

The History of Cricket in Bideford

This year we celebrate the 150th anniversary of the formation of the Bideford Cricket Club. This was documented in the Bideford Weekly Gazette back in 1867; a copy of the original article is shown below. At this time all of the local villages nearby including Northam, Appledore, Littleham and Alvington had their own village cricket team. Transport to the majority of these away games was by horse and brake but to some, such as Instow, Braunton and Ilfracombe, the local railway line from Bideford got the players to and from the venues. In the 1920's a number of touring sides from South Wales would come to play local teams and they would make the journey on the regular paddle steamers from Swansea to Ilfracombe.

Clearly with transport being much slower in those days you needed to have plenty of spare time on your hands to commit a full day to playing cricket. So it is perhaps not surprising that towards the end of the 19th century one Bideford team comprised no fewer than 7 members of the local clergy!



Over the years Bideford Cricket Club has been visited by dozens of international test players, two of England's most famous test captains of the 1960's and 70's, Brian Close and Ray Illingworth, played against us in the same game for the Torquay based club Barton. Both, you may not be surprised to hear, scored over 100 not out! One of our most famous regular visitors was Rudyard Kipling who, whilst attending the United Services College in Westward Ho! from 1878 would often relax in the hedge surrounding the ground on a summer's afternoon enjoying the cricket and writing poetry.

During both World Wars the ground was acquired by the Army so no cricket was played for a few years. But it was during the 1930's that Bideford Cricket Club moved to its current ground in Westward Ho! In 1971 the current club, Bideford, Littleham & Westward Ho! to give it its proper title, was formed. In its inaugural season in 1971 the club was captained by a young Andy Davies who is to this day a stalwart of the club, being Treasurer, Groundsman and one of just three Life Members. All cricket at this time was still just friendly cricket and it was not until 1975 that the club joined the North East Devon Cricket League; this eventually became the North Devon League in 1985, the league that Bideford C.C. won for the first time in 1987. In 1981 Bideford joined the Devon League for the first time and today we put out two sides in both the North Devon League and the Devon League.

At Bideford Cricket Club we take pride in the fact that our club is built on the nurturing of young local talent. Ever since the 1980s our Colts section has consistently won League and Cup competitions across the region and has produced a great number of County players across the age groups. It has also provided our Senior teams with a conveyor belt of talented young players who have gone on to become the core of these sides. We hope this will continue for another 150 years!

