the 2nd XI, winners of their ‘Junior UAU’ in 1979, 1984 and 1985 and losing finalists in 1978, 1980 and 1983. Obviously Exeter cricket then, as so often, had considerable depth. The Guild Handbook of 1984-85 asserted confidently that Exeter had ‘without dispute the best cricket and tennis teams in UAU’. By 1987-88, after the 1sts had lost to Durham in semi-finals in 1985 and 1986 and the final in 1987, the Handbook had modified the boast to being ‘the second strongest side of all Universities’, but clearly the early ‘80s, the Downton/Ellison years, were already coming to seem, in retrospect, a golden age for Exeter cricket. Some advances could be noted. The University now employed an off-season coach, Tony Greaves, a member of the School of Education staff, it now had three regular teams and also, for a couple of years, ran a Freshers’ XI and in 1986 it was ambitious enough to stage a two-day game against Cambridge University ‘complete with beer tent’ and was hoping to organize a full Cricket Week for the following year. The Club now seemed to be focussed more on inter-university competition rather than local or touring games and in 1987-88 there was a first mention of entering an indoor team in the UAU six-a-side tournament during the winter months. The 1981-82 Handbook had seen the first appearance of a Ladies’ Cricket Club, though, ‘concentrating on enjoyment rather than competitiveness’, it did not play in UAU. All told it was a flourishing scene, yet by the second half of the ‘80s the golden age was probably already over.

The Long Pause

Exeter reached UAU (or BUSA) finals in 1987, 1990 and 1995 but lost all of them to Durham. The frequency of appearances at late stages of the competition suggests that Exeter probably ranked as the third cricketing university behind Durham and Loughborough, a good showing but below the standards of a few years earlier. The various AU and University Handbooks went on giving prominence to the names of Downton and Ellison until the late-1990s; the implication was Exeter’s best years had come and gone. Even during these relatively barren years, though, Exeter notched up another future Test player. Mike Smith, a fine left-arm seamer, went on to a long first-class career for Gloucestershire. Though he played only one Test for England, in the Ashes series of1997, he was rated for some years as the country’s best one-day bowler. In all first-class cricket he took 533 wickets at 24.68, taking ten wickets in a match five times, and so stands as Exeter’s leading wicket-taker in the first-class game. Co-inciding with Smith in the years around 1990 was Marcus Wight, off-spinner and batsman (also a fine hockey player), who collected a blue in a postgraduate year at Cambridge before playing some games for Gloucestershire. There were other fine players too. We could still attract good cricketers and over many years there were mentions in the Handbooks of Exeter players appearing for English Universities, though only in the University’s 2002 Sports Report were the names given (Chris Coulson, Nick Pont and David Fury). It is hard, though, not to feel that Exeter had lost some momentum and even stagnated, at least relative to other leading cricket universities. The hammering received from Durham in the 1995 BUSA final raised questions about how competitive Exeter remained at the highest level.

Behind this lay problems, both internal to the University and external. During difficult years for University finance, there was almost no significant investment in sports development and facilities. Exeter’s facilities were not improving and were even deteriorating. Top Field, long the 1st XI venue, now suffered from serious drainage problems and became unsuitable for top-level cricket. The 1sts moved to Gras Lawn where, despite the devoted work of a distinguished groundsman, Dennis Lane, the wickets remained slow and hardly encouraging to either batsmen or bowlers. Gras Lawn had some character and many recall it with affection, but as a ground for an aspiring university it was of modest quality and its pavilion and catering facilities were simply inadequate. Meanwhile the ageing Sports Hall saw no investment in either cricket facilities or those for fitness and conditioning at a time when other universities were improving or extending theirs. External competition was also part of the problem. In 1992 the polytechnics had been given university status and that more than doubled the number of the country’s universities. The upgraded institutions merged into UAU which changed itself to BUSA (British Universities Sports Association). The old universities now faced more competition and some of the new ones, perhaps despairing of much academic distinction, invested heavily in sports facilities and even sports scholarships (previously a phenomenon confined to the USA) to make a name for themselves and to attract students from the schools. The great growth of university numbers in such institutions attracted many good sports players who would not have considered university before. There was no doubt that, at a time when Exeter was standing still internally, it was facing increased competition externally, though the damage to its sports standing was much more modest than that suffered by the oldest universities, Oxford and Cambridge. By the late 1990s, though, change was on the way.

