

## THE GREAT GAME

As an ex-player, an ardent follower and an umpire of the great game of cricket, I am always pleased to find some mention of the game associated with the Wellington and Napoleonic period.

There was and is, quite a lot of cricket played in the army and the Peninsular and Waterloo armies were no exception. This was during the period when under-arm bowling was still the main method of delivering the ball. The teams were frequently composed of officers and men playing together.

I am sure we have all read of soldiers comparing cannon balls bowling along in a manner similar to cricket balls. Or, as mentioned in 'Life in Wellington's Army' by Antony Brett-James, of the 52nd Foot playing cricket in Paris, watched by a crowd of Frenchmen. They considered this game strange and commented that the English could not be afraid of cannon balls when they could so fearlessly meet and stop those dreadful cricket balls coming towards them with such terrific force.

Cricket is regularly played on the Greek island of Corfu. The game was introduced to the island when it was occupied by the British army during the Napoleonic wars in 1813 when the British became the 'protectors' of the Ionic Islands. It is still played there even though the island was handed back to Greece in 1863.

Cricket again followed the army, or the army followed cricket and Napoleon to the island of St Helena. Its population, in the main, were descendants of Londoners left homeless after the Great Fire in 1666. They had accepted an offer of employment by the East India Company to go to the island and produce jute. Cricket had been played there for some years.

Until now I have never imagined that Napoleon may have watched a game of cricket. There is an anecdote, quite outside our period, but may well be of interest. The playing area was bounded by many ravines and in 1890, during a match, a fielder retrieving a ball that had crossed the boundary fell down a ravine and was killed. I am assured that the scorebook of the match can still be seen. Recorded against the name of the unfortunate individual the entry reads 'Retired - Dead'.

© Sid Nottingham 1986

Ed. note. We all know who was going to be 'knocked for six' in the match on the right.! Illustration kindly supplied by member Max Attenborough.

