

# The SABR(UK) Examiner

Number 8



May 1997

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

## Derby's Baseball Ground Closes

by Patrick Morley

This year sees the end of one of Britain's most enduring links with the great surge of interest in baseball that took place during the latter years of the 19th century. The Baseball Ground in Derby, the only sports stadium in

the Derby Club play the Erdington Club Birmingham." The date was May 3 1890. The paper records that Derby won by 23 to 11 and were so superior to their opponents they had to lend them several of their players in order to make a game of it.

(playing on the football ground adjoining the Staffordshire County Cricket Ground).

Derby of course played on what is now the Baseball Ground and was then the recreation ground for workers at the Ley's



*Then and Now: Left: The Derby Baseball Team of the 1890's.*

*Photo courtesy of W.W. Winter Ltd. Photographers, Derby.*

*Right: the Derby Football Club in action, 12 April 1997. Photo by the Editor*

the country bearing that name, is being closed down as Derby County Football Club move to a new home. Given Derby's important contribution to the history of the game in Britain it ought to be a rich source for the baseball historian. Yet surprisingly, source material on this aspect of sporting history is seriously lacking, confined to a few extracts from reports in local newspapers. For example, this from the Derby Mercury of over a century ago: "The first game at baseball ever seen at Derby was played on Ley's Recreation Ground on Saturday when

That historic encounter was by way of a practice match for the real baseball season which lay ahead. An English league had been set up, originally with the intention of eight clubs participating. But the organisers decided they could rely on only four sides regularly taking part, all of them associated with association football clubs. As well as Derby, the others were Preston North End (playing at the Deepdale soccer ground), Aston Villa (whose home was at Perry Barr before the move in 1897 to Villa Park), and Stoke

Malleable Castings Vulcan Iron-works. The Derby Mercury reported that "the new pavilions and stands on Mr Ley's ground are in a very forward state and will do the town great credit." Bryan, the team captain, called for young fellows about 21 to 24, weighing 10 to 12 stone "able to field smartly and throw well" to join the side. It already had a full complement but injuries were expected during the season and reserves were essential.

The very first league game was played at Derby on Saturday  
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# VIEW FROM THE CHAIR *by Mike Ross*

Welcome back to the publishing wing of SABR UK. This winter has been a long one, or at least it seems that way to us Londoners, now unprotected from the coldest May since 1066; the heat from the "Hot Stove" has long since cooled out. Over the long haul I have had time to ruminate on a few vital SABR issues. I have concluded (after having first assumed and then conjectured) and am now convinced, in my own mind, that baseball evolved from rounders (easy) but also that rounders evolved from "Prison Bars" or "Base" or any variation of children's running games, as expounded in articles in the SABR Examiner, issues 3, 4 and 5.

These wintertime thoughts were ignited by that little poem I must have read one hundred times already, from "The Little Pretty Pocket Book", 1744:

*The ball once struck at  
Away flies the boy  
To the next destined post  
And then home with joy.*

It makes sense to at least assume that the "bars" or "posts", whether prisons or bases, were always considered a refuge for the base-runner. Get it? They were also prisons, but with fair means of escape. Your teammate's heroics drove you home, a paleolithic RBI. The bases today are still fundamentally a prison from which one is eager to escape. That is the beauty of the home run. You run the bases without having to serve time on-base... Good God! You see what happens when the SABR part of the brain sets to cooking.

Anyway, we've got "base", "ball", "bat", "prison", "bars"... how did it all come together? We guess the bat and ball games merged

with the running games. If any-one out there has more clues, we need you.

That's the catch: You can conjecture till the cows come home, but at some point, the brain will ask for evidence to support your theories. But the fun of doing research always starts with conjecture.

But one can not live by conjecture alone. Here's a more recent example: During last year's press reception at Yankee Stadium following the deciding Game 6 victory over the Braves, after all the picas had been set, Dan Shaughnessy, baseball columnist of the Boston Globe, asked one of the greatest rhetorical questions known to baseball: "Why can't the Red Sox do that?" referring to the Yankee's comeback world title. My answer was obvious. "You tell me. You wrote the book." And a fine book it is too. "The Curse of the Bambino" tells the uniquely sad story of Red Sox history and the plight of their fans. I added "maybe they aren't supposed to win. Why ruin a good story?"

But you see, Shaughnessy's curse can only be conjectured. The principle behind the book is anathema to SABR-ites. The Curse cannot be proven and never will. So why don't the Sox win? The most logical answer is that they don't score as many runs as the opposition. But maybe former Boston star Wade Boggs, currently a Yankee, believes in that stuff. I recall him standing on a chair in the Boston clubhouse after Boston had just clinched their division on the last day of the 1990

season. Amid the jubilation, standing before the media morass, Boggs claimed that Boston was now going to beat the curse because the team would sign Babe Ruth's daughter to a contract (not to play ball, you understand), and her good will would do the trick. I suppose he meant it. But it didn't do the trick. Boggs was wrong. In fact, this episode proves nothing. In SABR, though we may start research with a conjecture, then we seek more solid evidence.

So, the above is a wee bit of what SABR is about. It is also a meeting of the minds of those who have a similar interest: baseball. Some love to research, some love to watch. The great thing is interests are varied; hence SABR UK is in position to cover the bases. Gazing out from the top table at the ten or so gatherings we have held so far, I sensed an easy, relaxed, sociable feeling, that we were all standing on common ground.

Of course it helps having most of our meetings in a pub, that pub being "The Kings of Clerkenwell", which is a further asset. SABR activities there have a hard time competing with the food cooked up by Sue Eichler, wife of the chief. John, the guv, was smitten with baseball and has agreed to become an honorary SABR member.

Things have gone well for us since our inaugural meeting in January 1992, and SABR USA has helped. They sent over an officer to see us into being: Norman Macht, national secretary. He taped for us an exclusive interview with Bobby Thomson (the

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## OFFICERS

**Chairman:** Mike Ross, 2B Maida Avenue, London W2 1TF (Tel and Fax: 0171 723 9848) **Treasurer:** Andy Parkes, 84 Hillingdon Road, Stretford, Manchester M32 8PJ (Tel and Fax: 0161 865 2952) **Procedural Advisor:** Hugh Robinson, 567 Kings Road, Stretford, Manchester M32 8JQ (Tel: 0161 286 7012) **Chairman of British Baseball Historical Committee:** Patrick Morley, Spring Cottage, The Batch, Hill Road, Sandford, North Somerset BS19 5RH (Tel. 01934 822781) **Publications Editor:** Martin Hoerchner, 3 Sheridan Crescent, Chislehurst, Kent BR7 5RZ (Tel and fax: 0181 467 2828; E-Mail: Martin@mhoerch.demon.co.uk) **European Co-ordinator:** Laurens De Jong, Carnisseweg 61, 2993 Ad Barendrecht, Netherlands

# 1. FOOTPRINTS IN THE SNOW *by Martin Hoerchner*

There is nothing so elusive as time. There is nothing so irrevocably lost as that which is lost in time.

One day last winter we had a light snowfall. By the time I got home it was dark, so I switched on the outside light in the back of the house. The snow was fresh and untouched, except for a set of tracks across it. I could follow the route with my eye. It seems that one of the neighbourhood cats had jumped over the fence at a low point, had walked over to ponder one of the cement flower pots in the garden, then walked over to the clothes line, then walked back toward the fence, and jumped back over from whence it came.

I'm sure many neighbourhood cats have jumped into our garden, snooped around, and jumped out. Probably thousands of times a year. These are moments lost in time. But because of a fresh snowfall, one action was recorded. It was an incomplete record; only footprints. We don't know the colour of the animal. Or even if it was a cat; that was only an assumption. We don't know which way it was looking, or what moved it along that path. We only have the footprints.

Our search for the origins of baseball is like looking these footprints. We have evidence that this game, or a game with the same name, was played extensively in different parts of Britain in the 1700's - yet in that time period exactly four references to baseball have been found. Footprints in the snow. A group of Wessex children, as likely to be girls than boys, meet for a match on a breezy spring day in 1738; one team triumphs, and the moment is lost. The game is called baseball, but there is no record. A moment lost in time.

