

The SABR(UK) Examiner

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**RESEARCH
SPECIAL**

THE JOURNAL OF THE BOBBY THOMSON CHAPTER OF THE SOCIETY FOR AMERICAN BASEBALL RESEARCH (UK)

BRITISH BASEBALL RESEARCH TAKES OFF!

While we are still very much at the foot of the mountain in relation to the History Committee's ambition of producing a comprehensive account of baseball in these islands, preparations for the ascent have been going on.

During November I had an opportunity to spend a week (some of it in company with Chapter President Mike Ross) in the British Library Newspaper Library at Colindale. The purpose of the time spent there was not to pursue any specific subject, but rather to begin collating an index of periodical sources which may be of use to other baseball historians pursuing research on specific topics. This, while intriguing and rewarding for the interested researcher, is a very hit and run process requiring strong detective instincts and a good deal of lateral thinking.

The basic problem is that base-

EDITOR'S NOTE:

Welcome to the latest number of the SABR(UK) Examiner. This time we put research to the fore, and we've also broken ground in that we've got five different contributors - keep those articles coming in!

Congratulations to Patrick Morley - his article "An Englishman Plays His First Game" appeared in *The National Pastime*. We missed scooping TNP because we wanted to put his submission in the Historical Issue.

Our friend Chris Harte is also a member of the Association of Sports Historians. He wants to inform us all about ASH, so we've enclosed a pamphlet. You should find it compelling.

If any of these discoveries intrigues you, remember that we are scratching the surface and there is "a lot more where that came from".

ball has almost always been treated in British publications in a tangential manner; interest being focused not on the game itself, as a game, but rather as a curiosity or a phenomenon of transatlantic socio-sporting cross-culture. This makes it difficult to know where to start, particularly in relation to the period prior to the Wright/Spalding Red Stockings-Athletic tour of 1874. I have come to think of the century preceding this watershed event as the Dark Ages of British Baseball history, the period during which the various bat and ball diamond games failed on this side of the Atlantic to evolve and unify, as did baseball in America, from casual childrens' pastimes into a naturedly-codified mass participation sport. The social, cultural, economic and political reasons for that failure, I feel, lie at the core of our studies.

On the other hand, Ian Smyth in Leeds is continuing and expanding his study of the 1938 England/America "Test" Series, and has, through the Committee, written to the SABR Bulletin requesting help in researching the histories of various Canadians (Ross Kendrick in particular) who played for England at that time.

More research is being carried on by History Committee members and we depend on them to keep us, the Chapter and SABR at large informed of their progress. We're here to hear, and to help.

We have made some interesting discoveries in the short time we have been searching; more of these in coming issues of the *Examiner*. So far, what we are discovering has raised more questions than it has resolved. But the questions are getting more and more specific. We're on the right track.

- Patrick Carroll

BOBBY THOMSON CHAPTER'S OWN VER- SION OF BURNS' NIGHT

On January 28, on or near the traditional Scottish Robert Burns' Night, the History Committee plans to have its own SABR version designed for baseball fanatics. The gathering - appropriate to a Chapter with a Patron native to Glasgow and whose nickname is "The Staten Island Scot" - will enable members to meet and update each other on research and other progress and also (courtesy of Martin Hoerchner) to view the first two-hour "inning" of Ken Burns' monumental nine-part PBS documentary entitled "Baseball". SABRites will be aware of this production and the impact it has had in America, and will appreciate the opportunity to get a foretaste. Scotch whiskey will probably be available for those who like it, but members will be expected to supply their own haggis.

Here's the crucial part: space is extremely limited so you must act fast. We will be holding the meeting at the SABR(UK) Headquarters, which is shared by the abode of our Chairman, Mike Ross. Because this is a meeting of the History Committee, we especially want those who are interested in research. Please phone Mike Ross or any of the other officers if you want to attend. You'll need to send your cheque to Andy Parkes A.S.A.P. Addresses are on page 2. The £7.50 includes a sumptuous spread, meaning you'll get more than Mike's legendary popcorn! So please phone immediately or you might miss out!

- Patrick Carroll

VIEW FROM THE CHAIR *by Mike Ross*

We are a research society. In some cases we'd exhumed ancient bodies of information (although research aside, some of the toughest digs we've had so far have been in tracing and tracking a few of our own SABR(UK) members from the woody rural wiles of these British Isles). Now with our new found wealth as secured for us by our patron saint of Baltimore, Norman Macht, we are able to support our impulses to delve into the origins and history of the game without having to spend the kids', or our own, milk money on direct expenses.

Our chairman of research, Patrick Carroll, made a 'pilgrimage' to the British Newspaper Library at Colindale. We met there one day and although we have made hardly a dent into the available materials, exciting inroads have been opened in what we hope will be disclosure of 'new' material. With the 'library angel' at my shoulder, I got lucky, simply by taking the first book at hand and flicking a few pages and discovering...

