

## Somerset County Cricket at Wells

After the success of staging County cricket on the outgrounds of Yeovil and Frome, the Athletic Field at Rowdens Road, Wells joined the list in 1934 when Somerset played Worcestershire. The picturesque cathedral City had good road and rail communications and a City Council which was very keen and supportive of staging first class cricket. A total of eleven County Championships games were played here on an annual basis from 1934 to 1951 (with a six-year break in between for World War Two).

The playing record was four wins, two draws and five losses. There were three mitigating factors which influenced the games at Wells – the weather, attendances and the cricket.

**Weather:** Wells invariably had bad luck with the weather losing a lot of game time to rain and with it being a very open ground the games staged in May suffered from cold biting winds. Both had a significant effect on attendances.

**Attendances:** The local Committee tried hard to encourage more spectators to attend and would have liked crowds totalling over 5000 for each game. However, they were not helped by nine of the matches starting on a Wednesday, thereby depriving mill and factory workers from watching the County on their Saturday off. In one of the two matches that did start on a Saturday rain prevented any play in the 1948 game against Warwickshire. Crowds exceeded 2000 only on a couple of days and even the Yorkshire match only attracted 4000 over the three days.

**Cricket:** Somerset found run scoring very difficult at Wells. Only once did an innings total past 300 whilst only one batsman managed to get past 100 – Harold Gimblett managed this twice scoring centuries against Hampshire and Leicestershire. Another notable achievement came from Aruther Wellard who twice hit five consecutive sixes in (1936 and 1938). There were also some very low scores as Somerset were dismissed for two scores in the 50's and two in the 70's.

The bowling fared better and Wellard in particular always liked bowling at Wells. He recorded bowling figures of five wickets or more on eight occasions. This included 13 wickets in the game against Kent and 12 against Essex.

## **Match Miscellanea**

**July 1935** Worcestershire beat Somerset by an innings and 105 runs

The first County game ended in two days. Although sightscreens were available, they were not used and this caused problems when spectators walked behind the bowler's arm. Somerset gave a County debut to Ernest Falck (a prolific run scorer for Wells CC) and he was the only batsman to reach double figures in the first innings, scoring 28 of the 56 runs total.

**August 1936** Somerset beat Derbyshire by one wicket

In the second innings Wellard scored 30 off one over from Thomas Armstrong. Five consecutive sixes included three straight drives hit out of the ground. Somerset's last wicket pair needed to score nine runs to win the game.

**July 1937** Somerset beat Hampshire by 69 runs

Gimblett hit the highest first-class score at Wells – 141 including 16 fours and 9 sixes. There was a late afternoon start on day one due to rain which affected the attendance with takings down 50% on the previous year.

**August 1938** Somerset beat Kent by 26 runs

Frank Wolley played his last game in the West Country and it was a game he would not forget as Wellard hit him for five consecutive sixes in one over. He was hit out of the ground four times which resulted in three lost balls. Wellard was denied the maximum six sixes when he hit the last ball of the over towards the sight screen where he was dropped by Bryan Valentine. There was a good attendance of 2196 on the first day.

**July 1939** Essex beat Somerset by 123 runs

The wicket was a bowler's paradise as 22 wickets fell on day one for only 198 runs. Both teams recorded their lowest scores of the season and only six boundaries were recorded in both first innings. Somerset's last seven wickets fell for only 11 runs.

**July 1946** Somerset beat Leicestershire by four wickets

In the first game after the War, Gimblett hit a chanceless 118 with eleven boundaries. Somerset made hard work of chasing 142 to win. Spectators were unhappy with the catering. Before the war the caterers put on a 'decent lunch' but despite bread rationing the only food available was

sandwiches and sausage rolls. They also ran out of beer – but there was plenty of local cider as an alternative!

**July 1947** Somerset drew with Nottinghamshire

Another game badly affected by rain with day three completely lost. After the match the Bath Chronicle reported 'There are moves afoot to give the Wells County match to Glastonbury and to abandon the Frome fixture'.

**May 1948** Somerset drew with Warwickshire

No play on the first day and the players spent more time off the pitch than on. Somerset remained pointless in the County Championship

**May 1949** Yorkshire beat Somerset by three wickets

Yorkshire give a County Championship debut to Brian Close, who later in his career would go on and captain Somerset. For the third consecutive game the match suffered from bad weather but it didn't stop the visitors who won with only 10 minutes to spare, chasing 196 for a three wicket win.

**May 1950** Surrey beat Somerset by nine wickets

Preceding this game the County Committee announced that Glastonbury would be a home venue for Somerset in 1952. Although the weather was dry this game was played in a biting cold wind with players waiting to bat in overcoats. Surrey romped to an easy win.

**July 1951** Warwickshire beat Somerset by an innings and 122 runs.

This turned out to be the last first-class game played at Wells and Warwicks won inside two days after claiming the extra 30 mins play at the end of day two. For once the weather was perfect and the visitors scored the highest innings total at Wells – 397 for nine. Somerset were forced to follow on and collapsed to 102 all out, thus recording their heaviest defeat at this venue.

**The End:** At the end of the 1951 season Somerset announced 'for the first time since the 1930's that County Cricket would cease at both the Wells and Frome grounds and would go to Glastonbury'.

The move to Glastonbury was a big success and despite pressure from the City Council, County Cricket never returned to Wells.

In subsequent years the ground hosted a few games for the County in both the 2<sup>nd</sup> XI Championship and the Minor Counties competition.

Wells CC continued to play at Rowdens Road but have since moved to the old Mendip Hospital Ground on the opposite side of the city. Their original ground has now been taken over by Wells Football Club.



1938 Aerialfilms : The ground pictured after the Kent fixture



Today's view: Google

GREAT ATTRACTION.  
County Cricket Match.

**SOMERSET v. KENT**  
 AT WELLS  
**AUGUST 24th, 25th, 26th**

“SIXER” WELLARD  
 FRANK WOOLLEY  
 “BLIZZARD” ANDREWS

1st Day 11.30—6.45, 2nd Day 11—6.45, 3rd Day 11—4.30 or 5  
 Prices as usual. (IF NECESSARY)

**A DANCE**

to which the Players of both teams will be invited will be  
 held in the Town Hall, Wells, on Wednesday, August 24th.  
 9 till 2 a.m.

COUNTY CRICKET

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**SOMERSET**

VERSUS

**NOTTINGHAM**

AT THE ATHLETIC GROUND

**WELLS**

Wednesday Thursday Friday

**July 9th, 10th, 11th**

Hours of Play: **FIRST DAY** 11.30 a.m. - 7.30 p.m.  
**SECOND DAY** 11.30 a.m. - 7.30 p.m.  
**THIRD DAY** 11.30 a.m. - 2.45 or 3.15 p.m.  
(if necessary)

**ADMISSION 2/-** **AFTER 4 P.M. 1/-**  
(including Tax) (including Tax)

**SCHOOL CHILDREN HALF PRICE**

W. I. GADD, Local Hon. Secretary.  
 BRIG. E. H. LANCASTER, Hon. Secretary, Somerset House, Taunton.

Adverts in Wells Journal 1938 and 1947



Rowdens Road today looking towards the pavilion. The cricket square would have been sited behind the fence and right floodlight.



1949 Bristol Evening Post