In 1700 Reverend Samuel Wilson of Maidstone, Kent, wrote a letter decrying the playing of sports on Sunday, and wrote down the earliest reference to "base ball" we have. In 1744 was first published "The Little Pretty Pocket Book" with the first illustration of

the game. In 1798 Jane Austen wrote "Northanger Abbey", and mentioned base ball in the first few pages.

Another footprint dates from 1748. That year Lady Hervey wrote "The Prince's family is an example of innocent and cheerful amusements. All this summer they played abroad; and now, in the winter, in a large room, they divert themselves at base-ball, a play all who are, or have been, school-boys, are well acquainted with. The ladies, as well as the gentlemen, join in this amusement." This Prince was none other than Frederick, Prince of Wales. He was one of the few heirs to the throne to predecease the monarch; he was the son of George II and father of George III. It says that "all who are, or have been, schoolboys, are well-acquainted" with baseball. But baseball in a large room? This was 217 years before the Astrodome. What kind of a sport was this? There are much more questions than answers.

I've always been intrigued about the origins and parentage of the game we know as baseball. I call it the "Mists of Time" period of baseball history. Pitifully little currently exists on the subject. This makes it a bit hard to know where to start. We came to the conclusion that it would at least be interesting to look at some seminal texts, including the 18th century references, and see what they might offer to the researcher trying to trace the origins and parentage of the game of baseball.

Living within shouting distance of London, I always assumed that the British Library would be ideal place to start in this search. Henderson may have had access to many texts, but he wasn't over here. But for some reason I had always assumed that the British Library was only open on weekdays. A turning point for my enthusiasm for breaking this mystery, was when I actually made a phone call and found out it was open on Saturday! I also found out that the Newspaper Library at

Colindale was also open on Saturday! Boy did I feel stupid! That proves what they say about assuming things, that "ass out of you and me" joke.

One evening Mike Ross and I, fuelled by fine single malt whiskey and Havana cigars, came up with the idea of finally visiting the British Library, and, as a start, trying to find certain seminal texts oft quoted in baseball cosmogony. I didn't take us long to come up with a search list - *The Little Pretty Pocket Book* of 1744, the first illustration of the game of baseball. Joseph Strutt's 1801 "Sports and Pastimes of the People of England". William Clarke's "The Boy's Own Book" of 1829, the first listing of the rules of rounders - the rules that were transported intact to the American 1836 volume "Book of Sports", except that the name of the game was changed to baseball.

We made the visit on Pearl Harbor Day - I don't know if this was significant. I met Mike in the middle of Russell Square, not far from where a "grand match of base" was played in 1770 behind Montague House, between gentlemen of Cheshire and Derbyshire. I knew the area, having worked there years ago, and pointed out where the match would have been played. The game was recorded, and so we have more footprints in the snow. Both Strutt and Chadwick mention it. Mike had phoned in advanced to request our books, so it was all arranged in advance. We completed the applications and they issued a card good until 2001 - by that time Hal would supposedly be available to help us with our searches.

Then we passed through security and entered into the Main Reading Room. This was an awe-inspiring moment. This place is august, and no other word suffices. The huge circular room is surrounded by stacks going up towards the ceiling, rising to a dome. Hushed lighting, with reading stations fanning out from a central area, like petals on a daisy.



# DERBY AND BASEBALL, *con't*

June 28 1890. It was, says the Derby Mercury, "watched with interest and appreciation by several thousand spectators." This time the opposition was Preston North End, much tougher competition than the earlier opponents. Derby's winning margin was only 6 runs to 4, but it was their fourth successive victory. On Monday, Derby played at home again beating Aston Villa by 4 runs to 1 "before a large number of people." As the local paper reports: "The Derby team it will be seen have done splendidly and they are very nearly certain to be the League champions at the end of the season."

While the league teams were battling it out, a Baseball Council was being set up to represent both amateur and professional clubs. It was established at a meeting in Birmingham on July 9. By then 36 baseball clubs were already flourishing in Britain. One of the leading figures on the new body was the Derby industrialist Mr (later Sir Francis) Ley. It was he who played a major role in establishing baseball in England and in doing so ensured that Derby would play a leading part in the new sport.

He had become interested in the game on business visits to the United States. As he was to recount later: "Having seen the game played on numerous occasions in the United States it occurred to me it would be really a first class game to introduce in Derby." The previous year (1889) two top American sides had come to Britain and played a series of games which had been widely reported in the newspapers and illustrated magazines. When they played at the Oval, the Prince of Wales himself watched the game and met the players on both sides. That tour was arranged by A.G. Spalding, an American sports goods magnate who decided England was ripe for baseball and not only sent over experts to educate the natives on the subtleties of

the game but was prepared to invest money as well.

At the end of the successful 1890 introductory season, Francis Ley presided at a well attended meeting in the Athenaeum Rooms in Derby to set up a club on a permanent footing. He offered not only a 50 guineas challenge cup but the Ley's ground, uniforms, gear and a nucleus of skilled players, all at "charges which would not handicap the new club." In five weeks of the season just ended, he said, they had taken about £150 in gate money and expenses had not exceeded £20 a week, so clearly a club could be made to pay. There was plenty of local support, he said: "One has only to go any evening around Litchurch and other parts of the town to see boys playing baseball enthusiastically." Other local businessmen voiced their support and what the local paper calls a very successful meeting ended with the setting up of a committee to run the new club.

So at the end of the summer of 1890 the Derby baseball club was poised to do battle in an attempt to establish baseball as a serious sport. Yet there, astonishingly, the story ends, at any rate as far as the local papers are concerned. Though Derby won the league cup more than once with a team which included such famous Derby County players as Steve Bloomer (capped 23 times for England and the scorer of over 350 goals) and even defeated the American champions, the Boston Beaneaters, not one reference is to be found in the index of local newspapers at the Derby Local Studies Library. It seems most unlikely that none of these triumphs was reported in the Derby press. Clearly, then the index is far from comprehensive.

The only way to find the missing baseball reports is to go laboriously through all the local papers of the 1890s page by page. That would mean someone stay-

ing in Derby for probably two or three days, an expensive piece of research. So I have enlisted the aid of one of the local schools in the hope that some of their students who are keen on sports research might do the job for us. At the time of writing, I await results.

Earlier I had made contact with the descendants of Francis Ley. The family proved not only interested but very helpful. They searched all their family papers for any reference to baseball but, alas, without success. It appears that much of Sir Francis's business correspondence was destroyed when the family firm was wound up some years ago. So, no helpful leads there. I next tried Derby County Football Club, who simply didn't bother to respond. So I managed to persuade Radio Derby to give me a five minute slot on their main morning news programme and that did draw one valuable, though negative, response.

The former coach for Derby County, who was with the club for 30 years, heard my broadcast and rang me to say that when Brian Clough took over as manager he ordered that all mementoes of the club's past should be disposed of. "Forget about the past," he ordered. "Derby County's history starts now." A general clear out began and in a cupboard that had not been opened for years was found a collection of baseball gear from the 1890s: bats, balls, gloves, a treasure house of baseball memorabilia. It was all disposed of. Also found was a collection of minute books and these apparently were handed over to the City Museum. So far I have not been able to track down their whereabouts. I also established that the Baseball Cup which Derby County won several times has not been seen at the club certainly since the Second World War.

You see therefore why I said at the beginning of this article that source material on baseball

## Derby, con't

in Derby is sadly lacking. All the same, I am pressing on with my investigations in the Derby area and will report progress in a later Issue of *The Examiner*. I am also exploring one other promising source and that is the collection of baseball papers belonging to A.G. Spalding, the 19th century star and sports magnate. Here, I am enlisting the aid of our SABR colleagues across the Atlantic in the hope that his correspondence with Sir Francis Ley and other worthies who helped to form the England Baseball League will come to light and provide us with some valuable historical material. Watch this space!

Prints of the Derby Baseball Team photograph are available from W.W. Winter Ltd, 45 Midland Road, Derby DE1 2SP, telephone (01332) 345224. There are a wide range of sizes, both framed and unframed. If interested, please phone for details.