Really, we are in a position to unearth texts never before used in modern baseball research. And I can tell you, if you have never done research work, great joys await you. The 1847 volume of *Sporting Life* contained some clues as to the origins of baseball, and the squelching thereof. I have submitted a short item in this issue.

It would be nice to find out when the children's running games joined up with the game of "ball" and how that evolved.

If you have an inclination and the spare time we hope you will make some effort at research in your locale - which is one advantage we have of being spread out over a million square miles of barren baseball wasteland.

Again I urge members and associates to try to make contact with officers and/or each other. Martin would like to hear from you particularly on the Examiner. And Patrick for research. Have you received each issue? Any ideas? Any submissions?

If you find original articles in any British press, other than day to day reports, and news stories, they should be noted and submitted to the research chairman.

I have made arrangements to acquire antiquarian baseball books, and others out-of-print, from a few specialized US sources at a discount price. If anyone wants a particular book or wants to be tempted, let me know. We can order almost any book you can think of.

Hope to see you on January 28 on Burns Night for the first meeting of the Research Committee. Patrick is coming in from the West Country. Let him know if you would like to make a presentation, or if there is something you would like to discuss at the meeting. Even if you cannot make it due to space considerations, please phone anyway, then we can be assured you received your Examiner; the phone is our one way of keeping contact with everyone. We'd hate to think we were missing anyone.

ANDY PARKES REPORTS FROM THE SABR CONVENTION

Our well-travelled Treasurer files this report from the this year's SABR convention in Arlington, Texas:

This was the fourth convention I have attended, and as far as I'm concerned, it was by far the best yet. The organisation was first class and the Texan welcome is all they say it is. The convention had the full co-operation of the Texas Rangers, and they had their brand-new Ballpark at Arlington to show us. They were justifiably proud of it.

I was travelling solo, so I was assigned a roommate. It turned out to be Bob Bencks from Cape Elizabeth, Maine who knows Mike Ross well and lives less than a mile from his mother! We both enjoyed each other's company for the

four days.

During my visits to Convention events, I have listened and some-



Bobby Brown, Mel Allen, Bing Devine, Stan Musial, Red Schoendienst, Nolan Ryan, Robin Roberts, Buck O'Neil, Charley Pride, yes, the country and western singer who played in the Texas League, and the delightful Bobby Bragan.

So for someone who prior to 1989 had only heard AFN and read the *Herald Tribune*, this was an education. At the end of the Convention, I was able to catch up with Norman Macht, and presented him with an engraved tankard in appreciation for all the help and kindness he has shown us (see photo).

Next year SABR comes to Pittsburgh, so don't forget that whatever happens in the baseball world, SABR will be there! Hope to see you there!

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THIS SABR'D ISLE

by Martin Hoerchner

This is not an article about baseball. It is about days of old when knights were bold.

I have been turning issues relating to the genealogy of baseball over in my mind, and I offer some unsolicited opinions. It seems to me that the question of whether baseball is descended from rounders or vice versa is a confusion, just like the early 20th-century controversy about evolution. Darwin did not say humans were descended from the apes; he said they were *cousins*, not father and child. Baseball and rounders are both are a member of a distinct *family* of games which flourished England and America from at least the 18th century, and whose origins stretched back much further than that, really to time immemorial. This family includes cricket, rounders, and baseball; it also includes extinct games like Massachusetts ball, town ball, goal ball, stool ball, one old cat, two old cat, plus more modern variations like softball and stick ball.

When I was a child growing up in California in the early sixties, we played a game at school called *kickball*. This was obviously a variation of baseball, played on the playground tarmac. We used a big red-brown inflatable rubber ball, about a foot and a half in diameter. The layout of the defense was exactly like it is in baseball, albeit on a smaller scale, with bases and infielders and outfielders. The ball was delivered by a "pitcher", and the kicked with all the "striker's" might. He/she would run the bases as in baseball; the rules for scoring a run or being put out were the same. A wrinkle was that the kicker could call for their type of "pitch" - either fast or slow, rolling or bouncing. A bit like baseball rules before 1887, when the batter could call for a high or low pitch. I was a "power kicker" and would always call for "fast bouncies" (as opposed to "slow rollies", which were for wimps). When the ball came bouncing towards me, I would time my motion to meet the ball at the height of its bounce, and then with all my might slam it with my foot and take it as far as I could, hopefully over the heads of the outfielders. Even today I can remember what it was like to get hold of one. It was a good playground game, not needing the space, the grass, or having the worry about broken windows that baseball carries. Has anyone else ever heard of or played this game?

Jane Austen writes of "Base Ball"

circa 1800 in the West Country of England. Was it the baseball we know? Did they have the three-strike rule or the infield fly rule? Was the distance from pitcher to batter sixty feet six inches, and was the distance between the bases ninety feet? I'd be surprised. This game is another member of the family. For the heterodox, the real birthday of baseball as we know it was September 23, 1845, when Alexander Cartwright proposed his twenty rules to his Knickerbocker Base Ball Club. These were pretty much the same rules we know, except for the pitching distance and the winning score of 21 instead of nine innings. Before then we have a tangled web of relations, like a mystery novel. But this is where it gets interesting. This is where we really have to get our Sherlock Holmes magnifying glasses out. And this is also the point where hard facts become scarce, and supposition and interpretation take over.

