

CRICKET SPECTATOR DISORDER: MYTHS AND HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

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Although it has become a somewhat hackneyed way to start a paper on cricket, it remains almost impossible to discuss the sport without some reference to its role as the quintessentially “English” game. As far back as 1857, Thomas Hughes in *Tom Brown’s Schooldays*, described cricket as “the birthright of British boys old and young, as *habeas corpus* and trial by jury are of British men”. More recently, in the wake of the perceived threat posed to English sovereignty by the increasing power of the European Parliament, John Major attempted to reassure the British electorate by evoking images of Britain as “the country of long shadows on county (cricket) grounds, warm beer, invincible green suburbs, dog lovers and pool fillers”.¹ Yet such descriptions remain common precisely because they are identifiable for such large sections of the population as a whole. In a recent survey, *Daily Telegraph* readers defined “English character” as “tolerant, reserved, self-deprecating, cheerful in adversity, having a strong sense of fair play and prone to side with the underdog”. Above all, *Daily Telegraph* readers noted, “an Englishman will appreciate and understand the game of cricket”.² Asked also to list the “cultural items” which most accurately signify “Englishness”, village green cricket came second only to fish and chips but above pubs, church bells and the last night of the Proms.³ It is perhaps no exaggeration that, as Maguire and Stead have argued, “Cricket is seen to represent what ‘England’ is and gives meaning to the identity of being ‘English’”⁴.

Many of the images connecting cricket with English national identity relate to a notion of the way the game is played. The common use of phrases such as “playing with a straight bat”, “going in to bat” and “it’s not cricket” are just three examples of the crossover. Yet, in the context of this paper, it is significant that the connection between cricket and “Englishness” is also based on ideas about the behaviour of spectators. The 19th century accounts of John Nyren and Mary Mitford are typical of an imagery of spectatorship as pastoral and passive and inclusive of all sections of a community. For example Mitford, in *Our Village*, (1879) wrote:

I doubt if there be any scene in the world more animating or delightful than a cricket match (the spectators are) retired cricketeers, the veterans of the green, the careful mothers, the girls, and all the boys of two parishes There was not a ten-years-old urchin, or a septuagenary woman in the parish, who did not feel an additional importance, a reflected consequence, in speaking of “our side”.⁵

Early 20th century works like Selincourt’s *The Cricket Match* (1924) and Sassoon’s *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* (1929) provide very similar accounts.⁶ Indeed, reviewing cricket at the turn of the century, Dobbs concludes that,

mental images of Edwardian England seem almost incomplete unless somewhere in the background white-flannelled men run to and fro, or just off-stage, the sound of willow on leather and polite applause filters through the noise in the foreground of the tinkling tea-cups and the horses’ hoofs.⁷

Just as notions of how the game is, was, and “should” be played influence our understanding of what it is to be “English” today, so too do notions of how cricket is, was, and “should” be watched.

This paper reviews some of the historical sources in this area and is presented with a view to shedding some – albeit limited – light on the accuracy of this depiction of cricket spectatorship. As will be seen, the majority of data is derived from secondary sources. Partly because of this, and partly because of the nature of the recording of cricket disorder

(something which will be discussed later), is not my intention, even if it were possible, to present a comprehensive or definitive record. Although this paper seeks to improve the understanding of this phenomenon by drawing together diverse empirical data, in many ways this paper contributes just as much to the theoretical interpretation of sports disorder. This paper does not, as such, set out to prove that particular trends in cricket crowd disorder can be demonstrated but, rather, seeks to provide a more adequate framework for interpretation than currently exists. To this end, in the first section of the paper a brief overview of some instances of 18th and 19th century cricket disorder is presented. In the second, some of the existing theories of cricket crowd disorder are reviewed and finally, in the third section, some recommendations for a more adequate approach to understanding cricket spectator disorder are made.

A Brief Overview of Recorded Cricket Disorder

In contrast to the common depiction of cricket spectatorship as peaceful and non-problematic, those who have examined cricket crowds in the 1700s have stressed their violent nature. Guttman, in *Sports Spectators*, notes that there were frequent disorders at 18th century matches,⁸ whilst Ford goes somewhat further in arguing that “when there was not some sort of commotion it seemed to be thought unusual”. Ford cites the example of the 1783 match between Nottingham and Melton. Despite attracting “an incredible number of spectators” the game was, “to the honour of both parties”, conducted with “the utmost harmony”.⁹ Similarly, in covering the 1787 match between the White Conduit Club and All England, *The Times* reported: “Upwards of 2000 persons were within the ground, who conducted themselves with the utmost decorum; the utility of the batten fence was evident, as it kept out all improper spectators”.¹⁰

These instances of peacefulness stood in sharp contrast to the way in which cricket matches were often conducted. During the 18th century cricket matches were some of the largest social events staged and, partly through the gambling opportunities which games presented, caused considerable local excitement. A match between the parish of Slindon in Surrey and an XI of London played in 1742 was publicised in the press as “the greatest match at cricket that has been played for many years” and a call for spectators to remain calm and orderly was made:

as 'tis expected that there will be the greatest crowd that was known on the like occasion 'tis to be hoped, nay desired, that gentlemen will not crowd in by reason of the very large sums of money which is laid if one of the Sussex gentlemen gets 40 notches himself.¹¹