## History Committee News

The UK/Europe Baseball History Committee has a new chairman. Patrick Carroll, who has chaired the committee for the past few years, has relinquished the post because of other commitments. He is succeeded by Patrick Morley, SABR UK's founder secretary who has not been prominent in SABR activities for the past couple of years because of pressure of other work.

The new chairman says he finds he has inherited a committee which does credit to SABR's research aims. "Patrick has not only got under way a number of promising lines of research but has drawn up an ambitious proposal for publishing that research in a book provisionally entitled: *THE SECRET GAME: A History of Baseball in Britain*."

Elsewhere in this issue Patrick (Morley, that is) describes his own research efforts into the Baseball ground at Derby and the Ley family's links with baseball. "There have certainly been times

that labour when I felt baseball was indeed the secret game," he says. "It's up to us to put British baseball on the map at last."

The new chairman would like all SABR members who are doing any kind of research to let him know how they're progressing in time for the Committee's annual report which is being prepared now. It needn't be a long report, or at all literary, he says, notes will do. He is also looking for SABR members to contact local history groups and comb through local newspaper files in STOKE, PRESTON and ASTON VILLA, where the three other founding members of the English baseball league of 1890 were based (Derby being the fourth). Volunteers please contact him at Spring Cottage, The Batch, Hill Road, Sandford, North Somerset, BS19 5RH, telephone 01934 822781. There are a number of other research projects he has in mind, so again anyone willing to help please get in touch.

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## Footprints in the snow, con't

*The Club: A dialogue between father and son* by Puckle, written 1834, was supposed to be about baseball. We couldn't find any reference to baseball in it. We coined a word, "to be puckled", meaning "to get a bum steer". In fairness, the edition was a different one than the reference we were given, so maybe it changed.

We were faced with a multiplicity of volumes, more than we could ever digest in an afternoon. Then, to my joy, I found that you could *photocopy* these books! If the book wasn't too old or rare, you could do it yourself, and the cost wasn't exorbitant. I tucked Strutt et al under my arm and went off to copy relevant pages. So I could digest these texts in unhurried peace, or on the tube during rush hour.

I have always been intrigued with the past. At the age of 16 I was going through charity shops looking for old 78 rpm records that people threw out. I'm not too sentimental, and I don't believe the past was necessarily better than the present. It's just *unobtainable*. It's the fourth dimension. You can go to Egypt, you can go to Spain, but you can never go to yesterday or tomorrow. By the time you get to tomorrow, it's today. I've never liked being told what I can and can't do. That which you can never have intrigues me. So I make it a goal to break open this mystery, dispersing the mists of time, and discovering how and where, and most importantly why, baseball succeeded or failed to flourish and grow, and the social, geographic,

ethnic, and political factors that influenced it. It's a deep and intense story, and we've only just begun.

I write extensively about what we discovered and what we didn't elsewhere in this issue. I only want to end this article with a call to hit the stacks yourself. It was surprisingly easy, and these books are full of interesting reading. Even if you don't find references to baseball, this stuff is fascinating, like a time capsule dug from the earth after two centuries. The last time I was in California, I searched the 1931 Sacramento newspapers for my great-great-grandfather's obituary. I found it. On the same day there was an advertisement for the first public display of television in the city, though the ad admits it is "still in its infant stage". Amazing stuff. And it's waiting for you.

## 2. A Brief History of Baseball Prehistory

by Martin Hoerchner

Baseball grew to maturity unself-consciously in New York City in the 1840's. The city gentlemen who came together to play on weekends were not overly concerned with the origins of the game that they so enthusiastically embraced. It was only a variation of a family of games that all had known since childhood. A bit of baseball history ends, not begins, with the Knickerbockers. Before baseball became a codified game, it existed in numerous variations under a myriad of names, with only passing mentions by writers of the age. Indeed, in this prehistoric era, the references to baseball and rounders and town ball and one old cat and many other related games are extremely rare. So we peer into the past "through a glass darkly".

Baseball grew from the Knickerbockers at an amazing rate. True, in the beginning it was largely regional, being popular in the Northeast. But the Northeast was also the most populous, important, and advanced region of the country, and everything that originated there was bound to spread. Just as baseball spread from New York City to the rest of the Northeast, it spread from the Northeast to the rest of the country. Events such as the Civil War and the California Gold Rush hastened the inevitable.

This was an aggressive, optimistic, and forward-looking young country, and retrospection was not the rule of the day. Bright minds were more concerned with "what can we do with this game?" rather than "where did this game come from?"

Along with the rapid growth in baseball came the beginnings of baseball writing. It seemed that people couldn't get enough of baseball; when the game was over, they wanted to read about it later. Henry Chadwick soon emerged as the premier sports writer. Arriving in this country in 1850 at the age of 13, he started out as a cricket fanatic. But in 1856 he

witnessed a game of baseball at Elysian Fields, and was so moved that he adopted the new country's new sport and became its prime champion in the press. He was influential for a half century. He invented the box score and most of baseball's statistics, and was known during his lifetime as "The Father of the Game". More accurately, I would call him the "Father of Baseball Writing and Statistics".

Henry Chadwick was born in Britain. He didn't have to research the origins of baseball; he knew them. He immediately recognised the similarities between baseball and rounders, a game that he played as a child. He mentioned it in his writings, often commenting on the "ancient game" of baseball, and discussing its English roots. Here was the most respected baseball writer of all time, telling them they were playing game of British origin! This did not set well with many people.

Including one John Montgomery Ward. Most of us remember Monte Ward as the founder of the first baseball players' union and the first player to fight against the reserve clause. In 1888 he wrote a book called "Baseball - How to Become a Player". In his "Introduction: Origin and History", he writes about the history of ball games, leading up to the codification of baseball in 1845. He sketches the history of games from ancient Greece to Old England, quoting scholars such as Joseph Strutt. He then shows his pique with those that claimed baseball is descended from rounders. He wrote "There were ... persons who believed that everything good and beautiful in the world must be of English origin". His ire evident, he then specifies Chadwick in all but name as "the main proponent of the rounders theory", and says other writers were parroting his words without making an investigation.

Ward supports his theory that baseball is not descended from rounders by mentioning 18th-century English references

to baseball, including Jane Austen, and said there were no references to rounders anywhere near as old. [Patrick Carroll made this same point in Examiner 5]. But then he paints himself into a corner. So as not to give credit to the English for baseball itself, he also said that this game must have been quite different from baseball as we know it. He then mentions old American ball games that could have developed into baseball, especially one old cat. But his credibility suffers when he declares the origin of baseball is "the fruit of the inventive genius of the American boy". Well-researched as it is, Ward's account fails to bridge all the gaps, and it reads as if written by someone who had made his mind up before thoroughly examining the facts.

I have no doubt that most of the American jingoistic attitudes about the origins of baseball were a reaction to Chadwick's frequent mention of baseball as a derivation of rounders.

In 1888 Monte Ward went with Albert Spalding and a group of ballplayers representing two Major League teams, and took a round-the-world tour to bring baseball (and presumably Spalding's sporting goods) to the unconverted nations of the world. When they played a game by the Pyramids, one of the players wrote about the locals "They took more interest in the game than the average Englishman, and did not once refer to it as 'the old game of Rounders, you know' ". And they hadn't even been to England yet! Evidently the attitude that so annoyed this player was fostered by the English people he had met in America.

When the tour finally returned to New York there was a grand formal banquet served at Delmonico's, attended by dignitaries such as Theodore Roosevelt, Mark Twain, and the former National League president, Abraham Mills. Mills addressed the group, and said that "patriotism and research" [in that order, presumably - ed.] had shown that base-



## *A Brief History (con't)*

ball was a purely American invention. Guests and players alike pounded the table and chanted "No rounders! No rounders!". If Henry Chadwick had been present, he must have run for cover.