In his article, Mike writes of the "joys of research". I must confess my baseball research has been mainly done in either bookshops or my own library. But I *do* have a good research story, and frankly, it was a very moving experience, even though it has nothing to do with baseball. It was soon after I moved to London, and I was interested in writing a screenplay about the princesshood of Queen Elizabeth I. Her elder sister, Mary, ascended the throne in 1553, and the next year a rebellion broke out against the Catholic monarch in favour of her more Protestant sister. Mary didn't know if Elizabeth was a co-conspirator (history has said she was not), but she had to protect herself and ordered Elizabeth to the Tower of London (where Elizabeth's mother, Anne Boleyn, had been beheaded only eight-years before). The boats came to the Palace of Westminster (where ball games had been forbidden since the fourteenth century! - see page 6). Elizabeth, ever fast-thinking, asked to be able to write a plea to her sister the Queen. She was allowed, and she purposely took her time in writing the letter, so that by the time the letter was finished, the tide had shifted, and it was no longer possible to take her by boat from Westminster to the Tower. It was called the "Tide Letter". I read this letter was at the Public Record Office, off Chancery Lane. So I went there to see it. I first had to apply for a User's Card; they asked the reason for my interest, and I said I was writing a screenplay. That's all

they needed; nothing had to be proved and no delays were met. They pointed me towards the public room, which was fairly large and mostly empty and had a retrieval desk and rows of chairs and counters. I filled out a card requesting the letter - I already had a reference number.

So it was brought to me, just stuck in a cardboard folder. They just *handed* it to me and walked away. I could have made a paper airplane out of it. This was probably the most important letter this great monarch had ever written in her life. She was writing it to save her life; at that time people rarely left the Tower alive. There was a debate about whether her handwriting shows a panicked state of mind, or whether it shows someone who was either confident of eventual vindication or had the courage and presence of mind to bury her fears. I had seen her handwriting from the same time period, written under fairly banal circumstances, in a document in the British Museum. I could compare them. They handed me the letter, and I couldn't believe it. I ran my fingers over the writing, and especially her signature. The second and last page, after the text was finished, she finished the page off by scrawling it with diagonal lines so no one could add anything afterwards. I was entranced; I spent a long time just running my eyes over the words, trying to study the mind that wrote them.

The letter didn't save her from the Tower. She was taken down river the next day, with the tide. But no evidence was ever found against her, and she was released after three months. Mary died after a reign of only six years, and Elizabeth became Queen at 25. Oh, and about the handwriting - yes it certainly wasn't as neat as the British Library letter - I was imagining her writing it with armed guards standing over her - but it shows none of the panic that I read about, and the presence of one of the keenest minds of that time, if not any time. That I held it in my hands, I shall never forget.

I think this is my fascination with research, that of a solid, tangible link with the past. It doesn't have to be *your* past - I have no English blood - but life as we know it was influenced by the happenings of so long ago, in countries sometimes far away - whether a princess fighting for her life, or children fighting to play a game they loved. Artifacts from those days are nothing but benchmarks in the march of time.

The Chicken or the Egg?

Some off-the-cuff ramblings from the Chairman of the Historical Committee:

Undoubtedly the most tedious experience for the baseball enthusiast in Britain is the almost-unfailing repetition of the phrase, "Oh, you mean rounders" mouthed by the average Brit whenever the subject of baseball comes up. Apart from the universal human instinct to patronise that about which one is ignorant, it is difficult to understand the monotonous predictability with which this phrase is trotted out. It's boring. It isn't original. It isn't witty. And, more to my immediate point, there is considerable doubt as to whether it's even true.

Having been continuously peppered with this cliché for the nearly thirty years I've spent in close proximity with Perfidious Albion, I decided recently to try to begin justifying my august office within this organisation by undertaking an innocent, disinterested enquiry into the whole "Oh, you mean rounders" business.

I took as a starting point John Montgomery Ward's "BASE-BALL: How to Become a Player - with the Origin, History and Explanation of the Game". This excellent booklet was originally published in 1888 and has been lovingly reproduced in a SABR edition, with a forward by Mark Alvarez, and given free for our delectation to us lucky members. In his introduction: An Enquiry into the Origin of Baseball, with a brief Sketch of its History, Ward argues eloquently against the theory that baseball is a development or deviation from the game of rounders.

