

CHAPTER X

CRICKET FIELDS

Cricket Fields—Light Crumbling Soils—Heavy Tenacious Soils—The Size of a Wicket, Playing Square or Table—The Plan of a Pitch—The Way to Move the Pitch—Top-dressings for Cricket Pitches—Why Worms Spoil Cricket Pitches—Nottingham Marl—The Way to True up a Pitch Quickly—How to Prepare a Wicket for Play—Protecting Wickets from Rain.

Cricket Fields

An ideal cricket field should have a fall in the ground of not more than 1 in 85, the same as the level at Lord's. If the lay of the ground allows, let the ground fall away from the wicket on all sides ; if draining or the lay of the ground makes this difficult or impossible, let the ground fall in the natural direction. The soil should be a stiff loam, which is not only suitable for carrying a magnificent turf, but it can be rolled down to produce a fine and true wicket, which neither crumbles in hot weather nor becomes soft and sticky after much rain. When a field is taken over by a club, it is merely a matter of money whether the ground is levelled or not, but the soil, anyhow for the out-field, has to be taken as it stands. If the soil is light and of a sandy nature, it is impossible to make a good wicket, for no matter what labour is expended on it, it is sure to crumble ; on the other hand, if the soil is heavy clay, it will bake during a drought unless well watered, and during a wet spell it will become soft and sticky, and will cut up.

Unless the soil of the ground is suitable, the wicket should be specially prepared in the following manner :—

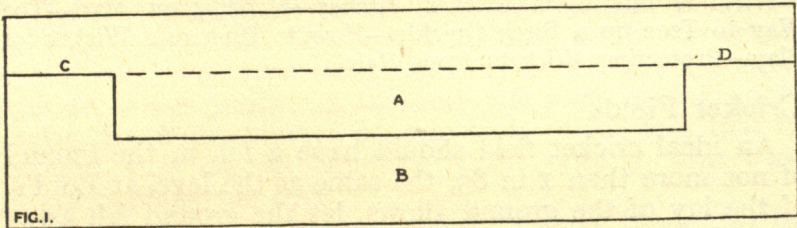
Light Crumbling Soils

Excavate the soil from the wicket to a depth of not less than 9 inches, see Fig. 1, and fill up the cavity with stiff loam, top spit off yellow clay if procurable.

A pitch prepared in this way would be practically perfect, because the imported soil would not only carry a good turf, but it would roll down true and firm and would be perfectly drained owing to the nature of the subsoil.

Heavy Tenacious Soils

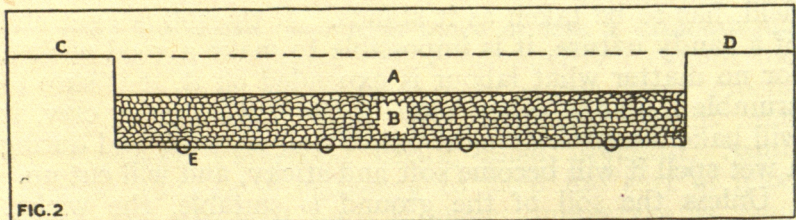
Excavate the soil from the wicket to a depth of not less than 18 to 21 inches, the top spit of soil should be preserved and placed aside, the rest discarded. In the bottom of the cavity lay a system of 3-inch drains, 10 yards apart, great care being taken to see that they are given a good fall and outlet, and herring-bone 2-inch pipes into these 5 yards apart, fill the cavity to within 12 inches of the surface with clean broken bricks or other highly porous material,



- A—Cavity, 9 or more inches deep, filled with good stiff loam.
 B—Natural well-drained light soil.
 C D—Level of ground.

in which there are no pieces larger than $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches square, see Fig. 2.

Ram, roll and beat down the same until it is quite hard and level.



- A—Natural soil.
 B—Broken bricks and other highly porous material.
 C D—Level of ground.
 E—Main drains.

The remaining distance should then be filled up with the preserved top spit of the soil, with which a quantity of sharp sand and well-rotted dung should be mixed to render it more porous and fertile.

The soil and other material should be replaced in layers

not exceeding 2 inches deep, and each layer well rammed and trodden down, so as to make it firm and solid.

In both cases finish off the work by preparing the surface in the usual manner, sow with grass seeds or lay the turf as may be decided.