In 1905 Al Spalding decided to put the last nail in the rounders coffin by commissioning a group to finally discover the origins of baseball. How much research they actually did is questionable, but their partiality was unquestionable: they were there to prove baseball American. They could not, however, unearth solid facts, and were near their deadline with just the insistence that baseball was an American invention. Then, like a gift from God, came a letter from Abner Graves, an elderly resident of Cooperstown, New York. He wrote of playing baseball with Abner Doubleday in 1839, and how Doubleday made improvements to town ball and turned it into baseball. Doubleday was a general in the Civil War and a real American hero. This was what they'd been waiting for. The Spalding Commission took this as gospel without investigation, even though the account was full of holes. As if this wasn't enough, they added embellishments such as Doubleday's eliminating soaking, and his sketching the diagram of the field on a piece of paper. Henry Chadwick, ever more venerable by now, was allowed to add his dissenting opinion to the end of the report, restating his claim that baseball was a descendant of rounders. But it didn't do any good. The patriots had the certification they had always wanted.

And thus was sunk the ship of baseball prehistory. The last bit of it disappeared under the waters, and the waves closed over it. Within minutes it was never apparent that there was ever anything there.

The sea remained sealed over it for thirty years. Doubleday was Baseball's Founder, and that was that. 1939 was seen as the cen-

tennial of baseball, and as the year approached, Baseball made preparations to erect a shrine to itself in Cooperstown.

The man who finally debunked the Doubleday myth was Robert W. Henderson. He was head librarian at the New York Racket Club, but his main area of interest was baseball. He proved baseball was once the same game as rounders by showing two texts side by side, one in 1829 in England describing rounders (The Boy's Own Book), and another a few years later in America describing baseball (The Book of Sports). The rules are exactly the same. He also showed the utter implausibility of the Cooperstown myth by showing the contradictions of the Graves story. His argument was so compelling that even the traditionalists begin to see the truth of it. By this time, a half-century after Ward, it is possible that America was starting to feel a bit more secure about itself, and could accept foreign influence in its national pastime.

His book, "Baseball and Rounders" was published in 1939, the year the Hall of Fame opened in Cooperstown. It must have rained heavily on their parade. Henderson kept up his research and in 1947 published "Bat, Ball and Bishop - A History of Ball Games". It is a sweeping genealogy of ball games, starting with ancient Egypt, where they were connected with religious ceremonies. They were picked up by the Muslims after they conquered that land, and then entered Europe through Moorish Spain. From there the games moved into France, and were particularly connected with church rites during the Easter season (hence the "Bishop" part of the book's title). From there they moved into Britain. He describes the medieval French game of *la soule*, and the British game of stoolball, first mentioned in 1330, which sprang from *la soule* and which he says is the parent of both cricket and baseball. Like Ward, he quotes Joseph

Strutt, but comes up with a different conclusion.

This book is the seminal work in the prehistory and origins of baseball; it is also currently out of print. Today the name Henderson is fairly obscure. But he is the father of baseball prehistory. We really haven't uncovered much beyond Henderson. Later scholarly works such as Seymour's "The Early Years" only paraphrased him.

We of SABR(UK) are in a unique position. We're close to the source of baseball parentage, unlike our American cohorts. And we care to know, because we're baseball fanatics, unlike our British neighbours. We are sitting in the catbird seat, with the opportunities to make some real discoveries. And that's an exciting prospect.

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## *The Chair, con't*

Chapter Patron as it were). The interview was so exclusive that Thomson had disclosed (confessed perhaps) for the first time that he was unaware of a Dodger's pitching change until he stepped to the plate to face Ralph Branca. So unknown was this gem of non-conjecture, that when I mentioned it to Monte Irvin (since named as an honorary officer for the help he has given us), he said that he had not heard that story. We will resurrect that tape and play that part at our next meeting on June 28.

Speaking of our June meeting... We had planned to stage an event at the Derby Baseball Ground, to commemorate this closing of a chapter in British Baseball History. It was going to include our AGM along with baseball and softball games, played where Sir Francis Ley first brought baseball to Derby. Alas, we rescheduled when the Derby football fans tore up the turf after the last match, in search of souvenirs. The Derby F.C. feared similar be-

### 3. Dispersing the Mists of Time

We didn't have a detailed plan of action when we went to the British Museum. It's hard to, when researching the origins and parentage of baseball - the "prehistory" of baseball in Britain. You just don't know where to start. I did however, have the name of a few early references to either baseball or related games. The first illustration of a game named "baseball" occurred in the "Little Pretty Pocket Book", first published in 1744. The volume we found was from 1770. A key volume was the encyclopedic listing of games of the era, "The Sports and Pastimes of the People of England" by Joseph Strutt, published in 1801. There was "The Boy's Own Book", first published in 1828. The first reference to rounders was the 1829 edition; we had the 1849 edition. It was this book that, when transported across the Atlantic, printed the same rules for "baseball" as it did for "rounders". We had some other references, but they all came to nought.

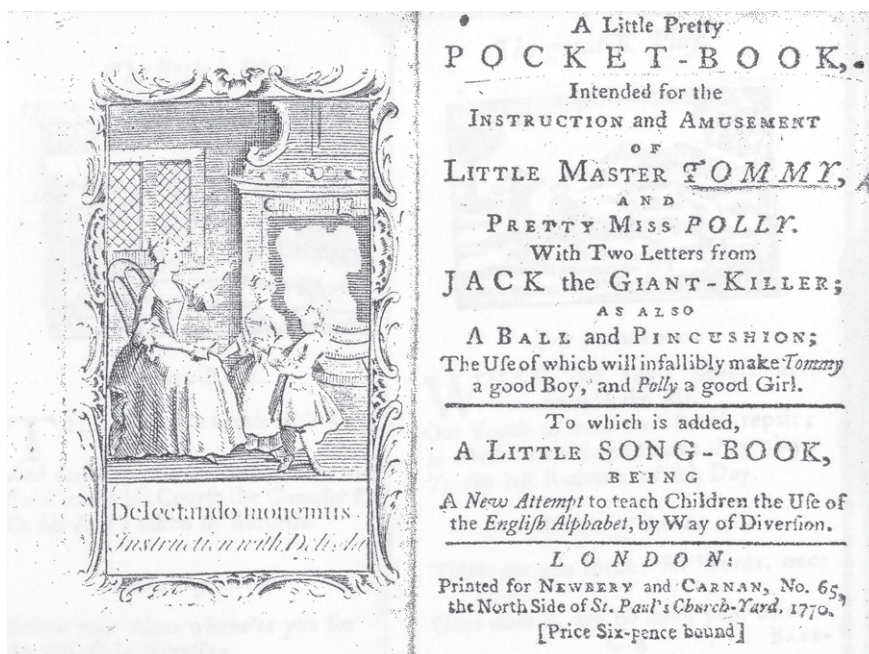
This search was not as straightforward as you might think. For instance, while the Little Pretty Pocket Book (1744), a small children's book, had a text and illustration of baseball, Strutt's book (1801), a scholarly compendium of the games and other pastimes engaged in by the people of England, mentions neither baseball or rounders. And it was Strutt's book that most interested me. It was the one of the three that was written for adults, and it listed more games than the others. I decided, not only to look for refer-

ences to rounders or baseball, but also to look for elements of baseball in the other games that were listed. In this I was not disappointed.

Having lived in Britain for more than a decade, I have become aware of an angle that can (and must) be read into works such as Strutt's, an angle that might get past even a solid researcher as Robert Henderson, because he had never lived here. And that is the pervasive effects of the British class system on every aspect of life. Even writing from 1997, I find it stifling. I can't

development of a sport. That is how the rules develop under an authoritarian system, where playing by the rules is all-important, in comparison to how they develop under a system where each team member is encouraged to do their best to win the game. The examples are multitude of 19th-century baseball players trying to break or bend the rules to get an advantage; in fact that is *the* story of the development of baseball. Players and later managers such as John McGraw would stay up late reading the rulebook, finding loopholes. Some of these loop-

holes were soon closed up, such as King Kelly's jumping into a game to catch a fly ball. But some of them permanently changed the game, such as the stolen base. In the 1850's a runner caused a amusement when he ran from first to second base between pitches. When challenged by the umpire, he correctly pointed out that there was no rule against it. And there still isn't. This type of behaviour would be seriously



Title page of the Little Pretty Pocket Book, 1770 edition.

imagine what it was like two centuries ago. It has been said that the Americans are taught to do the best they can, while the British are taught to follow the rules. Whether this is true or not in that exact wording, the principle becomes a key factor in the success or failure among particular sports, and more importantly, the success or failure among which classes.