The scale of these events was such that it was not unusual for crowds of several thousand to assemble. A game in 1751 attracted 10,000 spectators to London's Artillery Ground which Brookes estimates approximated to around 1 in 50 of London's population at that time. The introduction of a clause penalising teams for arriving late and delaying the start of play can be taken as an indication of the seriousness of the threat posed by impatient and potentially disorderly spectators.¹²

Table 1. Early Instances of Cricket Crowd Disorder

1693	Thomas Reynolds, Henry Gunter and Elenor Lansford. fined for their part in riot and battery.
1731	Duke of Richmond and his team assaulted by a mob after turning up late for a match.
1731	Match on Chelsea Common terminated in a gambling-related "free fight" among spectators.
1744	Kent v England, Artillery Ground, London. There was "great disorder so that it was with difficulty that the match was played out".
1747	Charlton v Westdean & Chilgrove at the Artillery Ground, London. Match abandoned due to fighting.
1750	The Prince of Wales awards a woman ten guineas as compensation for a broken leg which she received in a "crush" at London's Artillery Ground.
1765	Surrey v Dartford at the Artillery Ground, London. The first so-called "great" match to be abandoned.
1770s-80s	Disorder among spectators at Hambledon halts play. Nyren described this group of spectators as "the best behaved in the country".
1777	Crowd prevent Stowmarket winning a match, probably due to gambling interests.
1778	Duke of Dorset, impeded by the "Hampshire people", injures one of them with his bat in attempting to play a stroke.
1779	Clapham v Battersea. "A battle was fought between spectators".
1785	White Conduit Club players clash with some "spirited citizens".

- 1788 Leicester vs Coventry. “A scene of bloodshed scarcely to be credited in a country so entirely distinguished by acts of humanity”.
- 1789 Leicester vs Coventry. Match cannot be played to a finish due to a dispute between the players.
- 1792 Following a cricket match, a man fires shots over the heads of Westminster boys who were breaking local residents’ windows.
- 1796 Greenwich pensioners playing at Montpelier Gardens. Fighting and “one or two” arrests.
- 1802 Gangs of between 20 and 30 pickpockets operating at Lord’s. Those who resisted the thefts were threatened at knife point.

Table 1 provides an overview of pre-19th century disorder and highlights a number of characteristics of cricket spectator disorder during this period. Firstly, all but one of the incidents from 1731 to 1777 involved matches being halted or abandoned. More minor disturbances, if they occurred (and the logic of Ford and Guttman’s arguments would indicate that they did), often went unrecorded. It seems likely that the one exception in the list was publicly recorded because it involved the Prince of Wales. Moreover, the 1693 case of Thomas Reynolds, Henry Gunter and Elenor Lansford may be enlightening in this regard. Fined for their part in riot and battery, the convicted three sent a petition to the Queen seeking remission from their fines on the basis that, they were “only spectators at a game of crickets”.¹³ The basis of this appeal, therefore, would appear to be that the imposition of fines was unfair because disorderly behaviour in this context was perhaps seen as socially acceptable. This gives some indication that disorder was relatively frequent and supports the assertion that less severe examples often went unrecorded. Consequently, any attempt at an accurate portrayal of the scale and extent of disorder is impossible.

A second significant characteristic is the varied social mix of those who were involved in disorder. In 1731 the Duke of Richmond and his team were assaulted and in 1778 the Duke of Dorset was involved in an incident where he accidentally struck a spectator whilst batting. “The Hampshire people”, *The Morning Post* records, crowded the Duke such that he felt inhibited from playing a stroke: “his Grace gently expostulated with them on this unfair mode and pointed out their dangers, which having no effect, he, with proper spirit, made full play at a ball and in so doing brought one of the Gentlemen to the Ground”.¹⁴ Other incidents like that involving

members of the White Conduit Club in 1785,¹⁵ boys from Westminster School in 1792 and at Lord's in 1802, illustrate that disorder was not confined solely to the lower classes. Similarly, the Reynolds *et al.* case is also revealing in that it highlights the involvement of women in cricket disorder. This cross-gender, cross-class character of cricket disorder, as we will see, is a continuing theme which sets it apart from spectator disorder at other sports which tends to be largely working class and male based.¹⁶

Such a class and sexual mix at 18th century cricket is both a reflection of, and a reason why, fixtures were such large social events. Furthermore, as Ford argues, the dangers to law and order which large crowds posed, affected all levels of society: "it was a reasonable fear of anyone who had something to lose, for the crowds had few social responsibilities and such sanctions as the law had were difficult to apply when large groups rather than individuals were the transgressors".¹⁷ Partly because of the large number of spectators, and partly because of the anonymity which this provides, cricket fixtures often attracted a criminal element. For example, an estimated crowd of 5000 people attended a match at Montpelier Gardens in London between 11 players with one-arm and 11 with one-leg. Following the match,

the nimble-fingered gentry¹⁸ endeavoured to draw a crowd in order to follow their trade, and for a short time these fellows were never more dextrous; they had a long cord, and threw people down over it as they passed. A scuffle ensued, and several persons lost their watches and money. One or two of the crew were secured, and sent to Newington watch-house (*The Times*, 10th August 1796).¹⁹

