

THE HISTORY OF THE SUSSEX MARTLETS GOLFING SOCIETY 1920 - 2005

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Little or no cricket was played on Sundays just after the First World War, and the gentlemen or amateurs usually played golf, especially when the County was playing away. The Sundius-Smith family entertained the golfers of the visiting County sides to Hove at the West Hove Golf Club on Sundays, and asked their Sussex Martlet cricket friends to join them.

The idea of starting the "Martlets" came from J.K Mathews, aided and abetted by A.E.R.Gilligan, who was then the County Cricket Captain, and 'JK' became the first Hon. Secretary. No accounts were ever kept and the subscription was half-a-crown. Matches were arranged with Sussex Clubs, including Worthing, Southdown(Shoreham), Goodwood, Liphook, Seaford, Piltdown, Littlehampton and J.Goddard's side at Sunningdale Golf Club.

There were no hard and fast rules, but the Society was to play against strong opposition from the Sussex Clubs - two ball foursomes only to be played, and anybody who dared to suggest playing a fourball was considered a complete outcast and appropriately dealt with. It was also an unwritten law that no Martlet would dream of querying the pairings of the team arranged by the Captain - or venture to voice his personal choice of partner.

All matches were to be played in the off season - from October to April - and there would be no competition days. The Society has never had a home course and has always insisted that we are paying guests of our opponents and been allowed to have an equal share in the entertainment. Over the years many amusing stories could be told and have tended to become more embellished as time has gone on. All this is still very much the practice, though we have had to make some concession to the wish of one or two Clubs who like to play fourballs.

It was at a Martlets match against J Goddard's side at Sunningdale in 1932 that the idea of forming the County Cricketers' Golfing Society(CCGS) was made, those cricketers present including AER Gilligan (Sussex and England), and AHH Gilligan and 'JK' (both Sussex). The result was the founding of the CCGS in 1935, which is thriving with a large membership of those who have played first class cricket, including several current Martlets - Pat Mathews (Secretary, Captain -1971, and President - 1975-79), Tony Thackara and Geoff Seaton (Captain - 2000).

The following Martlets have all won the Sussex Amateur Championship:

DF Sundius-Smith	1920
D Watson	1932 & 34
DD Grant-White	1936 & 54
JH Langmead	1949

In which the following Martlets also have been runners-up:

H Mathews	1921
GH Lintott	1929
BL Sundius-Smith	1930
JK Mathews	1933
KB Scott	1936
JH Langmead	1950
WNF Sabey	1977

In addition the following Martlets have played golf for Sussex on various occasions

AER Gilligan
HJC Collett
D Richardson
EA Snow
JO Lintott
JBF Mathews (Dan)
TCH Mathews (Tom - Kenya Amateur Champion 1955)
KPA Mathews (Pat)
NRM Philcox
WNF Sabey

AER Gilligan was President of the English Golf Union and Captain of the Sussex Golf Union, and P Hunt was once runner-up in the Hampshire Golf Championship and Hampshire President. A notable event was the all Martlet final in the 1956 national Father & Sons tournament at West Hill, when 'JK' and Pat Mathews beat Jack and Donald Langmead. From the foregoing, it will be apparent how central the Mathews family ('JK' and his three sons Dan, Tom and Pat) have been to the history of the Martlets. Similarly the Langmead dynasty; Jack, who represented Sussex in five different sports, his son Donald who managed the Littlehampton match, and daughter Juliet, Ted Morgan's widow, who has been a leading figure in the Ladies County Golf. Ted himself managed both the Hankley Common and Piltdown matches, and their sons Simon and Andy Morgan are current match managers.

During the post war years the Society grew in membership and played more matches. A two day match with Rye was started in 1953 and is still one of our principal fixtures, although now only played on one day. This match took the place of the Kent & Sussex Cricketers fixture, which was always played on the Sunday of the Hastings Cricket week.

No Match Manager is appointed unless he has been presented with his Golfing Colours which is a tie - Dark Blue (Oxford), Light Blue (Cambridge or Eton) and Pink (Charterhouse) on a green background. The tie is presented by the Senior Martlet present and is not given until it is agreed that the candidate has played with success in a number of matches and, importantly, knows 'the form'. A Society flag is always flown at matches, being of the same colours as the tie with the Martlet motif in the centre.

When Dan Mathews finally retired in 1998 after forty five years as Hon. Secretary, some forty or so Martlets gathered at the Martlets match at West Sussex to pay tribute to him for all his devotion to the Martlets, with a presentation. Ham Whitty took over from Dan as Hon. Secretary, only the third holder of that position in seventy five years, (but thinks it unlikely that he will still be doing the job in 2043!)

The Martlets Golfing Society continues to flourish with about forty or so active playing members. Over the last twenty years our fixture list has been sensibly trimmed a little for a variety of reasons, but the ethos of our golf has been fully sustained, and we continue to be privileged to be able to play against many of the oldest and best clubs, and on some of the finest courses, in Sussex. The Society now plays nine matches in the cricketing off season in the months of March, April, September and October against Royal Ashdown, West Sussex, Hankley Common, Littlehampton, Piltdown, Cooden Beach, Seaford, Rye, with a new fixture in March against the Bluemantles at Seaford.

There is also a very enjoyable golf day in the Spring to which all golfing Martlets are welcome. We are now much looking forward to appropriate golfing celebrations of the Martlets Centenary in 2005.

In a world somewhat removed from the first few decades of the Martlets, we no longer boast current Sussex champions or County players within our ranks, and the average age has tended to rise a modicum. That seems to be the way of the world these days in wandering clubs, be they cricket or golf, but we have been encouraged in recent years by a number of younger Martlets who have played for the Society, and we hope that this trend will continue in order to ensure that the Martlets continues to flourish for the next eighty- five years and beyond: it is a wonderful Society, that enhances the wider reputation of our great cricket club, gives huge fun and enjoyment to all who participate, and is a priceless means of sustaining old friendships between Martlet cricketers after their cricketing days are over.

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