There is another effect the class system would have on the

frowned upon over here. Christy Mathewson, in a gently mocking tone, writes in his book "Pitching in a Pinch" (which has a whole chapter on cheating) "You have such jolly funny morals in this country", declared an Englishman I once met. 'You steal and rob in baseball and yet you call it fair. Now in cricket we give our opponents every advantage, don't you know, and after the game we are all jolly good fellows at tea together'".



*by Martin Hoerchner*

XII. There is a rustic game called *BASE* or *bars*<sup>b</sup>, and in some places *prisoner's bars*; and as the success of this pastime depends upon the agility of the candidates and their skill in running, I think it may properly enough be introduced here. It was much practised in former times, and some vestiges of the game are still remaining in many parts of the kingdom. The first mention of this sport that I have met with, occurs in the Proclamations at the head of the parliamentary proceedings, early in the reign of Edward the Third, where it is spoken of as a childish amusement, and prohibited to be played in the avenues of the palace at Westminster; during the sessions of Parliament, because of the interruption it occasioned to the members and others in passing to and fro as their business required. It is also spoken of by Shakespear as a game practised by the boys.

He with two striplings, lads more like to run  
The country *base*, than to commit such slaughter,  
Made good the passage<sup>d</sup>.

It was, however, most assuredly played by the men, and especially in Cheshire and other adjoining counties, where formerly it seems to have been in high repute.

The performance of this pastime requires two parties of equal number, each of them having a *BASE* or *home*, as it is usually called, to themselves, at the distance of about twenty or thirty yards. The players then on either side taking hold of hands, extend themselves in length, and opposite to each other, as far as they conveniently can, always remembering that one of them must touch the base; when any one of them quits the hand of his fellow and runs into the field, which is called giving the chase, he is immediately followed by one of his opponents; he again is followed by a second from the former side, and he by a second opponent; and so on alternately, until as many are out as choose to run, every one pursuing the man he first followed, and no other; and if he overtake him near enough to touch him, his party claims one toward their game; and both return home. They then run forth again and again in like manner, until the number is completed that decides the victory; this number is optional, and I am told rarely exceeds twenty. About thirty years back, I saw a grand match at base played in the fields behind Montague house, by twelve gentlemen of Cheshire against twelve of Derbyshire, for a considerable sum of money, which afforded much entertainment to the spectators. In Essex they play this game with the addition of two prisons, which are stakes driven into the ground, parallel with the home boundaries, and about thirty yards from them; and every person who is touched on either side in the chase, is sent to one or other of these prisons, where he must remain till the conclusion of the game, if not delivered previously by one of his associates, and this can only be accomplished by touching him, which is a difficult task, requiring the performance of the most skilful players, because the prison belonging to either party is always much nearer to the base of their opponents than to their own; and if the person sent to relieve his confederate be touched by an antagonist before he reaches him, he also becomes a prisoner, and stands in equal need of deliverance. The addition of the prisons occasions a considerable degree of variety in the pastime, and is frequently productive of much pleasantry.

*Description of the game of base, from "The Sports and Pasttimes of the People of England" by Joseph Strutt, 1801.*

# Dispersing, con't

Overt references to class in Strutt are constant. Under "running", he writes "In the middle ages, foot-racing was considered as an essential part of a young man's education, especially if he was the son of a man of rank". Later he writes "Two centuries back running was thought to be an exercise by no means derogatory to the rank of nobility". Under wrestling, he writes "The art of wrestling, which in the present day is chiefly confined to the lower classes of people, was however highly esteemed by the ancients".

Yet under tennis he writes "We have undoubted authority to prove that Henry the Seventh was a tennis-player", surely the highest stamp of approval you can give to a sport, and mentions his son, the future Henry VIII, who was "much attracted to this diversion". Under "hurling" he writes

"The matches are usually made by gentlemen". The game of "foot-ball" receives short shrift "It was formerly much in vogue among the common people of England, though of late years it seems to

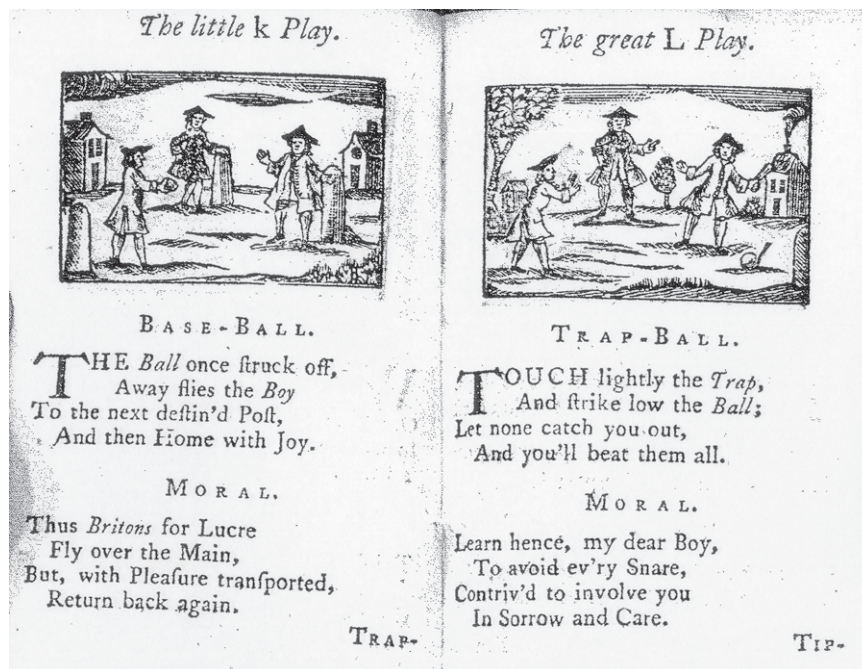
have fallen into disrepute, and is but little practiced." Obviously that trend did not last. Later on he writes of the possible origins of football violence, saying "The abilities of the performers are best displayed in attacking and defending the goals: when the exercise becomes exceeding violent, the players kick each other's shins without the least ceremony, and some of them are overthrown at the hazard of their limbs." Strutt names golf as the oldest of all bat and ball games. About it he says

"It should seem that golf was a fashionable game among the nobility at the commencement of the seventeenth century, and it was one of the exercises which prince Henry, eldest son to James the Fifth, occasionally amused himself". Of pall-mall he writes "The game of mall was a fashionable amusement in the reign of King Charles the Second, and the walk in Saint James's Park, now called the Mall, received its name from having been appropriated to the purpose of playing at mall, where Charles himself and his courtiers

from American eyes, the word denotes a countrified, pastoral environment. Yet I wonder whether the word has more of a "peasant" connotation in Strutt's time. Backward, in a word. I would be very surprised if it didn't. Among the games listed as "rustic" are foot-ball. Strutt writes "The rustic boys made use of a blown bladder without the covering of leather by way of foot-ball." About trap ball, which shares many elements of baseball, is written "Trap-ball, when compared with cricket, is but a childish pastime; but I have

seen it played by the rustics in Essex". And essentially, the game of "base" is a "rustic" game. "There is a rustic game called *base* or *bars*, and in some places *prisoner's bars*". This section is reproduced in full in page 9.

Strutt fascinated me, yet there are more questions. I would like to know why he didn't mention baseball or rounders. Maybe the 1838 edition does, but we



Illustrations of base-ball and trap-ball, from "The Little Pretty Pocket Book", 1770 edition.

frequently exercised themselves in the practice of this pastime." But throughout this period, the quintessential British game was cricket, another bat and ball game which is obviously but distantly related to baseball. Strutt writes "Cricket of late years is become exceedingly fashionable, being much countenanced by the nobility and gentlemen of fortune."