Similarly, at Lord's in 1802, gangs of pickpockets numbering between 20 and 30 were in operation. Those who resisted the theft were threatened with violence.²¹ Thus, the limited data available suggest that 18th century cricket crowds were characterised by regular and serious disorder which affected people from all levels of society. It would, therefore, appear that spectatorship at this time was far removed from both the way it was portrayed in 19th century accounts (such as Nyren's and Mitford's) and the way that it is commonly perceived today.

Yet when we move to the 19th century, we can see that “historians agree that crowd control was not a problem”.²¹ Guttmann, citing the descriptions of Mitford and Nyren as evidence,²² concludes that by the mid 19th century cricket crowds could be described as “usually quite civilized”.²³ Sandiford agrees with this view. Victorian cricket crowds, he claims, “behaved very well indeed. They were certainly less rowdy than contemporary gatherings at other sports”.²⁴

Table 2. 19th Century Instances of Cricket Crowd Disorder

1866	Dispute over a boundary at Lords. “So great was the uproar and confusion”, that play was abandoned for the day. The Prince of Wales, who had been watching the match, left the ground immediately.
1870s	Reports of trouble at Bacup vs Haslingden matches in Lancashire.
1873	The MCC committee calls for old and young members of Eton and Harrow schools to prevent future disorder.
1878	Prince’s Cricket Ground, London. A dispute over seating arrangements.
1878	Old Trafford. “The people so inconveniently encroached on the fielding ground so as to stop play”.
1883	Old Trafford. Police deployed to control crowd.
1885	“The Secular Club” of Leicester are stormed by a Christian mob.
1887	The Oval. The large crowd encroaches upon play.
1896	Lords. The deliberate bowling of byes to avoid forcing the opposition follow-on leads to “a very hostile demonstration”.

Such conclusions seem reasonable as there are – especially given developments in the scale of newspaper publishing – relatively few accounts of disorder during the 19th century. Following the 1802 incident at Lord’s (see Table 2), there is a gap of some 60 years until the next recorded incident when disorder, resulting from a dispute over the calling of a boundary, led the Prince of Wales to flee from Lords.²⁵ However, despite this break in evidence, from the reports which we have, we can see elements of both continuity and change. Most notably, the incident involving the Prince of Wales illustrates the continuing role of the aristocracy (and, indeed, royalty) in cricket disorder. Similarly, at the Eton v Harrow Match of 1873, various incidents around the ground led the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) to call for old boys to ensure order at

future matches. For the 1874 game, the MCC warned against “undue exhibitions of party feeling, hoisting being prohibited”.²⁶

Yet there are also significant changes in the character of disorder evident from these reports. If we compare the 18th and 19th century evidence, we can see that incidents from the later period are significantly smaller in scale. As in the 18th century, 19th century disorder often involved the encroachment of spectators on to the field of play but, significantly, unlike the cases from the 1700s, later games were rarely abandoned. A number of incidents towards the end of the 19th century (e.g. at Old Trafford in 1878 and 1883; at the Oval in 1887), were variously attributed in the contemporary press to the increase in cups and leagues, over-crowding or a larger than anticipated turnout as a result of the presence of the so-called “football element”,²⁷ or a “non-cricketing”, “holiday” crowd.²⁸ Vamplew notes that, because of this spate of events, by the 1890s, “there were numerous allegations that crowd behaviour worsened”.²⁹ Yet, even at this supposedly heightened level, reports of disorder are both fewer and of a less serious nature than those of the previous century.

Finally in this section, and although strictly speaking not an instance of disorder, the collapse of a stand holding several thousand in Sheffield in 1822 is useful in portraying something of the attitude towards disorder and resultant injury at this time. Although initial reports about the number of people injured proved to be exaggerated (“It is with painful feelings that we have to add, that two persons were killed on the spot, and between 40 and 50 more or less maimed”³⁰), the stand was re-used the following day when, incidentally, a false alarm led to further panic and a crush. Interestingly, this illustrates a less severe reaction, and a greater tolerance towards the witnessing of injury and bloodshed, than would be the case today.³¹ Furthermore, this incident also re-affirms the impression that women continued to be present at cricket in relatively large numbers. The revised reports noted that nineteen men and four women were admitted to hospital following the collapse of the stand.