The UCCE Era

Change, when it came, was both internal and external. By the end of the 1990s, a relatively disappointing decade for Exeter cricket, the University, now in better financial shape and with a sport-friendly Registrar in Ian Powell, was girding itself to invest in sports facilities and make itself more competitive. The decision was made to sell Gras Lawn for housing and to plough the proceeds into new developments, including a replacement ground out on the Topsham Road. In 1999 a Sports Office was created, which absorbed the management of the Sports Hall, and the first Director of Sport (Philip Attwell) was appointed. The University instituted its own system of Sports Scholarships, well funded by the standards of other universities., and, though the Cricket Club obtained only a few of them, by 2001-2 the Guild Handbook was noting that they had ‘enabled the club to portray a degree of professionalism’. While the new Topsham pitches were under development, the 1sts played at a variety of other grounds – Exmouth, the Exeter County Ground and even at Millfield School. Top Field now succumbed to other developments – a water-based astro for hockey and then a Tennis Centre, not to mention car-parking. The old Taylor Pavilion was swallowed by the new developments.

Major changes had arrived beyond Exeter too. The new England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB), under pressure after regularly dismal performances against a rampant Australia, put its mind to improving the nation’s cricket and decided to finance six University Centres of Cricket Excellence (UCCEs) to provide pathways into the first-class game for students now that Oxford and Cambridge were failing to do so. Former England batsman, Graeme Fowler (now running cricket at Durham), was employed as the ECB’s consultant and he recommended six centres – Durham, Exeter and Loughborough (all sole institutions) and Oxford, Cambridge and Leeds/Bradford (multi-university conglomerates). The political in-fighting began. Wales demanded its own centre and, when the Welsh Office and Labour Party weighed in, the Labour government leant on the ECB to change its plans. Over Fowler’s protests (he tried to persuade the ECB to have seven centres with Exeter still one) the Exeter place was re-awarded to Cardiff, another conglomerate. Perhaps oddly, BUSA agreed to let the new UCCEs, even though four were not sole universities, play at the top level of its inter-university competition, so increasing the serious competition to Durham. Loughborough and Exeter. In fact those three universities still dominated the early years of the new BUSA competition, partly because the conglomerates took some time to get themselves sorted and because the first few years saw the BUCS Premier divided into North and South divisons. In the South division Exeter faced the Cardiff, Oxford and Cambridge UCCEs and sundry other universities, with only Oxford UCCE being a real threat. For the first four years Exeter finished in the top two and so qualified for the knock-out semi-final where we would meet either Durham or Loughborough from the North division. By a nice co-incidence, Exeter’s very first game against one of the UCCEs was against Cardiff in May 2001 and it was a satisfying victory: Exeter 236-8, Cardiff 182-9.

The arrival of the UCCE era saw Exeter adapting to the new challenge. A professional coach was employed part-time. For several years Richard Ellison filled the role, though Millfield duties meant that he missed most actual matches, and later David Ottley and Julian Wyatt. It was clear that, to counter UCCEs with professional coaches and management, sizeable budgets and fixture lists including the counties, the University could hardly leave the Club to be run by students in the old way. (Some unsatisfactory episodes over fixtures, money and captaincies had shown the weaknesses of that.) A Cricket Committee was formed, with the present author as its chairman and Nick Beasant of the Sports Office (a former AU Chair) as cricket manager. One of the decisions of the Committee was to separate the 1st team captaincy from the Club captaincy; in future team captains would be appointed by the management while Club members would elect their own Club Captain at their AGM. As the UCCEs employed professional scorers, it was decided to try to improve Exeter’s standards, at least for the 1st XI, and in 2003 a professional scorer from outside the University was employed, though without great success. From 2004, now semi-retired from teaching and other University duties, I took over as the lst XI’s regular scorer, though maintaining amateur status.