Even my understanding of Strutt changed from reading to reading. For instance, he uses the term "rustic" often. Viewed

haven't been able to locate. He mentions so many obscure games of the time, why not baseball or rounders? But he does mention the game of *base*, which is often quoted as a precursor to baseball, or even the same game. It is listed, not under ball games, but under running games. He states that it was "much practiced in former times", and notes the references to base in Shakespeare and in the Edward III edict. He explains the rules this way: "The performance of this pastime re-



# Dispersing, con't

quires two parties of equal number, each of them having a base or home, as it is usually called, to themselves, at the distance of about twenty or thirty yards. The players then on either side taking hold of hands, extend themselves in length, and opposite to each other, as far as they conveniently can, always remembering that one of them must touch the base". If you can picture the opening position, there are two bases, one for each team. The team members join hands and stretch out in parallel lines to full length, with each team member facing his opposite, and the one at the end touching the base. Strutt continues: "When any one of them quits the hand of his fellow and runs into the field, which is called giving the chase, he is immediately followed by one of his opponents; he again is followed by a second from the former side, and he by a second opponent; and so on alternately, until as many are out as choose to run, every one pursuing the man he first followed, and no other; and if he overtake him near enough to touch him, his party claims one toward their game, and both return home."

Now this doesn't sound like baseball; it sounds more like an extended game of tag. I'm not sure if its connection to baseball is at most an unlucky coincidence of name. Yet many writers talk of base as if it is baseball. Harold Seymour, in his epochal volume "Baseball: The Early Years" writes "Possibly the first record of an American baseball game is that recorded in the journal of George

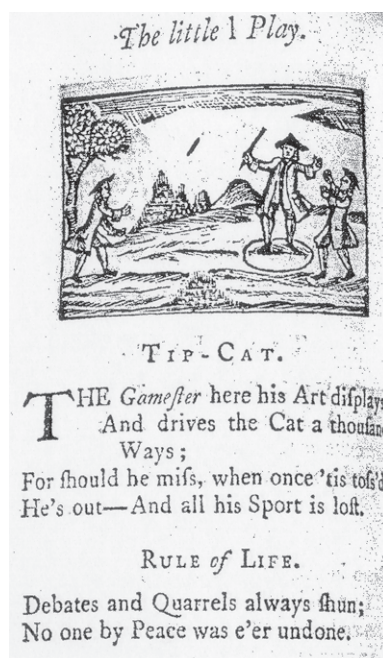
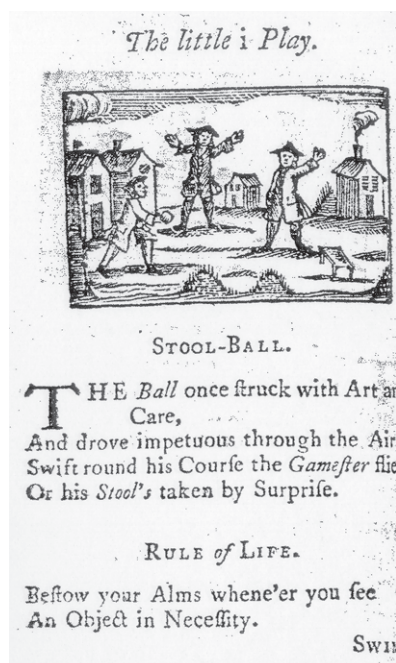
Ewing, a Revolutionary soldier, who tells of playing a game of 'base,' April 7, 1778, at Valley Forge." He might have been following Robert Henderson, who in his even more epochal "Bat, Ball and Bishop: A History of Ball Games" writes "What may be the first game of an actual game of baseball played in America, and so called, is related in the *Journal* of a Revolutionary War soldier, George Ewing who at Valley Forge on April 7, 1778 'Exercisd in the afternoon in the intervals playd at base". In both cases *base* is taken

Strutt says the Montague game was "about thirty years back", bringing it perilously close to the date of the Valley Forge game. Whether the same game could have been played in London and in America by Britons a generation or two removed must be considered. Whether the Valley Forge game was more *base* than *base-ball* should not be pre-judged. And the question whether base could be an ancestor or other relation to baseball needs more research. Strutt writes than in Essex there was a variation of the game which

added two prisons "in parallel to the home boundaries, and about thirty yards from them" thus making a rudimentary diamond. Yet the players didn't "run the bases", i.e. run in circuit from the first to the second and thereon, and any link is still tenuous. This needs more research.

In the same vein I am trying to understand the game in the Little Pretty Pocket Book, a London publication dating from 1744. This illustration is on page 10. At least this game was named "base-ball". Yet the differences with the modern game of baseball are numerous. First of

all, there are posts instead of bases. That is not a problem; rounders uses posts instead of bases. And there is no bat. The "pitcher" stands by what we would know as second base, ready to throw the ball to someone ready to hit it with an open palm. But many of the rules of the early games mention using a "bat or hand" to hit the ball after it had been thrown. And only three bases are visible, but that could be because of the perspective. And early bat, ball and base games



Illustrations of stool ball and tip-cat, from "The Little Pretty Pocket Book", 1770 edition.

as *baseball*. More ironically, Henderson adds "and so called" after calling the Valley Forge account the first record of a baseball game. Yet the name wasn't at all the same. It's like confusing York with New York.

In Strutt's account, just before he lists the rules, he writes of the "grand match of base played in the fields behind Montague House", just behind the present British Museum. The game was generally played by adult men, rather than children. In 1801



# Dispersing, con't

showed a varying number of bases, so that is not a problem. In fact, this lovely engraving with its teams of men in three-cornered hats, is about 80% of the game we know today. I find the differences fascinating rather than troubling. The fact that a game named *base-ball* could have had posts instead of bases, an open palm instead of a bat, and maybe more or less than four bases, is intriguing. Monte Ward points out in his "Ward's Baseball Book: How to become a player" that during his tour of Britain in 1888-89 that the British constantly remarked that Ward's game was "rounders with the rounder taken out". He logically asks that, if baseball was an old British game, didn't they make *that* comparison. Perhaps by that late time, the game known as baseball in Britain had long ago transformed itself into rounders. Or even disappeared completely. What actually did happen to baseball in Britain after the Little Pretty Pocket Book, 144 years before the World Tour? And a more tantalising question: which really is older, baseball or rounders? I'm sure there are references out there to be found which would clear up the questions.

The Little Pretty Pocket Book also shows games such as trap-ball, stool-ball, and tip-cat, in addition to base-ball. These illustrations are shown in full on page 11. It is in these three games that I find the most resemblance to the base-ball we know. But before I go into detail about these similarities, there are a few odds and ends that struck me from this research.

First, despite the fact that is

it obvious that Henderson relied heavily on Strutt's work, there is one disagreement I found immediately. It concerns a game called "club ball". In chapter 19, the chapter about cricket, Henderson writes as club ball as the immediate ancestor of cricket, "First, if we understand by 'club ball' not the name of a specific game, but a generic term for ball games played with some form of club." Yet Strutt writes that "Club-ball is a pastime clearly distinguished from cambuc

"Strutt invented this term in 1808 [ed: the book was published in 1801], and his use of it has misguided historians into the belief that at one time there was an English ball game called 'club ball'. So far there is no evidence that there was such a nomenclature in English for a ball game." But Monte Ward writes "The first straight bats were used in the old English game called club ball". So who is right? Without more research it's anybody's guess.

But there was one aspect of Henderson that was well supported by Strutt, and that is Henderson's connection of medieval ball games with Easter ceremonies, and their connection with the Church, as everything was in that time. Strutt writes that "hand-ball was formerly a favourite pastime among the young persons of both sexes, and in many parts of the kingdom it was customary for them to play at this game during the Easter holidays for *tansy cakes*". Later he quotes a Chester antiquary who said it had been the custom from "time out of mind" for the shoemakers to yearly deliver a ball of leather, called a foot-ball, on Shrove Tuesday, the day that begins the period of Lent that ends on Easter Sunday.