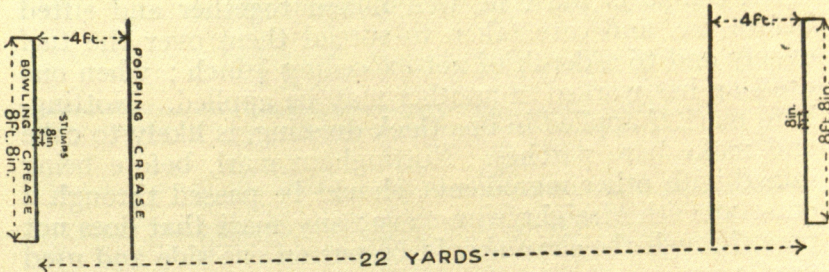
The Size of a Wicket, Playing Square or Table

The recognised area to treat in this manner is anything from 25 to 50 yards square.

The Wickets

The Wickets shall be pitched opposite and parallel to each other at a distance of twenty-two yards. Each wicket shall be eight inches in width, and consist of three stumps, with two bails upon the top. The stumps shall be of equal and sufficient size to prevent the ball from passing through, twenty-seven inches out of the ground. The bails shall be each four inches in length, and when in position, on the top of the stumps, shall not project more than half an inch above them. The wickets shall not be changed during a match, unless the ground between them becomes unfit for play, and then only by consent of both sides.

THE PLAN OF A PITCH



The Bowling Crease

The Bowling Crease shall be in a line with the stumps: eight feet eight inches in length; the stumps in the centre; with a Return Crease at each end, at right angles behind the wicket.

The Popping Crease

The Popping Crease shall be marked four feet from the wicket, parallel to it, and be deemed unlimited in length.

The Way to Move the Pitch

When moving the pitch, move it to the left or right, but keep it absolutely parallel with the old pitches and the creases all in a straight line.

If this is done the part of the pitch upon which the ball actually falls will never be cut up by the bowler or batsman, and the parts of the pitch that are cut up by the bowler and batsman, that is to say, the creases and the ground behind them, can easily be repaired every Autumn, without actually interfering with the pitch proper.

Top-dressing for Cricket Pitches

Top-dress the wicket every year as the season ends and the weather permits.

For light, crumbling soils use a compost made up of two parts good stiff loam, one part Nottingham marl, and one part well-rotted dung.

