

SPORTING ECCENTRICS

Sir Charles Aubrey “CB” Smith was one of the great English cricketing toffs.

He captained Surrey for two seasons in 1887 and 1888., and also captained England on his one and only Test appearance.

Later in his life he became a Hollywood actor, appearing in such films as “The Prisoner of Zenda” and “The Life of a Bengal Lancer” always getting cast as an English Aristocrat.

One day, during his cricketing career, Smith was fielding in the slips when he fumbled a catch.

He stopped play, requested his butler be brought on to the pitch, and instructed him to fetch his spectacles.

Several minutes later, with the other players standing around waiting to resume play, the manservant duly returned with the spectacles.

A couple of overs later Smith dropped another easy catch.

“Damn fool” he bawled at the butler, “you brought me my reading glasses.”

SPORTING ECCENTRICS (2)

The Yorkshire Cricket Club slow left arm bowler, Bobby Peel played cricket for England from 1884 to 1896.

He was regularly inebriated during matches, often drinking himself into a state tactfully referred to in the cricketing bible Wisden as “unwell” or “gone away”.

During one county game the Yorkshire captain Lord Hawke was forced to suspend Peel from the side for “running the wrong way” and “bowling at the pavilion in the belief that it

was the batsman.”

Peel was eventually sacked from the Yorkshire Team after his performance at Edgbaston in May 1896.

During an unbeaten partnership of 367 with Lord Hawke, Peel relieved himself on the pitch.

SPORTING ECCENTRICS (3)

Lionel, Lord Tennyson, was the cricketing grandson of the famous poet Alfred, and captained Hampshire in the late 1940's.

Tennyson played the part of the true English aristocrat to the hilt.

Hampshire's wicketkeeper at that time, Walter Livesey, was also Tennyson's manservant.

He was always required to pack his master's cricket bag, with instructions from his captain and master to pack enough champagne to celebrate a victory or drown a defeat.

When watching from the pavilion, Tennyson liked to keep in touch with his batsmen by telegram.

On one occasion a Hampshire batsman was struggling to make contact with the ball, and was surprised to see a bell boy trotting towards him with a silver salver on which was perched a small envelope.

Inside the envelope was a telegram from the captain, demanding to know whether the recipient knew what his bat was for.

ECCENTRIC GENIUS

If the cliché “mad scientist” had not existed already they would have had to invent it to describe Geoffrey Nathaniel Pyke.

During the Second world War, he was appointed civilian adviser to Combined Operations, a special unit headed by his friend Lord Mountbatten.

In 1939 Pyke hatched the first of a series of truly eccentric plans that were to earn him the name of “Professor Brainstorm”.

He devised a cunning plan to avert the War by simply presenting the results of an opinion poll to Hitler showing that the majority of Germans wanted peace.

Hitler would see the results, become discouraged and call the whole thing off.

As Pyke correctly assumed that the fascist dictator was probably against opinion polls, and thus ordinary pollsters would be unable to do the job, Pyke planned to flood Germany with students, disguised as golfers, carrying clipboards in one hand and golf clubs in the other.

(Germany was not at that time known to be a nation of golf enthusiasts.)

Pyke did, in fact persuade a few students to dress up as golfers and travel to Germany.

Unfortunately Hitler had other ideas and invaded Poland anyway.

Fortunately the students were able to flee before the Gestapo spotted them.

Pyke was then asked to come up with a plan for the destruction of Romania's oil fields.

He suggested sending in St Bernard dogs carrying brandy, so that the Romanian guards would get drunk before the British attacked.

He later improved on the plan by recommending that women carry the brandy—even more distracting!

When neither idea found much favour with the military he came up with a new ploy: start a few small fires, then the British commandos could simply drive about the oilfields dressed as Romanian firemen in replica fire engines.

Instead of putting out the fires, the “firemen” would stoke them up by spraying them with water mixed with fused incendiary bombs.

Pyke's most spectacular invention was the ship “Habbabuk”, a huge aircraft carrier, half a mile long, made entirely of ice reinforced with wood shavings--- a material he modestly dubbed “Pykerete”

The ship would be fitted with self refrigerating apparatus, to keep it from melting.

As the hull was thirty foot thick it would be virtually unsinkable.

The plan was to sail into ports and capture enemy warships by spraying them with super cooled water, encasing them in ice and forcing them to surrender.

Blocks of “Pykerete” would then be used to build a barrier round the port, making an impregnable fortress.

From there special teams would spread out into the countryside, spraying railway tunnels with super cooled water to seal them up and paralyse transport.

Understandably very few of Pyke's projects ever got off the ground and he

ended the war a bitter and disillusioned man.