There is one last point that also struck me. That is that the "Boy's Own Book" cop-

ies Strutt word for word in many places. About stool ball, the Boy's Own Book writes "In some parts of the country, a certain number of stools are set up in a circular form, at a distance from each other, and every one of them is occupied by a single player; when the ball is



*Ball and Ball.*

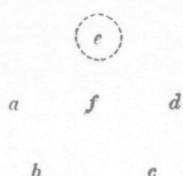
*The top two drawings illustrate different versions of club ball, according to Strutt, while the bottom drawing is of trap ball. All are in the 1801 edition of "Sports and Pastimes of the People of England".*

or golf, in the edict above mentioned [i.e. Edward III's]. He also presents two drawings taken from earlier illustrations from games he claimed were club-ball. [These are on page 12]. He then names club-ball as the origin of cricket. So Henderson counters with

# Dispersing, con't

## ROUNDERS.

This is a favourite game with bat and ball, especially in the west of England; the bat used is a smooth, round stick, sometimes called a dagger, about two feet in length. The players are divided into two equal parties, and chance decides which shall have the



first innings. Five stones or posts, called bases, are placed from twelve to twenty yards asunder, as *a, b, c, d*, and the fifth (*e*) has a circle drawn round it for "home," as shewn in the margin.

The out-players should be scattered about the field, excepting one, called the pecker or feeder, who places himself at *f*, from whence he tosses the ball gently towards one of the in-players standing at "home," another out-player being stationed behind home to return the ball to the feeder. The in-player then strikes at the ball with his bat, and should he succeed in hitting it, he immediately runs to the base *a*, while another in-player takes up the bat, and is served or fed with the ball; however, he need not stop at *a*, if he thinks he can reach another base, *b, c*, or *d*, or even home again, without being struck with the ball by the feeder or any of the out-players; should he be so struck, he is out. The in-player is also out if he miss striking the ball, or if the ball, when struck, falls behind home, or is caught by any of the out-players. An in-player, stopping at a base, should keep his eye on the feeder, and when he sees him toss the ball to a striker, he should immediately run for the next base; and a feeder is allowed to pretend to toss the ball, in order to tempt a player to leave a base, in which case he has a great chance of striking the player with the ball, and thus putting him out. As the in-players arrive at home, after passing through the other bases, they take the bat in rotation until they are all out. Suppose all to be out but two, the better player, with the consent of the other, may then claim "two fair hits for the rounder," as follows:—He stands at the home, and the feeder tosses the ball to him; if it does not appear to suit him, he need not strike at it, and the feeder must toss the ball to him as often as he requires, provided he does not strike at it. He need not run the first time he strikes at the ball, should he not send it a sufficient distance; but the second time, if he hit the ball, he must pass round all the bases in rotation, without being struck by it, and before the ball shall have been grounded in the circle, or "home." Should he accomplish this feat, his side go in again, and begin the game as at first; if not, the opposite side take their places. Of course, if he miss the ball whilst striking at it the second time, the rounder is considered to be lost. If at any time the number of the side should have greatly diminished, and that these should all be at the several bases, and no one left at the home to strike, then, should the feeder, or any player of the opposite side, run to the home and ground the ball in the ring, the in-players are put out, and the feeder's party go in; if he miss the ring in throwing, and any one from the bases gets regularly home, the in-players continue the game as before.

## FEEDER.

This game is played with three bases only, and a player takes the place of feeder, who remains so until he puts one of the others out, by catching his ball or striking him while running from base to base, as at Rounders; the one that is put out taking the place of feeder to the others, and thus the game goes on. There are no sides at this game.

*The rules of rounders, from "The Boy's Own Book", 1849.*

# Dispersing, con't

struck, which is done as before, with the hand, they are every one of them obliged to alter his situation, running in succession from stool to stool". Strutt writes about the same sport: "Again, in other parts of the country a certain number of stools are set up in a circular form, and at a distance from each other, and every one of them is occupied by a single player; when the ball is struck, which is done as before with the hand, they are every one of the obliged to alter his situation, running in succession from stool to stool.". As for foot-ball, the Boy's Own Book writes that "Foot-ball was formerly much in vogue in England, though, of late years, it seems to have fallen into disrepute, and is but little practised." Strutt writes: "It was formerly much in vogue among the common people of England, though of late years it seems to have fallen into disrepute, and is but little practised". The fact that a child's manual of the rules of commonly-known games could have borrowed wholesale from a scholarly work is an interesting twist in this search.

But while the "Boy's Own Book" mentions rounders, Strutt's book mentions neither rounders or baseball. So in a search for the origins of baseball, I looked for elements of baseball in the games that were listed. As I wrote before, these are many.

One of the games that Henderson names as a direct ancestor of baseball is **stool ball**. Of this game Strutt writes "I have been informed that a pastime called stool-ball is practised to this day in the northern parts of England, which consists in simply setting a stool upon the ground, and one of the players takes his place before it, while his antagonist, standing at a distance, tosses a ball with the intention of striking the stool; and this it is the business of the former to prevent by beating it away with the hand... If, on the contrary, it should be

missed by the hand and touch the stool, the players change places: the conqueror at this game is he who strikes the ball most times before it touches the stool." This resembles cricket if you substitute the *stump* for the *stool*. If the ball passes the batsmen and hits the stump, the batsman is out. Also note that the "batter" actually beats the ball away with his hand, like the Little Pretty Pocket Book illustration of baseball. Note also, that there is no mention of bases or the "batter" running a circuit.

However, Strutt goes on: "In other parts of the country a certain number of stools are set up in a circular form, and at a distance from each other, and every one of



*Illustration of trap ball, from "The Boy's Own Book", 1849 edition. Note the difference with the trap in the drawing on page 12.*

them is occupied by a single player; when the ball is struck, which is done as before with the hand, they are every one of the them obliged to alter his situation, running in succession from stool to stool, and if he who threw the ball can regain it in time to strike any one of the players, before he reaches the stool to which he is running, he takes his place, and the person touched must throw the ball, until he can in like manner return to the circle." Now we're getting closer! Here we have a circuit of bases, each one occupied by a runner (who evidently doesn't have to hit safely to reach

base). We also see the beginnings of baseball's "force play", where each runner has to move up a base when a runner is behind him. And interestingly, the runners are put out by being struck with the ball - "soaking", in other words. This was a feature of early versions of baseball (like town ball) that was finally abolished with the Knickerbocker rules of 1845. It is interesting to note that the "bases" version of stool ball was just a *variation* of the game. Like regional accents, it is obvious that different regions played different versions of games. And this is what makes research both more difficult and more interesting.

Henderson says stool ball is the parent of cricket, while Strutt disagrees, saying that cricket descended from **club ball**. This is the game that Henderson says is a generic and not specific tag. Strutt's description is largely based on two illustrations, reproduced on page 12. He does not date the drawings, but he does connect club ball with Edward III's 14th-century ban. And the dress in the drawings is clearly medieval. Strutt writes: "The first exhibits a female figure in the action of throwing a ball to a man who elevates his bat to strike it; behind the woman at a little distance appear in the original delineation several other figures of both sexes, waiting attentively to catch or stop the ball when returned by the batsman." Unlike stool ball, club ball uses a bat; in fact, that is how it gets its name. But there is no mention of the batter running after hitting the ball. An interesting point is the mixed-sex nature of the game; which has not been uncommon from then till now.

Strutt continues: "The second specimen of club-ball, which indeed is taken from a drawing more ancient than the former, present to us two players only, and he who is possessed of the bat holds the ball also, which he ei-



# Dispersing, con't

ther threw into the air and struck with his bat as it descended, or cast forcibly upon the ground, and beat it away when it rebounded; the attention of his antagonist to catch the ball need not to be remarked." This description is reminiscent of hitting fungos. In school we did a similar exercise as a warmup before a baseball game. But the batter could either toss the ball in the air and hit it, or bounce it hard on the ground and hit it after the bounce. Surely an early version of the Baltimore chop! This hints that the ball was softer and more rubbery than a baseball.

The description of these two illustrations is all that Strutt writes about club ball. The pictures, obviously copied from the originals, are neither identified or dated. Henderson's scepticism regarding club ball might well be justified. Again, this is a story waiting to be written.

