

# Howzat



There was a long drought in Central Africa. The witch doctor had tried all his rainmaking dances, imprecations, but to no avail. One of the elders observed that rain was never a problem in England, so why not send the witch doctor to London to learn the secret. Off he went to England, learned the secret, and returned to the tribe. He informed the leaders that these crazy white men had a big paddock of grass enclosed by a white picket fence. In the middle were two lots of sticks driven into the ground. Two men, each with a club, stood next to these sticks and waited for a lot of other men to spread themselves all over the paddock. Then two more men, wearing black trousers, four sweaters and six hats, came out to keep a close watch on the men with the clubs. Then one man got a red rock and threw it at one of the fellers with a club. AND DOWN CAME THE RAIN!

Cricket, for many, has been and will always be a mystery. Much has been written about exactly where and when Cricket started. Its name probably derives from the Saxon "cpcyce" - a stick, its origins possibly in club-ball, bat-and-ball and trap-ball. As David Gower says in his foreword to John Goldsmith's *Hambledon* "Trying to unravel the exact and true origins of cricket is one of the great medieval mysteries, with much of the answer lying in and around the village now known as Hambledon. It was the Hambledon team of the late 18th century that 'raised cricket from a sport to an art', in an era when the local team was more than a match for any All England team, and when it seemed that the Bat and Ball Inn, was the centre of the cricketing universe."

But what of the terms used in modern match play, what are their origins? The use of the words 'On' and 'Off' for example, probably originate from the 'off side' and the 'near side' of a horse, the 'off side' being the opposite side to which the rider mounts. Indeed some of the early writings about cricket refer to the 'leg side' as the 'near side' however this didn't appear to last.

'Mid On' and 'Mid Off' are simply a contraction of the earlier positions 'middle wicket off' and 'middle wicket on'. Manuals written in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century all show 'middle wicket' as one of the standard positions of that time, however an equivalent leg-side position was also occasionally used, hence the two derivations. The origin of the slips is hinted at in an early



description of the long stop who "is required to cover many slips from the bat" and the name 'gully' suggests a channel between the 'point' and the 'slips'. 'Point' meanwhile stems from the very early days of the game when the position was referred to as 'the point of the bat' or indeed 'bat's end'. Both terms indicating that the fielder stood very close to the bating position.

Other cricketing terms are not so clear cut. Take the term 'Chinaman': The delivery bowled by a left-armed bowling leg-spin. Leg-spin is bowled out of the back of the hand. The use of 'Chinaman' has often been a source of argument because people erroneously look at the direction of spin as the result of the bowling method. Because the ball is bowled out of the back of the left-hander's hand, in the same manner as by a right-hander, the method is leg-spin. Because the left-hander's spin has the same effect as a right-arm off-spinner, it would be wrong to call the left-hander's bowling off-spin, just as it would be wrong to call a left-arm orthodox spinner, a leg-spinner. The left-arm orthodox spinner delivers his ball with a finger-spin method, not out of the back of the hand. Any other stance is discriminatory towards already over-disadvantaged left-handers. However, some, most notably in Australia and the West Indies regard a Chinaman delivery as the left-arm leg-spinner's googly, which has the same effect as the right-arm leg-spinner. Origins of the term are often debated, but may have their origins with West Indian left-arm leg-spinner Ellis Ahchong who played in the early West Indian Test sides of 1929-33.