The crux of Ward's argument is that despite being invariably referred to as "the old English game of rounders" those propounding the rounders-as-chicken-baseball-as-egg theory have never been able to adduce any historical evidence whatsoever of rounders' antiquity as a game in its own right. Unfortunately for his complete credibility, Ward's argument was, as Alvarez points out in his forward, "flawed by [his] chauvinistic insistence that our game was a purely

American sport, not descended from or related to English ball and bat games". And, as I have said elsewhere, it is not really convincing to suppose that baseball "just grewed" from the native ingenuity of the American Boy. I am aware that there have been studies made of this subject but I have not as yet had an opportunity to read any of them. In order to fill in until such a chance arises I betook myself to the local library and pulled down a hefty tome entitled "The Oxford Companion To Sport & Games", edited by the late and much lamented John Arlott, the Red Barber of cricket.

Turning the entry for baseball I

there the statement "The earliest known literary reference to rounders was in 1744 when "A Little Pretty Pocket Book" included a woodcut of the game and a verse under it under the name of (wait for it) 'Base Ball'." The Oxford Companion goes on to cite R.W. Henderson's book "Ball, Bat & Bishop: The Origin of Ball Games" in which the author maintains that baseball stems from the English game. Not having been able to get hold of Henderson's book, I am unable to comment on the basis of his argument, but whatever it is it doesn't seem to have lessened the confusion of those responsible for the relevant

companion entries. The problem is becoming one of semantics and may be stated thus: baseball evolved from rounders, only rounders, at the time when baseball was evolving from it, wasn't called rounders, it was called baseball. Got it? Good.

Injustice (or injustice) to the compilers of the Oxford Companion I must observe that they manage to get their boxer-shorts in a similar tangle over



find, after an exegesis of the rules and so forth of the game, this statement: "Baseball, long regarded as the American national game, evolved *directly* (my italics) from the *old* (again, my emphasis) English game of rounders". Pretty authoritative and positive, what? The entry goes on to say, "The myth that baseball was spontaneously invented by Abner Doubleday in 1839 at Cooperstown has no basis in fact." Well, no, it never did. Even in Ward's day that piece of American counter-propaganda katzenjammer had been thoroughly debunked. But check out the end of the paragraph which, referring to rounders, says, "The game was played in a simple form under the name 'base ball' in England and America as early as the eighteenth century."

Hmm, do you, as I do, get the feeling that there is a screw loose in the logic of this historical analysis? The feeling is not assuaged by turning to the entry for rounders and finding

cricket. In the book's lengthy cricket entry there is a section dealing with the origins of the game which gives a wonderfully English Heritage account of how it arose out of the Saxon mists, played (this is all quite specific) by shepherds - particularly in Kent and Sussex where the terrain favoured its development - using hurdle gates as wickets, their crooks as bats and bundles of wool as balls. Very picturesque indeed.

Unfortunately for the coherence of this fairy story, in other entries it is suggested that cricket came about through the marriage of two other games, club ball and stool ball, both of which, in historical reference, post-date those cunning shepherds batting the wool around the gate with their crooks. I give you this from the entry on stool ball: "It was one of the two older pastimes from which the modern game of cricket probably sprang, ...the idea of bowling at a wicket, an essential feature in the

by Patrick Carroll

The Last Game, con't

development of cricket, was borrowed from stool ball where, as the name suggests, the wicket was a stool." Compare this with the following: "Club ball was an ancient pastime played with a stick and ball and ... [a] 'rude and unadulterated simplicity'. (Sounds like Lenny Dykstra's kind of game.) It is important because it introduced the straight (as opposed to curved) bat and, it seems, the placing of fielders to catch the ball." This, combined with the use of the stool as wicket in stool ball, apparently equals the recognizable ancestor of modern cricket. Poor old John Arlott, chewing over all this in the great Long Room in the sky, might well be tempted to call for another bottle of claret.

So, our earliest references to baseball (so called) are early-to-mid eighteenth century. Rounders - which as it is now played, has always seemed to me to be a rather stilted and artificial game; one that gives the feeling of having been codified by P.E. teachers rather than naturally evolved by players - gets no historical reference that I know about prior to 1827. Before that every (English) commentator assumes it is an old English game but all his historical sources refer to it as 'base ball'. Cartwright drew up his rules in 1845. The first governing body for rounders did not come into being until 1889.

My researches in the Oxford Companion also led me to the entry for Welsh baseball (of which we have read previously in this newsletter). It says in part, "Supporters of this form of the sport claim that the American game grew from Welsh baseball. The ancient [that word again] game of rounders flourished in the West of England and almost certainly led to this refinement building up in South Wales. It spread to isolated pockets of England, notably around Liverpool." Internal migration of the Welsh to Liverpool, of which there was a great deal, would, of course, easily explain this, but why should the mere process of crossing the Bristol Channel change the name of the game from rounders to baseball?

Then there is Irish rounders. I've seen this game played. It is also called base rounders, as it uses bases rather than posts, and it is described in the Oxford Companion as being "...very similar to the softball version of baseball." This is accurate enough not to warrant any quibbling from me. And, it may be Irish chauvinism on my part but I find it a much more attractive game than the English ver-

sion.