Theories of Cricket Crowd Disorder

A number of theories – characterised by varying degrees of depth and sophistication – have been proposed in order to explain levels of cricket

spectator disorder at various times through history. Ford links 18th century disorder to the “spirit” of the age but cites “an unprecedented increase in drinking and gambling among the lower classes” as particularly important factors.³² Guttman, the only person previously to have attempted an 18th/19th century comparison, argues that as a consequence of the so-called “character” of the game, spectators had to be patient and, by implication therefore, passive and non-violent. He states that, “the length of Victorian and later matches symbolised the pace of life in a rural society not yet dominated by an industrial sense of time”.³³ The research problems of Vamplew and Sandiford are slightly different yet the explanations they propose are very similar to Guttman’s. Vamplew attempts to explain the relative peacefulness of cricket crowds at the end of the 19th century compared to their counterparts at football and race meetings. He cites a number of relevant factors, namely: the relative absence of gambling; the proportion of seating which reduced the amount of spectator contact; and the high proportion of middle class spectators for whom “structural strains” would have been relatively low (structural strains, according to Vamplew, are frustrations linked to the deprivation of power and esteem as a result of working conditions). However, like Guttman, Vamplew cites the drawn out nature of cricket which leads to reduced levels of tension amongst the spectators. Sandiford draws heavily on Vamplew’s explanation but, citing the similarities between disturbances at Bacup-Haslingden and Eton-Harrow matches in the 1870s, argues that it is difficult to accept that the more socially respectable spectators were less frustrated than their working class counterparts. Sandiford’s alternative thesis, as Guttman’s and Vamplew’s before him, seeks to explain disorder in relation to the character of the game. Urban workers in an industrialised society, Sandiford claims, do not generally go to a sports event for “quiet and decorum”; rather they seek a release from the tedium of industrialism and an opportunity to vent their emotions.³⁴

When we attempt to look at disorder comparatively we can see that parts of each of these explanations are problematic. Guttman, Sandiford and Vamplew all propose a theory that spectator behaviour is, to some degree, derived from the character of the game. Guttman’s explanation is, in fact, contradicted by his own evidence. If Victorian matches were orderly because they “symbolized the pace of life in a rural society not yet

dominated by an industrial sense of time”, why would *pre*-Victorian matches have been *more* violent? If, as Sandiford and Vamplew claim, the so-called character of the game neither attracts urban workers nor generates levels of excitement high enough for disorder, how can we explain 18th century crowd disorder or spectator violence on the Indian sub-continent, in Australia and the Caribbean, or even at Test Matches at the Edgbaston ground in Birmingham in 1993 and 1998? Counter to these explanations, cricket does not have *a* character but is played in a variety of contexts, attracting people from different social groups for whom the game’s meaning will vary. Aside from being factually incorrect (urban industrial workers in England have, throughout history, been attracted to cricket in large numbers³⁵), Sandiford is mistaken to argue that it is the game which makes cricket spectators quiet and orderly. Rather it is the behaviour of the spectators which makes for the quiet and decorum stereotypically characteristic of the English game. Explanations based on a supposedly identifiable “essence of cricket” must be rejected. These theories are both the product and the producers of notions of cricket and “Englishness” and, as such, should be treated with considerable caution.

Table 3. Early Crowd Control Measures

1726	Fearing that a cricket crowd would cause a rebellion, a Justice of the Peace in Essex, has the spectators dispersed.
1744	George Smith employed to ensure control at the Artillery Ground, London.
1744	Captain Vinegar, “with a great many of his bruisers and bull dogs” employed at Walworth Common, London.
1748?	Prices at the Artillery Ground, London are increased to deter “the poorer sections of society”.
1764	Westminster Magistrates “considering ridding the fields adjacent to the metropolis” of those playing cricket and other games.
1777	Entrance fees of 6d per person at Artillery Fields, London are introduced “to prevent the players being interrupted”.
1796	The Headmaster of Eton (Dr. Keate), having banned the annual match against Westminster, flogged the entire team after his instructions were ignored.
1826	Cooper “and two principal officers of Queen-square” employed to preserve order at the Westminster Town Boys vs Westminster King’s

Scholars match.

1835-42 Thomas Bennett “using his long leash” keeps order during a series of matches between Kent and England.

1842 Thomas Cramp records post match singing and rioting in his diary. “Such is the usual ending of cricket matches”.

1864 MCC employ off duty policemen during fixtures.

Pre-1900 All County Committees introduce regulations similar to those at Lords.

Yet whilst the limited data which we have available suggest that cricket disorder reduced from the 18th to the 19th centuries, there are grounds for thinking that neither the scale nor the trends of disorder are accurately portrayed in historical sources. Table 3 charts various crowd control attempts made by cricketing authorities. As one might expect from the pattern of recorded disorder discussed above, attempts were made in the early to mid 1700s (including the raising of entrance fees and the employment of hired hands) and further, more systematic moves were made at the end of the 19th century. However, similar measures were introduced between the 1820s to ‘40s and we might also note that the Headmasters of Eton and Harrow, emulating their Winchester and Eton predecessors, continued to attempted to ban games between the schools in the 1820s.³⁶ Given the continuity of crowd control measures it would appear that cricket spectator disorder continued in the early 1800s but ceased, temporarily, to be an issue which was addressed in the press.