The first four years of the UCCE era were ones of regained success for Exeter and a concentration of quality players was a factor. That had started even before the UCCEs appeared. A talented young Devon batsman, Matt Wood, had come to the University and he scored heavily in his first season in BUSA, though he then decided to turn professional with Somerset and went on to play with success for the county and later for Nottinghamshire. At about the same time a highly-fancied Yorkshire off-spinner, Richard Dawson, also arrived in Exeter. Though injuries and other interruptions meant that he never came to dominate in BUSA, an otherwise meteoric career saw him fast-tracked into the England side and he played seven Tests in 2001-3 (so becoming Exeter’s fourth England cricketer) and went on an Ashes tour to Australia. Partly because of difficulties in modifying his action, his descent was equally meteoric and his first-class career saw a return of only 199 wickets at 44.07. Two other batsmen who would enjoy notable first-class careers then arrived: the South African Steve Moore (Worcestershire and Lancashire) who made 17 first-class centuries and over 8800 runs averaging 36.39 and the Malaysian Arul Suppiah who would make eight first-class centuries for Somerset and over 5000 runs averaging 32.42. At BUSA level both were also very useful bowlers. In fact Suppiah, an occasional slow left-arm bowler, holds the world record T20 figures of 6-5 for Somerset v. Glamorgan in 2011. Moore hit 111 in a BUSA game versus Bristol in 2002, which for long remained the only century scored for Exeter in the UCCE era. Tom Stayt, 1st XI captain in 2007, played some games for Gloucestershire. He achieved the best recorded bowling figures for Exeter in the modern era (10-1-27-7 v. Cambridge MCCU at Fenners in 2006) and also had the distinction of fielding as 12th man for England in a Test match versus West Indies.. A county future and value in BUSA were, though, not exactly one and the same thing. Suppiah, though obviously immensely talented, performed only modestly for the University in BUSA. Players like Neil Turk, Jordache Rawson, Ben Thompson, David Court, Ian Haley (an Olympian for South Africa at hockey), the Zimbabwean Duncan Micklem and Paul James were all more substantial BUSA performers. James, who went on to do a Master’s and a doctorate after his first degree, managed to play for the 1sts in eight out of nine years in 2002-10, a record probably never to be eclipsed. With a depth of talent, many Exeter players in these years appeared for county 2nd XIs or for Minor Counties.

That talent and the structure of BUSA explained the success enjoyed by the University in the first four UCCE years. Exeter reached the semi-finals in all those years – 2001-4 – though the final only in 2003. The semi-final victory against Loughborough that year, by 8 wickets at Dean Park, Bournemouth, would remain our last semi-final win until the defeat of Cambridge MCCU in 2014. The 2003 final, against Durham at Hampshire’s new Rose Bowl ground, saw two strokes of ill-fortune for Exeter. First, Haley, who had scored a fifty in the semi-final victory, was away on hockey duty for South Africa, and then Russell Jones, the senior opening bowler, broke down after five overs. Even so, the final was a disappointment rather than a disaster. James took four wickets for us and Moore and Turk scored fifties and at one point looked to be capable of winning the game. 2004 brought another semi-final and the University won the BUSA six-a-side indoor competition, which we had entered only spasmodically, for the first time. Perhaps Exeter could again claim to be one of the top three cricket universities. From 2005, though, matters became more difficult. That year BUSA created a single Premier division in place of the North/South division and so Exeter found itself one of two ‘ordinary’ universities in a group of eight dominated by six UCCEs (later renamed MCCUs – MCC Universities). Exeter remains the only non-MCCU university to have spent the whole period since 2001 in the Premier division, though the avoidance of relegation became a regular pre-occupation after 2004. (No other ‘sole university’ has managed much success at the top level, though Southampton Solent have emerged as a contender in the last few years.) In 2005 we started badly and, facing relegation, needed to win both of the last two matches. Two fine performances – one away against Leeds/Bradford which condemned them to relegation instead and one at Millfield against Loughborough – saw us safe. In the latter, reduced by rain to 24 overs a side, Micklem hit 85 off 59 balls in what ranks as one of the outstanding innings for Exeter. The opposing bowlers included Panesar and Wainwright, both of whom conceded 35 runs off five overs. The detail of these matches is preserved. We have not only a fairly full record in Cricket Archive but also our 1st XI scorebooks from 2002 onwards. One hopes that match details will be kept, whether in scorebooks or on the web, for all competitive matches in future. EUCC has and continues to have a distinguished history and it is worth recording it properly.