Then we have Pesapallo: Finnish baseball. Also known as 'nest ball' and 'burn ball'. (Surely Nolan Ryan didn't come from Helsinki.) It is said to be based on modern baseball and certain traditional Finnish games such as kuningaspallo, pitkapallo and (wouldn't you know it) rounders, called in Finnish the 'four goals' and in Swedish brännboll.

The last entry in the Oxford Companion to which I will refer is for the certifiably ancient game of trap ball. This game is recorded as being played at least as long ago as the fourteenth century, being especially associated with Shrove Tuesday festivities. The game is essentially the same as baseball or rounders but for the fact that the ball instead of being thrown was projected toward the hitter by means of a miniature version of the type of catapult used at that period to hurl cauldrons of molten lead at one's military adversaries. This medieval pitching machine consisted of a spoon suspended by a thole between two uprights; the thin, or handle, end of the spoon being struck downwards thus slinging the ball at the batter. Truly, there is nothing new under the sun. There are no entries in the Oxford Companion for town ball, or for one- or two-old-cat, that 'favorite of boyhood' which Ward maintained was the one true lineal ancestor of baseball. Perhaps the omissions occur because these games are thought to be too strictly American and 'unorganized'. However, there are references in the trap ball entry to games with such suggestive names as tribet, tip cat, kit-kat and others using various combinations of stick, ball, and hole culminating in Knurr and Spell, a game widely played in Yorkshire and appearing to be one of a number of games developed from a variety of primitive Scandinavian golf.

Having had some fund with inconsistencies of the Oxford Companion compilers, I feel that it is only fair to leave the last word with them. In the cricket entry, after all that flapdoodle about Kentish shepherds, there is this wisely modest observation: "The basic pattern of one person casting a ball at a target - hurdle, gate, stool or stone - defended by another who tries to hit the ball away with a stick is so simple that it may well have separate origins in different communities..." In my present state of benign and ignorant agnosticism, I'll go with that for now.

report in the local paper. Looked at now nearly 50 years later I see it was actually quite an amusing piece.

"No girls, I'm sorry (the paper's reporter wrote). You've got it wrong. When an American talks of squeeze play he's not thinking on the same lines as you but of an intricate situation on the baseball field."

"That was only one of the things I learned at the Baseball Ground on Saturday. Another was that all the players on the fielding side keep up a nonstop babel of shouting. It may be encouragement, it may be imprecation, it may be directed at the guy who happens to be listening. I don't know. What I do know is that it isn't cricket!"

"I gathered from my Yankee guide, counsellor and friend that the Derby crowd, in its deplorable ignorance, applauded spectacular aerobic catches when it should have taken these for granted but failed lamentably to show due appreciation of the squeeze play and another mystifying move known as making a double play."

Some things clearly have changed little over the years. The reporter (a woman by the way) notes that "the baseball umpire, that is the referee, is just as defective in vision and general mental capacity as in football." And after reporting that the game ended in a 3-3 tie, called after seven innings (why I never discovered), she writes: "Very sportingly, the commentator offered to have the players demonstrate any particular point in the game when the match was over. That, girls, should have given you the opening coyly to inquire about 'squeeze play'".

Whatever the girls got up to after the game, I made my way home filled with starry eyed satisfaction. Carefully folded in my pocket was the special souvenir programme. I have it still, creased and faded now but a reminder of that distant happy day. It hadn't been the Yankees or the Giants, just two scratch teams of American servicemen. It didn't happen in Yankee Stadium or the Polo Grounds, which all my dreams said it should. But it had been my first live baseball game and that was satisfaction enough.

1847 Sporting Life Articles Shed Light

Clues and Conjectures regarding the Origin and Suppression of Ball Games:

Baseball did not appear as a result of spontaneous generation somewhere near Cooperstown, New York, as a purebred American thing. Such a myth surrounds the ubiquitous Abner Doubleday who was miles away from Cooperstown when he was supposed to have been there inventing the modern game. The yarn has been spun by A.G. Spalding and been supported by various commissions and societies hyping the American dream.

Being liberated from such notions, SABR(UK) has every reason to get down to the business of verifying the bone fide roots of baseball, with a variation on the theme of its derivation from rounders.

For a kickoff we can search for customs relating to old British children's games, and they lead to the fields, dales and wayward greens of rural England and the parks of London.

Really, with the talk of researching baseball's origins, and while forced to assume it sprang from British soil, SABR(UK) has a tough turkey to carve. After all, scant information has been set down. With the Doubleday myth, up until the publication of *Ball, Bat and Bishop* [Henderson] in 1947, no one really knew the story. While the Americans were shifting the goalposts from England to the USA, the British bothered not about staking a claim to a game they invented, and were indeed asleep at the wheel. In a way, the Britons' failure to lift a pen to prove what was theirs, is almost an insult to our beloved game. The Russians would have had their own Cooperstown by now.