To explain why disorder was not addressed by the media, we should perhaps pay some attention to the practicalities of cricket reporting. Viewing facilities for the press were so poor that, for instance, Lord’s did not have a press box until 1868 and even as late as 1893 Wisden records that there were complaints about the adequacy of the viewing facilities for the press.³⁷ Consequently, Altham and Swanton argue, “the accounts of the big matches were extremely meagre”.³⁸ In contrast to this, it might be hypothesised, the later development of football grounds meant that the reporting of both games and spectator behaviour could be done with a relatively high degree of accuracy. Additionally, even if such viewing problems were overcome, there was only very limited space available in individual newspapers for match reports. For example, in *The Times* during the early 1800s coverage was often limited to just a scorecard and

a single line of comment. Furthermore, the reporting of matches tended to be haphazard rather than comprehensive in nature. William Denison, “the father of daily cricket reporting”, wrote the bulk of the cricket coverage for *The Times* from the 1820s until his death in 1856 and for much of this period doubled up as a parliamentary reporter.³⁹ Inevitably, as a result of this dual role, Denison would miss large parts of the games on which he was reporting and thus to reproduce the scorecard, with little or no further comment, would have been both convenient and expedient.

More importantly however, there were “social” reasons why cricket disorder was not defined in the press as a problematic issue during this “middle” period. Early recorded incidents of disorder tended to be so significant that they simply had to be commented upon; hence the predominance of incidents involving the abandonment of play. Later incidents were recorded in a non-judgmental manner and rarely, if ever, was any blame apportioned. Journalists, it would appear, were very sympathetic towards any instances of crowd disorder. Initially this may have been partly due to the role of the aristocracy in many of the matches covered. Ford, for instance, notes the “unctuous sycophancy” with which local papers recorded the cricket of local gentlemen in the 1750s.⁴⁰ Later, however, this sympathy may have derived, not from the fact that cricket crowds were peaceful *per se*, but merely because, as Vamplew and Sandiford argue, they were viewed as peaceful in comparison to their counterparts at other sports. For instance, this would explain why late 19th century incidents were often attributed to a “holiday” or “footballing” crowd.

Furthermore, it is also instructive to look at who, specifically, has chronicled and reported on cricket. Cricket’s major historical works have been authored by people such as Warner, Rait-Kerr, Bowen, Altham and Swanton who have held various levels of office in the administration of the game. Similarly Denison, amongst his many roles, was the first secretary of Surrey County Cricket Club and a member of the MCC. Such was his prominence in the organisation that it was he who responded on behalf of the club to the calls for the legalisation of round arm bowling in the 1830s.⁴¹ As establishment figures each of these men may have had a vested interest in portraying a particular image of cricket and, consequently, would be unlikely to have emphasised problems like disorder.⁴² This, in

conjunction with the practical problems of reporting, may explain why spectator disorder was not considered a particularly pressing issue during the early to mid 19th century.

Attempting a More Adequate Approach to Cricket Spectator Disorder

In the previous sections we have looked at the historical evidence relating to cricket crowd disorder and discussed some of the theories which have been proposed to explain it. In summary, although there are grounds for arguing that the reporting of incidents may have served to underplay the phenomenon, the limited evidence which is available would seem to suggest that between the 18th and 19th centuries cricket crowd disorder declined. In this final section an attempt will be made to understand this pattern. Two key points would appear to be particularly significant in this regard: the changing structure of the game and the changing composition of those who played and administered it.

Because of the early codification of cricket – 1727 and 1744 being particularly significant dates⁴³ – it is often assumed that the game was fixed into its modern form at an early stage. One example of why this is false – and the development of round- and over-arm bowling is another – is the use of boundaries. Dunning and Sheard, for example, note how one of the differences between folk games and modern sports is the move towards a clear distinction between playing and spectating roles.⁴⁴ Boundaries are significant in terms of this process, but also in terms of spectator disorder; not only do boundaries mark the playing area but they also serve to separate the game's participants from its non-participants. The absence of boundaries in early matches, therefore, might partly explain why so many of the early instances of disorder involve the abandonment of games due to spectator invasion. Prior to the 19th century the respective captains pitched the wicket in an unprepared field (Altham and Swanton state that this could be anywhere within a 30 yard radius of an agreed spot)⁴⁵ and the game began. With no boundaries, and no clear idea of exactly where the pitch would be, spectators watched from whatever vantage point they could. The informal nature of this arrangement meant that the demarcation of playing and spectating areas was neither clearly established, nor widely accepted, in cricket's early years. Hence, in 1744 we see Captain Vinegar,

his bruisers and dogs, “make the ring” – a term also used in boxing⁴⁶ – in an attempt to separate the players from the spectators.

