Banstead played its first recorded game on 25 July 1842 versus Twickenham. Although the game was held in Banstead, it is not known precisely where, as the Avenue Road ground was not used until 1850. Bunny Knibbs, a former long serving committee member and president of the club, wrote in his historical records that he suspected the game was played in a field now occupied by Wilmot Way (these records together with John Wilcox's fine book "Playing on the Green" are the main sources used for the facts presented in these newsletters). That field sat near the Victoria pub which gave its name to the other village club at the time, the Banstead Victoria, which played cricket there. Sadly, the Banstead Victoria club did not survive the First World War.

The Twickenham players would have travelled to Banstead by horse drawn carriage as the railway to Sutton was not completed until 1847. The 12 mile journey would have taken between 1 ½ and 2 hours. The game would most probably have been arranged by letter as there was no telephone let alone email in 1842.

The Banstead village that the Twickenham team travelled to in 1842 was very different to the one we are used to today. The population was 1,168 (in the 1841 census) with 34 landowners over 5,518 acres and 223 dwellings. According to the 2011 census, the modern Banstead has a population of 16,666. Agriculture would have been the main source of work for residents in 1842. Click on the map of Banstead in 1841 for a closer look at the layout of the parish. See if you can spot the back field which was exactly the same shape in 1841 as it is today (clue: look for a paddock to the right of the church then check the satellite view on Google Maps).
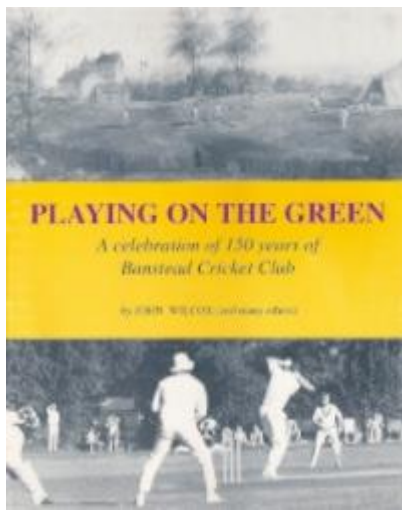
It is thanks to Twickenham CC's records that we know Banstead won this game by 35 runs. Twickenham scored 71 in reply to Banstead's 106. A low scoring game, but that was the norm in those days as pitches were not prepared to the standard we are used to today. The painting on the right shows a game being played with a pub in the background. The title of the painting by Louis Belanger is "A Cricket Match on Banstead (sic) Downs" (and is part of H.M. The Queen's Collection), so the pub could be the Victoria.

Despite difficult and unpredictable pitches, batsmen did not have the luxury of protective equipment which was not introduced to the game until the 1850s. Being flat and straight, bats would not have been dissimilar to those used in the 20th century. The curved hockey stick variety seen in many historical pictures of cricket matches went out of fashion in the early 1800s as bowlers started to bounce the ball off the pitch to get deviation and spin rather than bowl full. Bowlers would have employed two styles of bowling, the under-arm lob and the round-arm delivery. Round-arm bowling had been legalised in 1835 but the arm could not be raised above the shoulder. Round-arm was popular as it generated more pace but the under-arm lob gave more control of length and line.

It could be said that thanks is due to Surrey County Cricket Club that full over-arm bowling was introduced to the game. Like many teams, Surrey were keen proponents of a high arm action as it generated much more pace and bounce. However, it was illegal and no balls were common as bowlers tried to get their arms as high as possible without breaking the "not above the shoulder" rule. At the Oval in 1862, in a game against All England, the Surrey team effectively went on strike during a game following a series of no balls and walked off the field in protest. After this incident, and pressure from other teams, the MCC decided to change the rules and legalised over-arm bowling in 1864.

PLAYING ON THE GREEN
A celebration of 150 years of
Banstead Cricket Club

by JOHN WILCOX (and many others)

The club still has copies of John's book about the history of the club, "Playing on the Green". If you would like a copy in exchange for a small contribution to club funds please contact Ray Watson bccmemsec@gmail.com or Neil Bowman nbdbowman@googlemail.com