At the British Library Newspaper Library in Colindale, London, while searching for clues to baseball's murky origins, an article emerged from among

the first issues of a British publication, *The Sporting Life* (TSL), dated 1847. The writer (no by-line) laments the demise of the old children's games, pretty much forbidden (already) on many greens. One such game was "base", mentioned in a couple of Shakespeare plays and quoted by the TSL writer from Shakespeare's *Cymbaline*:

"He, with two striplings, lads more like to run the country base, then to commit such slaughter, made good the passage"

The country base? How be it? One supposes that the quote refers to boys playing games rather than running to war. The writer adds:

"Drayton and Spenser, contemporary with Shakespeare, also allude to 'Prison Base'. It was a

Just an idea.

My favourite contention has been that baseball was unable to develop in England because of the power of the aristocracy and the remnants of feudal Britain. The game was forced to America, and there permitted to grow up. And akin to the Pilgrims, baseball can be regarded as an underlying cause of the American Revolution.

We are reminded of the original quote from John Tener, former president of the National League: "Britain is a democratic country, but lacks the finishing touch of baseball". Well, not so surprising when we consider the ponderous process required by baseball to win out.

Our TSL writer alludes to what might relate to baseball's origins, showing where the squeeze was on:

"The rural games are nearly abolished, that many persons perhaps scarcely know any of them excepting by name. Some are entirely or all but entirely extinct and others are only kept up in out-of-the-way nooks of the

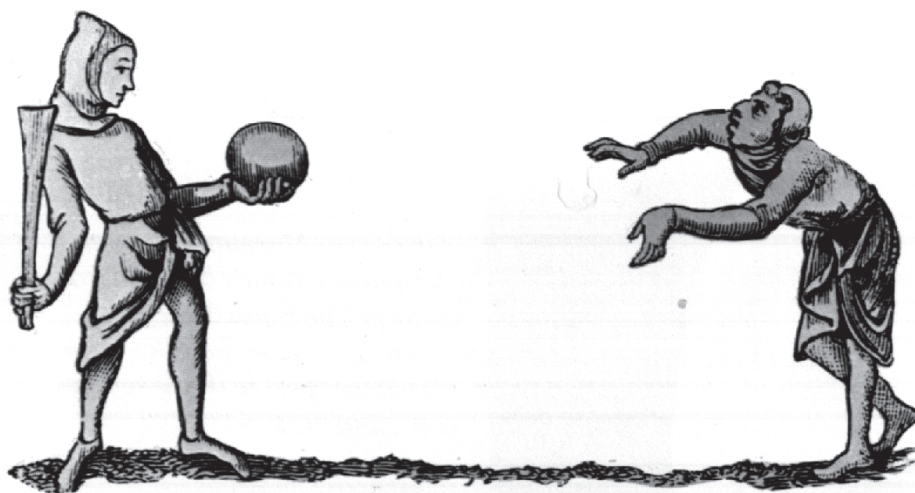
country, where modern manners have been less successful in intruding..."

Modern manners? Or was it restrictions imposed by the upper classes perhaps as far back as the middle ages? What say to the notion that the origins of baseball go back that far?

"It is mentioned so long ago as the reign of Edward III [1327-1377] when an order of Parliament forbade 'boys and others' to play at it ['base'] in the avenues of the Palace at Westminster, on account of the interruption which it gave the members passing to and fro as their business required".

Well, we wouldn't want those poor M.P.'s to be disturbed by silly children's games, would we?

Alexander Cartwright of the New York Knickerbockers organized a game of baseball at Hoboken, New Jersey,



running game, and therefore we may presume chiefly a youth's amusement; yet it is also known to have been played by men in Cheshire and the counties adjoining, within the memory of the present generation."

Not much to go on, but if conjecture indeed be acceptable, let us then suggest that, when a batter gets on base, that we regard him as being a prisoner? Let's face it, when one is 'on base', if he (or she) possesses any degree of competitiveness, an inkling of team spirit would result in an innate longing to break out, to go home.

The baserunner, while safe, is unable to move forward toward his ultimate destination without help. So, while the base is a prison, it is also a refuge. And if he gets caught off base, he is out. Out of luck, out of the game, out of life. A player's position on base is a formality if he fails to make it home

by Mike Ross

and is now officially recognized as the inventor of the modern game. Not Doubleday. Credit was given to Cartwright for his pacing out the 90 (30 yards) between bases. Such a perfect distance! Practically mystical. Not to deprive Cartwright and company of glory - we need our benchmarks - but that 90-foot space has been around a long time. The 1847 TSL quotes a Mr Strutt writing in his *"Sports and Pastimes"*, about the games of *Base* or *Prison Base*:

"The performance of this pastime requires two parties of equal numbers, each of them having a base or home, as it is usually called, to themselves at the distance of about twenty or thirty yards..."