This informal, unstandardised, use of boundaries continued for many years and at all levels of the game. A report in *The Times* in 1929, makes reference to some of the earliest Eton-Harrow matches (the first match was in 1805, the next in 1818 and the fixture became an annual event from 1822) and indicates the significance of boundaries for understanding levels of spectator disorder. The author of the piece writes,

those early matches were very haphazard affairs. There were, of course, no boundaries, and a fieldsman pursuing a ball hit into a hostile patch of the crowd would have to play a frenzied game of hide-and-seek before recovering it (12 July, 1929).⁴⁷

Although this may provide an indication as to why the schools’ headmasters attempted to ban these early fixtures we can see that, gradually, the playing area became more standardised. In 1823 the responsibility for selecting the pitch moved away from the two captains and was placed in the hands of the umpires. Boundaries, note Altham and Swanton, were gradually introduced from the 1860s (for instance the first boundaries in matches between Eton and Harrow were used in 1864)⁴⁸ and became included within the laws of the game in 1884. Indeed, the playing area in cricket, in comparison to other sports, remains relatively unstandardised. Although the dimensions of the wicket were first outlined in the 1744 code of laws, there remains no minimum or maximum specifications for the positioning of the boundaries. It is no coincidence that some of the oldest grounds have some of the “poorest”, or most irregular, playing areas; for instance the famous slope at Lord’s or the lime tree within the playing area at Kent’s St. Lawrence Ground, Canterbury.

However, not only did cricket change in terms of its structure, there was also a shift in terms of those who played and controlled the game. During the 1700s the game – certainly those games which were reported in newspapers – was notable for two particular features: firstly, though led by members of the aristocracy, games were characterised by a considerable social mix of participants; and secondly, gambling was common amongst both players and spectators of all classes. By the end of the 18th century,

however, these features were beginning to change. Even though, as amongst others Holt has suggested, a distinctive feature of early English cricket was that the aristocracy and commoners played alongside each other,⁴⁹ in many ways the establishment of the MCC in 1787 was symptomatic of the beginning of a process towards greater exclusivity in the game. The incident involving the White Conduit Club in 1785 nicely highlights one of the possible motives for this change. The following report is the first ever reference to cricket to appear in *The Times* and refers to a clash between the club's members and some unnamed others using the same area of the White Conduit Fields on which the club members played.

It is recommended to the Lordling Cricketers who amuse themselves in White Conduit Fields, to procure an Act of Parliament for inclosing their play ground, which will not only prevent their being incommoded, but protect themselves from a repetition of the severe rebuke which they justly merit, and received on Saturday evening from some spirited citizens whom they insulted and attempted *vi et armis* to drive from the foot path, pretending it was within their bounds (22nd June, 1785).⁵⁰

Two phrases from this report serve to illustrate the severity with which this incident was viewed. Firstly, *vi et armis* is a legal term for a kind of trespass; literally meaning by force and arms. Secondly, the reference to "citizens" is perhaps significant because this event occurred between the American (1776) and French (1789) Revolutions, when the use of the word "citizen" would have been particularly revealing of the strength of disdain felt. From this quotation it would appear that social distances were relatively small at this time and, as a manifestation of this, these high status men did not feel it necessary to shun direct, physical confrontation with those "citizens" who, we must presume, were of lower status. But, significantly, if even the aristocrats who formed the MCC could not protect their game from the interruptions caused by outsiders – that is, from a form of "spectator" disorder – then it is doubtful whether others would have been able to do so either. The year following the incident in the White Conduit Fields, Thomas Lord, acting on the advice of the Earl of Winchilsea, leased a piece of land in Dorset Fields, enclosed a private playing area, and established Lord's Cricket Ground. Although the location of Lord's cricket ground has subsequently changed on two occasions, it has re-

mained the headquarters of the MCC ever since.⁵¹ This example shows how the introduction of boundaries and a move towards greater social exclusivity are inter-related and it would seem likely that interruptions such as that discussed here provided part of the motivation for this change.

However, to return to our central point, a distinct shift is identifiable in terms of the social make-up of those controlling and playing cricket in the early 1800s. During this period the British aristocracy, who had dominated cricket in the previous century, underwent a process of considerable change as industrialisation and the emergence of an increasingly wealthy capitalist class served to modify the established social order. As Cannadine has noted, “the new rich sought to catch up with the old” by adopting typically aristocratic social practices acquiring such things as land, art work, titles and honours.⁵² By incorporating this group, the aristocracy expanded. Between 1776 and 1830, 209 new peerages were created and the number of seats in the House of Lords increased from 199 to 358. For their part, aristocratic land holders responded by making agriculture “more rational, more efficient, and more capitalistic” and increasingly became involved in commercial enterprises such as transport, urban development and property rental.⁵³ More and more, members of the aristocracy moved into political positions (both at home and in the Empire more broadly), the civil service, the armed forces and the church. In effect, many of these practices led the aristocracy to become more “middle class”, but the richest, most well-established, and powerful in this group, “looked on with disdain as their inferiors and the parvenus fought it out”.⁵⁴ Although Cannadine does not mention the sport specifically, it is clear that such changes also occurred in the organisation of cricket. Although established largely by titled men, by 1833 the MCC, in terms of membership and administration, could “scarcely be described as an aristocratic institution since only twenty-five, out of a total membership of 202, possessed titles.”⁵⁵ As Bradley’s work on the composition of MCC committee members from 1860-1914 has shown, this trend continued throughout the remainder of the 19th century; “the whole feeling of the general committee was more upper-middle class than aristocratic”.⁵⁶ However, underlining Cannadine’s point that there was a large degree of incorporation of other social classes into the aristocracy at this time, Bradley notes that even “those who were not aristocrats certainly moved with ease in that milieu”.⁵⁷