From the turn of the millennium when the University was investing heavily in enhanced sports facilities, the outcomes for cricket were mixed. Gras Lawn was sold off and the completely new ground was developed out on the Topsham Road. Unfortunately the noise from the adjacent motorway was distracting, the proper cricket pavilion promised was never built and the wickets, particularly on the designated 1st XI square, were not up to the requisite standard. Many BUSA games there were low-scoring. Though the other teams played at Topsham, the 1sts began to play competitive games on local club grounds, soon regularly at the County Ground (the home of Exeter CC) immediately adjacent to the Streatham Campus. There has long been a close relationship at personal level between the University club and the City one, but these have strengthened as University 1st XI players came to view the County Ground as their home venue. A further change – one of huge benefit –had to wait until 2009 when, after some delays, the University’s own Cricket Centre, costing over £2.1m, was finally opened up at the Sports Centre on the former Top Field, an appropriate site for historic reasons. It provided a fine year-round facility for University cricket in a way the older amenities could never do and the benefit to a new generation of Exeter teams, both in performance and in commitment, has been immense. At the same time a post of University Director of Cricket was created and Julian Wyatt (Somerset and Devon) was appointed. Julian has also doubled as 1st XI coach. Having a professional with his focus and commitment has transformed the atmosphere and culture of cricket. Students new to the University may take all this for granted, but a longer perspective shows that the Club and facilities it now enjoys are both relatively new and far better than most comparable universities have. Across the university system cricket has struggled; some institutions see it as unfeasible to compete with the MCCUs, some are reluctant to spend money on an expensive sport that has only a short season and the trend towards shortening the summer term in universities (until very recently Exeter and nearly all universities had a ten-week summer term) has squeezed cricket. Exeter is one of a fairly small number of universities where cricket remains one of the major sporting priorities and, after running a 4th XI for several years just for friendlies, it now enters all four teams in BUCS.

Other changes of these years include the entry of the Ladies Club into BUSA competition. The Ladies team now regularly reaches BUCS finals or semi-finals, both indoor and outdoor, but has hardly challenged Loughborough’s dominance. More successfully, the University Men have taken up the indoor game seriously, winning the BUSA Men’s title for a second time in 2007, and the building of the Cricket Centre has allowed that commitment to be intensified. (The following year, 2008, BUSA became BUCS – British Universities & Colleges Sport.) The Men’s 1st team reached the final stage of the BUCS competition in all four years 2011-14, losing the final at Lord’s in 2012 and winning the one at Edgbaston in 2014, a prelude for the run to the outdoor final by a very talented squad. For the last couple of years BUCS has expanded the competition so that we can enter a 2nd team too. At the time of writing the 1st squad has won 50 of its last 53 games in the indoor competition. One other development since the millennium is the annual Varsity Match. The Varsity Match idea was pioneered by the University’s RFC in the 1990s but cricket followed suit soon after 2000. Several games have been spoilt by the weather, but most (now played on the County Ground) have been tremendous successes, not least socially, with crowds up to 6-700. When BUSA/BUCS games have provided the Varsity Match, Exeter have achieved some notable victories; one such was a satisfyingly decisive win against Loughborough in 2009 (Exeter 223-8, Loughborough 166 all out, with the all-rounder Archie Fellowes returning 4.2-0-8-5 with his left-arm spin). Latterly non-BUCS opponents have been preferred and the late May Bank Holiday Monday has become the favoured date. In the 2014 game the Club Captain, Andrew Curtis, scored a fine century against an outgunned Bristol University. Another development has sartorial significance. In 2005 the Club Captain, George Vaughan, designed and introduced the first Club tie. That original version (I have one) carries the initials EUCC. Further designs, not all an improvement in my view, have changed that to EUMCC. 2013 even saw the ‘creation’ of a Club blazer! As BUCS in 2011 introduced coloured clothing for the Premier division (and a pink ball), university cricket has become more colourful. May Exeter’s ‘greens’ long remain a familiar sight at that level.

Some of these developments help to explain the notable successes of the last few years. The 1st XI had a very modest record in BUSA (then BUCS) from 2005 to 2011 and, with little prospect of semi-final places, often had to look to avoid relegation. The MCCUs had got their acts together and both Cardiff and Leeds/Bradford have enjoyed periods of great success. Despite talented players like Stayt, James, Sandy Allen, Scott Barlow and Ben Howgego (who played some games for Northants) Exeter was struggling by the standards of only a few years before. We settled for underdog status and developed an inferiority complex about the UCCEs. The nadir came in 2011, when, with a team shorn of stars, we failed to win a single game in BUCS and avoided relegation only because it had, that year, ceased to be automatic and had become subject to a play-off. A disastrous Varsity Match against Cambridge MCCU saw us bowled out for 47, our lowest total in the modern era at least, and the campaign ended with an abject capitulation up in Durham. It was not a season to dwell upon.