Well, we know about the 30 yards, so the 20 yards was to accommodate the little leaguers from the Middle Ages. Softball also relates to Strutt's numbers. Remember, we speak of these as simply running games. Do we detect the beginnings of what in baseball is termed 'the running game'? Were some lads pre-empting Ty Cobb or Rickey Henderson and setting the pace? And one might suspect that, at some point, *Base* joined with the game of *ball*; hence "base ball".

The writer speaks of the concept of "going home", and of a player being tagged "out". First team to get a score of 20 would end a contest. Twenty-one was needed in Knickerbocker baseball. Another childlike variation was known as *bars*, "with stakes placed in the ground at 90 feet intervals", an innovation used in rounders.

"...Bars - it is necessary to have on each side a row of stakes driven into the ground about thirty yards in advance of the home boundaries; this row of stakes is called the prison. Such was the arrangement adopted in Essex where the game was played by men since the beginning of the reign of George III [1760-1820]."

England is far behind several other European countries in adopting the game on a national scale. Yet English uncles, brothers and cousins played baseball in America and attempted to introduce it 'back home'. Despite the various baseball missions and the efforts of Spalding, the eager and wealthy John Moores, and Frances Ley of Derby who built "The Baseball Ground" there in 1890, which

exists to this day, baseball utterly failed to succeed here.

We may acknowledge a lingering feudalism that has often caused the suppression of initiative in the British commoners. And suppose, their children's natural impulses were thwarted for the pleasure of the lords, most noticeable in London's parks and "commons". Not so strange that baseball failed to flourish.

Just an idea.

Since the events surrounding Edward III in the 1300's, the notion of a free range would not materialize for the children. Described as a game of "unrestrained exercise", even in the mid-1800's they were "fast disappearing". So the culprit was not baseball in the eyes of the lords; it was the natural freewheeling and imaginative activity of "unrestricted" children's games.

From an issue of *The Sporting Life* of the same year, 1847, a further indictment:

"A FEW MORE WORDS UPON HYDE PARK

[Hyde Park] is of a goodly extent... This park is a royal property, and is used now and then for (royal) reviews; but for nothing else; for as we stated in our last paper with reference to Regent's Park, "It is all for the eye" - children not even being allowed to play trap-ball [i.e. an early form of baseball] within its precincts. This monopoly of space on the part of the government is a great moral injustice if ever there was trusteeship on the part of the nation, it but ill becomes it to employ that prerogative to the very letter of the law that allows it. We have walked over Hyde Park dozens of times and could not help feeling surprised each time we did so, that so large a space of ground should be suffered to lay idle..."

As in Italy and Sweden particularly, baseball is a spectator sport. In Britain only about 1200 players from assorted leagues keep the flame alive. The governing federation is ill-equipped to deal with the opposition from above which also affected softball during its rise in Britain, from 1963. Then a few Hollywood moguls, filming in London, started a club in Hyde Park which evolved into HyPISCO (Hyde Park International Softball & Canoeing Organisation).

Now, that Palace of Westminster, mentioned above, where Edward

III and the fellas made the rules (and Elizabeth wrote the Tide Letter!), would have been in close proximity to what is now Hyde Park. There HyPISCO threw down the gauntlet and, against negative tradition, has succeeded in playing ball at their regular pitch for 31 years. But, more than once, modern-day edicts have banned them. Déjà vu. In the last decade, a bowler-hatted stroller, attending a "royal review", stubbornly refused to recognise the game's boundaries. He inadvertently received a conk on his bowler, and wrote a letter to the authorities. As a result, police maintained restrictions for awhile. Some of the national press found the incident compelling.

And get this: At the same Regent's Park mentioned above, while cricket and soccer were permitted, softball and baseball (gaining increasing popularity) officially were banned in 1992 (the charge was for "digging up the grass"). That edict was overturned, for the numbers now playing organized softball in London are vast. That is not to say that in the future the Duke of Westminster or Lady Porter might again induce the House of Lords to end softball in 'their' royal parks.

The *Sporting Life* of 1847 concludes:

"(an act) which one might suspect emanated from the brain of some Old Bailey clause-picking lawyer, rather than from that quarter where the soul of honour is supposed, most essentially, to be a freehold resident. To take the fraternity of Brother Bobs [commoners, one supposes], as a class there does not exist a more inoffensive one to the rights of property in the whole of Her Majesty's dominions; and to make them suffer...is a despotic act not at all in keeping with the commonest notions of common justice. Representing as we do...the interests of this class, we are thus emboldened to speak out, and hoping that our first words may not pass unregarded, for the present we lay down our pen."

And with that, so will we, leaving the issue open-ended.

But stop press! I have just acquired a copy of "Ball, Bat, and Bishop", which traces the history of ball games back to the year dot. I have just began to make a dent into the information contained therein. More on this book later on.

THE LAST GAME by Patrick Morley

Fifty years ago we were in the middle of a World War. Britain was packed with thousands of American troops all waiting to go over to join the fighting in newly invaded France, once the breakout had been achieved from the invasion bridgeheads. Yet amazingly, some of those troops found time to stage an exhibition baseball game for several thousand bemused English spectators in a Midlands town.