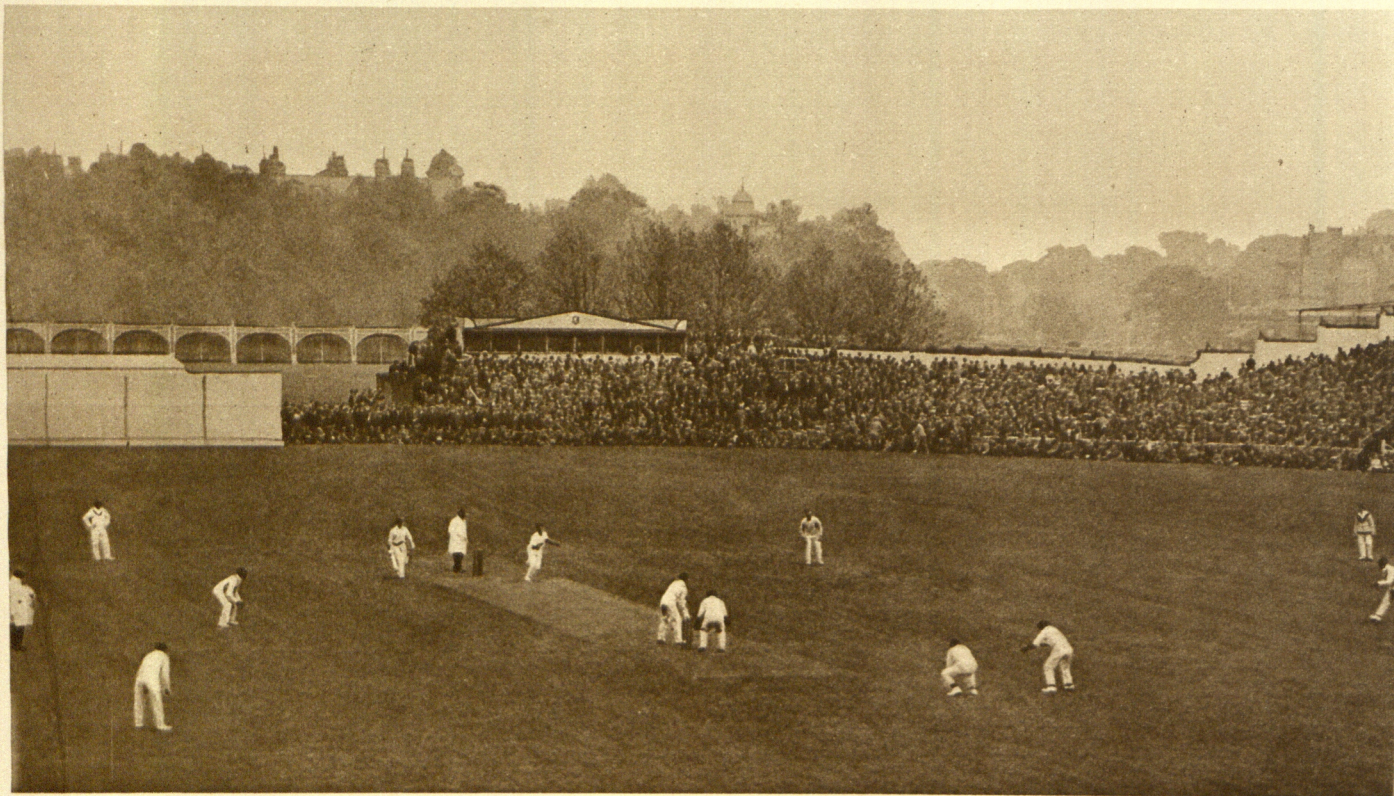
For medium soils that do not crumble, two parts own soil and one part dung.

For heavy, sticky soils, two parts good stiff loamy soil, one part well-rotted dung, and one part Nottingham marl. Prepare all composts one year before they are required for use and apply in a sifted state.

All composts must be well mixed together and sifted before use, and care taken to spread them over the turf evenly and to a depth of not exceeding $\frac{1}{4}$ inch; when one dressing has worked in another may be applied. Nottingham marl, if applied in one thick dressing, is likely to cake and make bare patches. Nottingham marl, before being mixed with other ingredients, should be passed through a one-sixteenth straight wire sieve; any marl that does not pass through the sieve should be put on one side and used next year.

Supplement these dressings in the Spring and early Summer with several quarter-doses of Carters Complete Grass Fertiliser at the rate of half an ounce per square yard, mixed with two or three times its own bulk of sifted compost so as to ensure its even distribution. It is a good practice to put lines down, 4 yards apart, so as to ensure covering the ground evenly—a matter of great importance.

Wickets that are treated in this manner will derive great benefit; the compost applied in the Autumn, being of a slow-acting nature, will nurse the turf through the Winter, and



LORD'S CRICKET GROUND—MIDDLESEX v. SUSSEX.



THE OVAL.

being put on in a sifted state, it will fill up all the little holes in the turf, which make the ball kick so dangerously, and which remain in spite of heavy rolling.

The dressings of Complete Grass Fertiliser in the Spring and early Summer will compensate the ground for the loss of nitrogen, phosphoric acid, lime, potash, etc., carried away with the cut grass.

All holes in wickets made by the batsman or bowler should be repaired with turf directly the match is finished. A wicket cannot be made really first-class if it contains a large quantity of worms.

Why Worms Spoil Cricket Pitches

The continual movement of the worms in the soil gradually makes the level untrue, the surface soft, wet and slippery, which no amount of rolling will remedy.

The burrows of the worms when they collapse form the very small cup-shaped depressions in the surface which make the ball kick so dangerously.

The worm-casts themselves, or the little bare patches caused by the worms, frequently make the ball "work" very differently to the way anticipated by the bowler.

A wormy pitch always cuts up quicker and is more slippery than a wormless and consequently firm pitch.

Brushing off worm-casts damages the turf, as the action of the broom bruises and exposes the surface roots of the grass.

Rolling down worm-casts smothers the fine grasses and is responsible for many bare patches.