We now come to the grand English game of this time, if not all time: **cricket**. Cricket was so dominating that the Boy's Own Book, in its chapter on ball games, has one section on cricket and one section on "other games". Strutt writes: "From the club-ball originated, I doubt not, that pleasant and many exercise, distinguished in modern times by the name of cricket. The differences and similarities between cricket and baseball are too familiar to list here. But less familiar is his description of variations of cricket: "This game, which is played with the bat and the ball, consists of single and double wicket". Double wicket is similar to the current game, and the single wicket version is described this way: "At the single wicket the striker with his bat is the protector of the wicket, the opponent party stand in the field to catch or stop the ball, and the bowler, who is one of them, takes his place by the side of a small baton or stump set up for that purpose two and twenty yards

from the wicket, and thence delivers the ball with the intention of beating it down. If ... the ball is struck by the bat and driven into the field beyond the reach of those who stand out to stop it, the striker runs to the stump at the bowler's station, which he touches with his bat and then returns to his wicket. If this be performed before the ball is thrown back, it is called a *run*." Like many sports of the period, cricket had a varying number of "bases", a bit like the versions of the old U.S. game of cat, like "one old cat", "two old cat", etc. Has cricket ever been played with four bases?

"The Boy's Own Book" says about **trap-ball** "This game is, by many, considered to rank next to cricket." Strutt only says is "anterior [i.e. older] to cricket". That this was a popular game of the time is evident when "The Boy's Own Book" says "With the form of the trap our young readers are of course acquainted". The trap was actually a small catapult, spring-driven, that would hold the ball. The striker would spring the trap with his foot and strike with the ball with a small bat that resembled a large wooden spoon. Strutt writes "It is usual, in the present modification of the game, to place two boundaries at a given distance from the trap, between which it is necessary for the ball to pass when it is struck by the batsman, for if it falls without side of either, he gives up his bat and is out." This is the first reference to the foul rule. This is important because the existence of foul territory is one of the main things that distinguishes baseball from cricket. Strutt continues: "He is also out if he strikes the ball into the air and it is caught by one of the his adversaries before it grounds." This is the fly rule, a feature of both baseball and cricket. "And again, if the ball when returned by the opponent party touches the trap, or rests within one bat's length of it." This

is similar to the put out. And the "Boy's Own Book" says "It is not necessary to make the game in one inning". The *inning* is a hallmark both of baseball and cricket, but note the usage in the singular, like the American game!

Strutt lists a variation of the game played in Essex: "for instead of a broad bat with a flatted face, they used a round cudgel about an inch and a half in diameter and three feet in length, and those who had acquired the habit of striking the ball this instrument rarely miss their blow, but frequently drive it to an astonishing distance." The first reference to power hitting! But still, unlike stool ball and cricket, trap ball is purely a hitting and catching game, with no running element.

"**Tip-cat**, or perhaps more properly, the game of *cat*, is a rustic pastime well known in many parts of the kingdom. Its denomination is derived from a piece of wood called a *cat*, about six inches in length and an inch and a half or two inches in diameter. The player with its cudgel strikes it smartly, in the same manner as he would a ball". Strutt then says, unsurprisingly, that there are many variations, and lists two of them. One of them has the batter standing in the middle of a large circle drawn on the ground, and trying to hit the cat outside of the circle.

More importantly "The second method is to make four, six, or eight holes in the ground in a circular direction, and as nearly as possible at equal distances from each other, and at every hole is placed a player with his bludgeon; one of the opposite part who stand in the field, tosses the cat to the batsman who is nearest him, and every time the cat is struck the players are obliged to change their situations, and run once from one hole to another in succession; if the cat be driven to any great distance they continue to run in the same order, and claim a score

# Dispersing, con't

towards their game every time they quit one hole and run to another; but if the cat be stopped by their opponents and thrown across between any two of the holes before the player who has quitted one of them can reach the other, he is out." This version get closer to baseball. It has a bat (cudgel or bludgeon), unlike stoolball. It has bases, like cricket and stoolball. It has runners who run the bases in succession, like cricket and stoolball. Like cricket and unlike baseball, it has a striker at each base. A unique aspect of the game is its use of an irregular piece of wood instead of a ball, which would give it an irregular path, and thus be harder to catch, especially on the bounce. A bit like a rugby ball or American football. I have heard of a U.S. game, in living memory, that used as a ball a bit of wood with a nail driven in, to give it untrue bounces. Has anyone ever heard of this game? Another question is about the connection between the English game of tip-cat and the U.S. pre-baseball game of "one old cat" and "two old cat". Irving Leitner, in "Baseball: Diamond in the Rough" says "it has been suggested that the familiar game one o' cat ... originally was known as 'one hole cat'. Such a description would be in perfect harmony with Strutt's description of tip-cat, in which 'every time the cat is struck' players 'quit one hole and run to another.'"

Lastly we come to **rounders**. Of rounders, "The Boy's Own Book" says it is "a favourite game with bat and ball, especially in the west of England", which is Jane Austen country. The entry on rounders is printed in its entirety on page 13. This game is, of course, the closest to baseball yet seen. It would be easier to list the differences. Most importantly, the runner is put out by being struck by the ball, and not tagged or forced out. The feeder (or pitcher) is allowed to fake a throw, violating baseball's balk rule. There are no strikes, balls, or fouls. And

rounder has the "rounder", in which one of the last two players may opt to be given two tries to circle the bases before the ball is returned. If he makes it, the whole side gets the bat again; if not, the inning is over.

The subject of the relationship between baseball and rounders has filled volumes. It is a game that is commonly known as the English parent of baseball, though that has never been proven. It may be more correctly a cousin, a maybe even a younger cousin, to baseball. Suffice it to say at this time that references to the word baseball go farther back than rounders. What exactly is the relation between these two similar sports? We need to dig deeper.

All this is of course only skimming the surface. There are so many questions to be answered: I hope we've asked some of them here. The study of the ancestors and origins of baseball is a wide-open field, because so little has already been written. It can be a difficult and frustrating path; the references that interest us are frustratingly rare. I know there must be more than four references to baseball in the 1700's. It was described as well-known and commonly played. The first reference dates from exactly 1700. Imagine if someone could find a 17th century reference! And of the four, only the Little Pretty Pocket Book gives a hint of the rules. Can more information on this be discovered? And of course, the relationship to rounders always bedevils us. Is the child father to the man? Can we find more early references to rounders, and especially those that use it in the same breath as baseball. Do you think any newspaper articles about the 1874 tour, or even the 1888 tour, describe baseball in comparison with any British games?

This is virgin territory, and one could make important discoveries with very little effort. So give it a go - great things await!

# Volunteers

A few SABR UK members have recently volunteered to cover key Chapter duties, for which we thank them. We will give **Barry Winetrobe** the title of Archivist. If anyone comes across anything in the media, in an old bookshop, in an art store, etc, of baseball interest, please could you send a copy to Barry. He can be reached at 53 Woodside Road, New Malden, Surrey KT3 3AW, tel. 0181 949-1035.

**Graham Winterbone** has volunteered to look after the membership list, which is a much bigger task than it may seem. Please direct any questions regarding the membership to Graham. He can be reached at 5 Beech Court, Hillside Road, Harpenden, Herts AL5 4BW, tel. 01582 622 180.

Finally, **Harvey Sakher** is assisting Patrick Morley in his new duties as the Chairman of the British and European Baseball History Committee. He gets the title of Assistant Chairman. If you want to discuss a research idea or any other historical topic, and can't get hold of Patrick, feel free to contact Harvey. He can be reached at 9 Byrne Road, Flat B, Balham, London SW12 9HZ, tel. 0171 630-0271.

We want to thank Barry, Graham, and Harvey for their good work on behalf of SABR UK

# The Chair, con't

*continued on page 16.*  
haviour from 18,000 howling baseball fans! So our AGM returns to its reliable home, John Eichler's Kings of Clerkenwell pub, on Saturday 28 June 1997. Specifics will follow under a different cover. The guv'nor knows us well enough to know we won't tear his place apart. Meanwhile, we're still trying to get something going at Derby this summer - we feel this is a historical chapter that must be marked. We'll keep you informed.