Since then the University’s standards and fortunes have improved steadily, helped by a remarkable intake of talented players in 2011, though the 2012 season was so wet that BUCS had to cancel its normal competitions as sufficient fixtures could not be fulfilled. In 2013 the 1st XI reached the semi-finals for the first time since 2004 (when qualifying was easier), beating Cardiff, Cambridge and Loughborough MCCUs and Solent along the way. A side below full strength lost disappointingly to Leeds/Bradford in the semi-final at Leeds. Remarkably that year the other EUMCC teams, the 2nds, 3rds and 4ths all won their BUCS divisions – an achievement probably unequalled by any other university and showing the depth of cricket ability that Exeter attracts. Remember that the 2nds and even the 3rds spend much of their programme playing the 1st XIs of other universities. The arrival of Jack Bradbury to assist the Director at the Cricket Centre contributed to that success. That provided a backdrop to the *annus mirabilis* of 2014 when the lsts not only won the BUCS indoor title again (could there be a better side than the one that won so easily at Edgbaston?) but, in a remarkable run, reached their first outdoor final since 2003. Though bedevilled by injuries, that 2011 intake had provided the core of the 1st XI for three years. Joe Barrs, who captained the team for three years (a record in itself), was a survivor of the 2010 intake and the team benefitted from settled selection which allowed players to know each other’s games as well as develop their own. The 2012 intake had added Tom Abell who has made his mark as a batsmen for Somerset in the closing weeks of the 2014 season, just missing a century on his first-class debut. The 2014 squad began poorly in BUCS: short of match practice, it lost disappointingly to Cambridge MCCU at Fenners, then lost to Leeds/Bradford under Duckworth/Lewis at home and had the Loughborough game rained off. With three games gone and only one point, the much-fancied Exeter team looked likely to miss out on the 2014 competition. To qualify for the semi-final, four straight wins in the remaining games were needed – an unlikely target verging on the impossible and one Exeter had never achieved before in the ‘modern era’. But achieved it was. A tense and fluctuating game at Oxford produced a win by seven runs (only the second victory against those MCCU opponents away), Cardiff were beaten more comfortably in the wet at Newport (the first away win against them), and Durham and Solent were overcome in close games on the County Ground. Finishing third in the Premier table, Exeter had an away semi-final, but in the event the venue hardly mattered. The Cambridge side that had beaten us in the first game was now crushed on the Clare College ground in what was the most impressive performance of recent years. The whole team performed in the eight-wicket win. The attack was always tight and disciplined, with Neal Prowse hastening out the Cambridge batting to finish with 5-40, but the game will be remembered most for the 110 scored off 102 balls by Andrew Curtis, the first century scored for Exeter against an MCCU and the first in a competitive game since Moore’s in 2002. Just as meritorious as the decisive eight-wicket win was the fact that the side had come so far with several players out injured or playing half-fit. Perhaps the extent of parental support (a recent and welcome feature of Exeter cricket) was a factor.

The final, played against Loughborough MCCU at Kibworth in Leicestershire, was something of an anti-climax.. The defeat owed something to injuries – Abell and Zac Bess both sat the game out and Bradley Lane could not bowl – but it also pointed up an over-reliance of the batting of Curtis. The Exeter score of 163-8 was 40 runs short of defensibility on an easing wicket, though it didn’t prevent Barrs and Tom Barton, one of the best BUCS opening attacks of recent years, reducing the opponents to 16-3 at one point. The ultimate disappointment of defeat by six wickets still left Exeter as one of the top three teams in BUCS for 2014, the holders of the indoor title and runners-up in the outdoor. That even such an achievement seemed not enough showed the extent of the University’s ambition. No underdog psychology now – in 2013-14 Exeter beat more MCCUs than lost to them. Cricketers have not always been appropriately rewarded in the Athletic Union’s distribution of colours, but the 2014 squad was recognized by a record number of Club Colours and Awards to add to its BUCS gold and silver medals. The Player of the Year Cup, introduced in 2013 when freshman Alex Morgan was the first winner, was awarded to Joe Barrs as captain and leading –wicket-taker, though Curtis was a strong contender All that remained for the leavers was the now-traditional ‘Last Breakfast’ at the local Squash Club (on the County Ground) in Graduation Week. Those graduating and leaving included seven major figures from the 1sts squad - Barrs and Curtis, Prowse, Lane and Bess, Matt Laidman and Will Leith, the core of a fine BUCS side. They will take a lot of replacing, though they have set standards for those who follow them in EUMCC.

