

A Hundred and Twenty-Five Years of Cricket at Avenue Road

By Paul Sussex with acknowledgement to Ryland Wallace

Excitement was building towards the end of the 1895 season as the chance of a permanent home for Abergavenny Cricket Club moved a little closer to reality. In the annual general meeting held at the Greyhound Hotel under the presidency of Dr Paton it was decided to accept the Marquess of Abergavenny's offer of a suitable field near to Avenue Road and as a result the new ground at Penypound was opened on May 16th 1896. After many years of searching around the club at last found a home where the game could be played under conditions that promised a successful future.

As the *Abergavenny Chronicle* pointed out at the time: 'The national pastime has for many years been languishing in Abergavenny and those that have the welfare of the younger inhabitants of the town at heart have vainly sought a suitable ground where the game could flourish and provide fresh life and vigour to lovers of cricket'.

The Marquess had in effect rescued the club from this unfortunate position and generously provided it with a properly laid-out field. Alongside this went a pavilion, a fund for which had been started some years earlier, and 'a pretty structure' was designed and erected by Mr W. White.

The opening of the ground was a grand affair with a game arranged between Abergavenny and District and a South Wales team. The weather was perfect and a crowd of more than 350 attended. The Marquess of Abergavenny and several members of the leading families of the county were present. W. C. Williams of the Greyhound Hotel undertook the catering and a large company sat down for lunch in the spacious marquee provided for the occasion.

Fifteen years later, a new larger pavilion was constructed, once again due to the generosity of the Marquess of Abergavenny. The main facade – which can be seen in a team photograph taken in 1911 – has not changed in the 110 years of its existence. And this was despite the dramatic attempt by suffragettes to burn the building down in August 1913 during the week of the National Eisteddfod in the town. The club caretaker, who was supposedly on guard duty, had fallen asleep but fortunately a night-duty policeman noticed the smoke and raised the alarm and only the pavilion door was damaged.

It is especially important to remember such rich history and to recall the vision of the club committee in 1896 to provide a thriving local centre for cricketing enthusiasts. At no time today is the success of this ambition more vividly apparent than by visiting the highly attractive Avenue Road ground on the weekly Friday junior evenings, when scores of youngsters from the town and neighbouring villages turn up to practice, play and enjoy the fruits of a facility first unveiled a century and a quarter ago.

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By Paul Sussex

Excitement was building towards the end of the 1895 season as the chance of a permanent home for the Abergavenny Cricket Club moved a little closer to reality. In the AGM held at the Greyhound Hotel under the Presidency of Dr Paton it was decided to accept the Marquess of Abergavenny's offer of a suitable field near to Avenue Road and the new ground in Penypound was opened on May 16th 1896.

After many years of waiting the club at last found a home where the game could be played under conditions that promised a successful future.

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Lord Abergavenny had in effect rescued the club from its unfortunate position and generously provided it with a properly laid out field.

The Club also became the proud owner of a new pavilion, a pavilion fund which was started some year ago was utilised and 'a pretty structure' was erected designed by Mr W.White

The opening was a grand affair with a game arranged between Abergavenny and District and a South Wales team. The weather was perfect and a crowd of 350 plus watched the game. The Marquess of Abergavenny and several members of the county families were present. WC Williams of the Greyhound Hotel catered and a large company sat down for lunch in the spacious marquee provided for the occasion.

The pavilion as we see it today was built in 1911, once again due to the generosity of the Marquess of Abergavenny, the main facade which can be seen in a First X1 photo taken in 1911 has not changed in all the 110 years of its existence, this despite the efforts of the Suffragette movement in August 1913 who attempted to burn down the pavilion. Security that had been set up and the caretaker who had been sleeping in the building needed to escape through one of the windows.

Around the pavilion were found Suffragette literature and copies of 'Votes for Women' and on a piece of paper was found written " If Mrs Pankhurst dies, Lloyd George will be the murderer" A poster stuck to the pavilion door said " Apply to Lloyd George for damages'

It is especially important in 2021 to remember this rich history and to think that the legacy of the those gentlemen of the Committee in 1896 is being realised by the youngsters of the town and neighbouring villages who still enjoy the fruits of an idea planted 125 years ago. Anyone in attendance at Junior night at Avenue Road will vouch for the dream being a reality