The new, wealthy, middle classes – the elite of whom, through the acquisition of land and titles could properly be described as having broken into the aristocracy – adopted cricket in an attempt to aggrandise themselves and to aid their movement and assimilation within society’s changing elite. The expanded upper class was the target for much criticism and, Cannadine claims, one of the few concessions made in this respect was to relinquish some of the traditional aristocratic practices the most notable of which, in this instance, was gambling. Thus the social mix and widespread betting which characterised the aristocracy-patronised games of the 1700s began to die out as a new, re-constructed upper class emerged in which the influence of the newly arrived and the aspirant upper-middle classes was increasingly being felt. Despite being a less exclusive group than it once was (indeed, perhaps as a direct consequence of this), the new elite became increasingly exclusionary in practice. To secure their status, they sought to (re-)present themselves not as something new, recent or novel, but as “something old”.⁵⁸ A cricketing manifestation of this was not only the adoption of the traditional amateur-professional distinction, but the placement upon it of far greater significance than had previously been the case. For this reason it is at this time that being a professional cricketer came to mean more than just payment for playing and began to acquire a whole gamut of other meanings.⁵⁹ Similarly it was also during this period that the match between amateurs and professionals began to be played as an annual fixture and to assume its place – alongside the Oxford and Cambridge boat race and cricket match, Royal Ascot, the Henley Regatta and so on – in the calendar of British sporting events.

As cricket began to take on a more class-exclusive character, there appears to be a noticeable decline in both disorder and cricket-related gambling. Though no exact record survives, Wynne-Thomas concludes that book-makers were excluded from the pavilion at Lord’s during the 1820s.⁶⁰ By 1851 James Pycroft in *The Cricket Field* described gambling as “A Dark Chapter in the History of Cricket”. Clauses relating specifically to gambling, which had been so influential in the early codes of cricket laws, were retained until 1884 and indicate that in some settings the practice may have remained common. However, we can see that gambling was not only beginning to decline, but also that it was becoming increasingly disapproved of by those who administered the game. Whilst Ford and Vamplew

are right to note the role of gambling as a relevant factor in early disorder, gambling waned because of the changing social composition of those who played the game. Gambling did not, as such, cause disorder; rather gambling and disorderly incidents were forms of behaviour characteristic of certain groups of spectators. As cricket became increasingly exclusive and the lower classes ceased to attend the more prestigious – and therefore press covered – matches, so disorder seems to have reduced (though, clearly, this is not to say that it disappeared entirely).

Conclusion

As noted in the introduction, the purpose of this paper has been both to draw together diverse empirical data as well as to attempt to improve the theoretical frameworks through which we view such phenomena. Although it is true to say that cricket became more socially exclusive at the beginning of the 19th century it is important for us not to exaggerate the homogeneity of people involved in the organising, playing and spectating of the game. Fixtures involving the touring Professional XIs became particularly popular, attracted spectators from all levels of society and were widely reported in the press around this time. Furthermore, these touring teams normally played against sides which represented particular cities. Given this mixture of lower classes and local identification one would expect crowds to be relatively disorderly and for this disorder to have been reported. It is perhaps surprising, therefore, that there appears to be little recorded evidence of crowd disturbances at these games and an investigation of these matches may prove a fruitful line of enquiry. Other research might focus on the establishment of leagues (with a largely democratic ethos) in the Midlands and the North of the country, the establishment of county clubs (with a largely elitist ethos), and the effects of an increasingly efficient local and national state apparatus able to put more civilised standards of behaviour into effective action (including, for instance, the establishment of the Metropolitan Police in 1829). Similarly, the amplifying and de-amplifying consequences of the press coverage of cricket disorder are, as yet, unclear as, indeed, is the extent to which the historical data might support Elias's theory of civilising processes.⁶¹

However, despite the limited data in this context, it seems to be no coincidence that the mid 19th century is the era in which what Guttman

describes as the “pastoral myth” of cricket – part of what we might describe as the stereotypical notion of cricket and “Englishness” – began to become firmly established. Nyren wrote *The Young Cricketers’ Tutor* in 1833, and Mitford wrote *Our Village* in 1879, and the form of spectatorship which is discussed in these works is far removed from the evidence of the 1700s which shows that cricket was characterised by regular interference with play and widespread gambling and drinking. In Hobsbawm’s terms, there appears to be an invention of cricketing tradition at this point in time. Cricketing disorder probably *did* reduce in the 19th century, largely because of the changing social composition of spectators and the changing way in which the game was played, but during this period new cricketing customs were introduced and the characteristics of the older game were “forgotten”. This is the invented tradition of cricket spectatorship; an invention which influences the way we think that cricket crowds have behaved historically and, for some, should behave today.