Conclusion

More could be written but even this effort shows how much the Club offers to its members - not just a story but also a pedigree and a legacy. Cricket at Exeter has a record which few universities can equal and, in the years since it became a university and entered UAU competition, it has, despite fluctuations in fortunes, a claim to be one of the three leading cricket universities, alongside Durham and Loughborough – all that in an era when the once celebrated universities, Oxford and Cambridge, have seen their cricket fortunes and standing wane. (A few years ago the Exeter 2nds met Oxford University 1sts in the final of their BUCS division!) Some achievements may have left no record, but we know that the 1st XI reached UAU finals in 1978, 1980, 1982, 1983, 1987 and 1990, BUSA finals in 1995 and 2003 and a BUCS final in 2014. Three of those finals were won, though none since 1983. Semi-finals are too numerous to be worth listing, while the frequent successes for the 2nds are obscured only by the inadequacy of the records. The nature of university teams and of their turnover of players means that there are lean years as well as ones of plenty, but the ability of Exeter to attract good players has not wavered, even during the last decade or so when normal inter-university competition has to some extent been distorted by the UCCE/MCCUs. In fact Exeter’s record over the fourteen years of the latter has been fairly successful, with only 2011 as a disaster. Though initially we resented losing our place as a UCCE to Cardiff, that outcome may have been a blessing in disguise. The UCCE system has not worked entirely well – players have often complained of too much cricket during the pre-exam period and of being cannon-fodder for the counties – and now, in its MCCU phase, the funding is being cut back by MCC after the ECB had washed its hands of the business several years earlier. Exeter has managed to respond to the new challenge and to maintain standards comparable to those of some MCCUs without needing to be one itself. As a single university it has been able to benefit from a clear identity and its own *esprit de corps.*  It is a proud boast to have been the only non-UCCE university to have maintained its position in the top level of BUSA/BUCS competition through the past fourteen years and one that we must fight to keep. Exeter’s tally of four England players stands proud against all but the two ancient universities and, more recently, Durham and Loughborough. It has, in addition, a useful collection of county and first-class players and many at county 2nds and minor county levels. Two Exeter alumni, Elias and Downton, stand high in the administration of English cricket. If the MCCU system ends (and that possibility has been discussed periodically) Exeter would rank clearly among the three top cricket universities in the country. Our Athletic Union prides itself on finishing around 6th in terms of BUCS rankings across all sports. Cricket would aim rather higher. The University has a record of cricket achievement already; the challenge is to ensure much more is to come.

At the Club’s start-of-year meeting a few months ago, the new 1st XI captain, Ollie Mills, emphasised that appearing for Exeter is not something to be taken for granted by players old or new. It should be regarded as an honour and a privilege. Exeter teams stand in a great tradition, one that goes back more than a century through times of great change for the game and for our society. The names that appear in this history show that and many others who have contributed to establishing Exeter’s reputation and position could have been added. Every academic year, every season, has its challenges. I hope that this work whets appetites for those of 2015.

Dedication

Perhaps even as limited a piece of work as this history deserves to have a dedication. The Club has had many fine players over the years but - and not only because it is so fresh in the memory – I dedicate this history to the 2014 1st XI who gave so much to the Club, to the University and to good cricket. It was a privilege to be with them.

January 2015

APPENDIX

It has been impossible to find out the Club or 1st XI captains for the whole period discussed, but the following list gives most of those since 2002. I would be grateful for further information on past holders of the positions.

Club Captains 1st XI Captains

2001-2 Steve Moore 2002-3 Ben Thompson 2003-4 Paul James Neil Turk 2004-5 Ian Haley 2005-6 Paul Short Paul James 2006-7 Ed Loader Tom Stayt 2007-8 Sandy Allen 2008-9 Tom Whiteside Chris Travers 2009-10 Matt Williamson David Cranfield-Thompson 2010-11 Tom Worthington Jon Todd 2011-12 Rhys Jones Joe Barrs 2012-13 Richard Croney Joe Barrs 2013-14 Andrew Curtis Joe Barrs 2014-15 James Rimmer Ollie Mills

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