A wormy pitch is always more difficult to keep up than one free from worms.

The worm-casts make a natural seed-bed for weeds. A wormy turf is always rotten and breaks up quickly. A pitch freed from worms plays accurately, the turf keeps clean and healthy and does not cut up so quickly when the weather is wet, and as one of the constituents of the Worm-killer is a valuable plant food it immediately improves the growth and texture of the turf. See Chapter XX.

Nottingham Marl and How to Use it on Established Grounds

The marl must be sifted through a one-sixteenth straight-wire sieve, and mixed with good virgin loam, top spit off yellow clay being most suitable for this purpose.

Proportions for first time of using on ground :—One of marl to two of loam ; for subsequent applications, one of marl to three of loam.

Care must be taken thoroughly to mix and spread the compost on the ground to a depth not exceeding a quarter of an inch. When the dressing has gone away, which it should do in three or four weeks, apply a second, and if it goes away freely, even apply a third.

It is a good practice to put down lines 4 yards apart, and then you ensure covering the ground evenly all over, which is very important.

The marl must be applied in light dressings ; if put on all at once it is liable to cake and so cause bare patches.

The Way to True Up a Pitch Quickly

Take 14 lb. of good yellow clay and a bushel of pure cow-dung collected from the fields.

Steep the clay and cow-dung in 36 gallons of water for three or four days, stir it up well and strain it through a hair sieve, when it will be ready for use.

Thoroughly drench the pitch with water and apply the liquid with a can with a rose, then water it in with a hose with a rose, until it whips it up into a creamy condition. Allow the pitch to become nearly dry, then roll with an iron roller.

If this treatment is given a week or ten days before the pitch is required for use it will make the surface absolutely smooth, hard and true.

How to Prepare a Wicket for Play

Assuming that the turf is in good condition and has been properly manured, the preparatory work on the wicket should be started as soon as possible after the break-up of the Winter.

To get the best results from rolling the soil should be heavily rolled when the ground is moist to a considerable depth, and in such a condition that the compression of the soil takes place, not only immediately on the surface, but also to a depth of several inches.

If the preparatory work is put off until, say, March or April, it is quite possible that the soil at a depth has begun to dry out under the influence of the sun and wind, and only the actual surface soil may be moist.

If soil in this condition is rolled with a heavy roller it is bound to have a bad effect, or at least it cannot have the desired effect, because it will only squash a thin layer of soil on the surface instead of gently compressing the soil to a depth.

To get the best results from heavy rolling, the soil must be in such a condition that the compression is felt to a depth of several inches.

When the compression takes place only on the surface, the turf becomes root-bound, and generally remains in a very unsatisfactory condition until the roots are relieved either by the soil being sprung with a fork or eased by a heavy frost.

Protecting the Wicket from Rain

In the Laws of Cricket, Law No. 9 provides that "The ground shall not be rolled, watered, covered, mown or beaten during a match, etc., etc."

Mr. Bumble stated that "The Law is a hass," and I am just wondering if this is the law he referred to.

Just think of the number of games that are drawn or abandoned during a wet season ; granted in many cases the weather is continuously wet and they have to be abandoned anyhow, but what of those that are delayed or abandoned because the wicket is unplayable, and yet the sun may be shining overhead !

I submit that it would not in any way interfere with the purity of the game or its traditions if the word "covered" were deleted from Law No. 9 and made the subject-matter of another law, laying down that "The wicket shall be covered and protected from the rain both before and during the progress of a match," with the express object of defeating the clerk of the weather as often as possible, and avoiding the disappointment connected with delayed or abandoned games.

I know I have no right to make such a suggestion, but I am confident that I am expressing the views of my friends and a goodly number of the general public, who regard it as almost criminal to allow a wicket to get wet and unplayable when it could so easily be protected by the use of paulins or waterproof sheets, say three measuring 15 yards square for easy handling.

Since writing the above the following appeared in *The Times* on September 5th, 1923 :—

Cricket Pitches

“ I am sure it would be to the interest of cricket if it were permissible to protect pitches, say, three days before and during a match. Not only would players have a better chance to play the game, but the public would be more sure of enjoyment. The hardship of a wet out-field is not nearly as bad as being unable to play a game.—The REV. ST. JOHN MACDONALD, Harrietsham.”