It was probably the last baseball game ever played at the Baseball Ground in Derby, home of Derby County Football Club. The Americans, stationed at a huge army camp several miles out of the town, had been intrigued as to how a football stadium, as they called it, came to be named after their national sport.

The answer lay in a factory whose chimneys poured out smoke right next to the Baseball Ground. Ley's Malleable Castings had been founded by a Victorian industrialist, Sir Francis Ley. In 1888 he went to America on a business trip and became so enamoured of baseball he decided to support those who were trying to introduce the game over here. His money and enthusiasm was a big factor in setting up an English league.

The Baseball Ground emerged from what had originally been a sports ground for the workers at the factory. Part of it was used by Derby County F.C. whose players were to make up the nucleus of the baseball team. There were four teams in the league formed in 1890, all based on football clubs. Apart from Derby the others were Preston North End, Aston Villa and Stoke City. That first league lapsed after a couple of seasons but in 1894 a National Association was formed.

Most notable player in the Derby side was Steve Bloomer, the England international inside right, capped 23 times and a prolific goal scorer with over 350 goals during his soccer career. For the Derby baseball team he played second base but sadly the statistics of his performance on the diamond have not come down to us. The side also boasted another England soccer international, goalkeeper Jack Robinson, the third baseman.

The Derby team did amazingly well. Not only did they win the Eng-

lish Baseball Cup three years out of four, they also trounced a top American team, the 1897 National League Champions, the Boston Beaneaters, when they were unwise enough to pay a visit in what was intended as a triumphal tour of England.

By 1898 it was clear the public's enthusiasm for baseball didn't match that of Sir Francis Ley. The game rapidly declined over here but by then Derby County were playing football regularly at the Baseball Ground and the name stuck.

Now, after a lapse of over 40 years, baseball was back again at the

ports in the American newspapers we occasionally got to see, with their incomprehensible box scores.

I wrote to the Office of War Information at the American Embassy in London for enlightenment. Considering there was a world war on, they were remarkably helpful. They could have given me a polite brush off but not a bit of it. They sent a long detailed letter, telling me precisely what every item on the box score signified, explaining a variety of baseball terms and also listing all the major league grounds.

Then an aunt who lived in America put me in touch with a boy of my own age who was an avid fan of the Brooklyn Dodgers. Ships running the gauntlet of the U-boats to bring vital supplies across the Atlantic also carried his letters containing baseball magazines, newspaper cuttings, and even photographs he had taken himself at Ebbets Field and the Polo Grounds. Before long I

was the best informed 14-year-old on baseball in Britain. I was familiar with all the heroes of the day and their nicknames before they vanished to join the forces: Jolting Joe DiMaggio, the Yankee Clipper, Hammering Hank Greenberg; Stan the Man Musial; Ted Williams, the Splendid Splinter. I absorbed the jargon of the game with a speed and ease that surprised me. If only I could have mastered physics and algebra with the same thoroughness.

But nothing spurred my enthusiasm more than watching a real live baseball game. The Americans certainly did it in style. There was a full military band, an informed, radio-style commentary over the loudspeakers and even popcorn and chewing gum dished out free. I was enthralled. Every now and then, as I sat there I'd close my eyes and imagine I was in Yankee Stadium. Maybe when I opened them again I'd see not the usual grimy factory chimneys but the skyscrapers of New York.

Almost all of the crowd at the game was totally bemused by what they saw. But there was at least one spectator who understood and appreciated it all. I listened with amused condescension to the uncomprehending remarks of those around me

- continued on page 5

and read with even more disdain the

BASEBALL GROUND :: DERBY

SATURDAY, JULY 22nd, at 2-45 p.m.

AMERICAN FORCES BASEBALL MATCH

The Teams appear by kind permission of Col. JAMES A. KELIAN, U.S. Army
(10th Replacement Depot).

Baseball Ground. The Americans had promised to show the people of Derby what baseball was about, and even though D-Day had arrived only six weeks before, they kept their word. The date was Saturday, July 22, 1944, and among the crowd of several thousand was an excited schoolboy who probably knew more about the game than any other Englishman there.

My passion for baseball began with the film *Pride of the Yankees*. I watched mystified but entranced as Gary Cooper, in the role of Lou Gehrig, tried to fulfill his promise to a crippled child to hit three home runs in the same game. The crouching man in the mask snarling exultantly every time Coop swung and missed was clearly the villain of the piece. But what was it all about? Why didn't Gary Cooper belabour the squatting growling figure by his side with his bat? I must know more about this fascinating ritual.

I began listening regularly to AFN, the American Forces Network set up in England for the growing army of Yanks flooding into the country for the invasion of Europe. AFN transmitted live or recorded commentaries on major league games most days and I listened to them avidly. I got the general drift of what was going on but most of the details escaped me. Equally baffling were the baseball re-