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Notes

- 1 Maguire, 1994, p. 414.
- 2 It is interesting to note how easily and uncritically national characteristics are assumed to be the characteristics of men.
- 3 Cited in Marqusee, 1998, p.332.
- 4 Maguire and Stead, 1996, p. 17.
- 5 Cited in Guttman, 1986, p. 78.
- 6 Guttman, 1986, p.80.
- 7 Dobbs, 1973, p. 118.
- 8 Guttman, 1986, p. 79.
- 9 Ford, 1972, p. 131.
- 10 M. Williams, 1985, p. 4.
- 11 Marshall, J. (1959) *Sussex Cricket: A History*, cited in Brookes, 1978, p. 54.
- 12 Brookes, 1978, p. 49.
- 13 Scott, 1989, p. 177.
- 14 Brookes, 1978, p. 40.
- 15 The White Conduit Club, out of which the MCC was formed in 1787, had an overlapping membership with the Star and Garter Club (which was sometimes known as the *Je ne sais quoi* Club) to the extent that they are often confused with one another. Indeed such was this overlap that Wynne Thomas, 1997, concludes that they were one and the same club.
- 16 See for example, Dunning *et al.*, 1988; Smith, 1981.
- 17 Ford, 1972, p. 121.
- 18 One would presume that “nimble-fingered gentry” referred to pickpockets.
- 19 Cited in M. Williams, 1985, p. 11.
- 20 The term pickpockets in this context might be somewhat different to its contemporary usage. Given that these perpetrators were known both to their victims and to the authorities, “muggers” might be a more accurate, contemporary equivalent.
- 21 Guttman, 1986, , p. 102.
- 22 Nyren’s *The Young Cricketers Tutor* reflected upon the period when of the Hambledon Cricket Club was at the forefront of English cricket. However his book was first published in 1833, some fifty years after the most influential patrons of the club had withdrawn and the club’s influence began to wane. Because of this Guttman is perhaps unwise to place too much emphasis on the reliability of his account.
- 23 Guttman, 1986., p. 79.
- 24 Sandiford, 1994, p. 123.
- 25 The significance of boundaries in the context of crowd disorder is discussed below.
- 26 Warner, 1946, p. 69.
- 27 Vamplew, 1980, p. 15.
- 28 Sandiford, 1994., p. 123-5.
- 29 Vamplew, 1980, p. 15.
- 30 Cited in M. Williams, 1985, pp. 14-15.

- 31 Norbert Elias, within the broader theory of “civilising processes”, used the term “threshold of repugnance” to describe changes in people’s attitudes towards incidents such as this. See for instance, Elias and Dunning, 1986, and Elias, 1978.
- 32 Ford, 1972, p. 39.
- 33 Guttman, 1986, p. 79.
- 34 Sandiford, 1994, p. 125.
- 35 See for example, Hill, 1990; J. Williams, 1990, 1999.
- 36 Brookes, 1978, p. 72 notes that the frequency with which the headmasters of public schools attempted to ban games of cricket is an indication of their lack of power over the boys and the ineffectual nature of their rulings.
- 37 Warner, 1946, p. 106-7.
- 38 Altham and Swanton, 1949, p. 130.
- 39 M. Williams, 1985, p. 21.
- 40 Ford, 1972, p. 71.
- 41 Brookes, 1978, pp. 93-94.
- 42 To some extent, this pattern continues today. Leading cricket journalists such as Christopher Martin-Jenkins, Henry Blofeld, Mark Nicholas and David Gower are rather more closely aligned to the administrators of sport than, for instance, are their footballing counterparts.
- 43 For a fuller discussion of the development of the laws of cricket see Rait Kerr, 1950, and Brodribb, 1953.
- 44 Dunning and Sheard, 1979, pp. 33-34.
- 45 Altham and Swanton, 1949, p. 30.
- 46 The idea of making the “ring” was probably first used in boxing where it became common practice to make an inner ring for the fighters and the seconds, and an outer ring for the referee and fight backers. Spectators stood outside this outer ring and hence it also performed the function of a barrier which was designed to stop spectators - perhaps with a betting interest - from interfering with the “playing area”. See Sheard, 1992, p. 205.
- 47 Cited in M. Williams, 1985, pp. 242-243.
- 48 Altham and Swanton, 1949, p. 130.
- 49 Holt, 1989, p. 25.
- 50 M. Williams, 1985, p. 2.
- 51 After its initial founding in Dorset Fields, Thomas Lord moved his ground twice: in 1808 to North Bank in Regents Park and again in 1812 to its current location in St John’s Wood.
- 52 Cannadine, 1994, p. 25.
- 53 Cannadine 1994, p. 14.
- 54 *Cannadine*, 1994, p. 31.
- 55 Brookes, 1978, p. 87.
- 56 Bradley, 1990, p. 8.
- 57 Cannadine, 1994, p. 8.
- 58 Cannadine, 1994, p. 33.
- 59 Brookes, 1978, pp. 83-87.
- 60 Wynne Thomas, 1997, p. 56.
- 61 Elias, 1978.