

Press Release: 10 May 2019

BASEBALL'S COMING HOME

***The world's first recorded game of Baseball was played in
Walton-on-Thames, Surrey in 1749***



ROYAL HOME RUN!

Baseball, surely, is American? No, sorry, it's English!

The first documented game was played in 1749 in Ashley Park, Walton-on-Thames, Surrey on the estate belonging to the wife of Charles Sackville, Earl of Middlesex, who also played in the match. Another of the players was his friend, Frederick, Prince of Wales, son of George II.

'I am so sorry to miss the unveiling of the blue plaque commemorating the world's first recorded game of baseball,' remarked Robert Sackville-West, 7th Baron Sackville. "I was aware that the Sackville family were among the earliest patrons of the game of cricket; and that Charles Sackville and his brother John regularly hosted 'county' matches at Knole, where I live, and in London, which drew crowds of up to 10,000 people. But I am thrilled to learn that he was also responsible for the first game of baseball, cricket's equally successful, transatlantic cousin: held here at Ashley Park, on his wife's estate.'

BLUE PLAQUE

To celebrate this historical occasion exactly 270 years on, Walton Cricket Club in Ashley Park will be honoured with a Blue Plaque. The Blue Plaque unveiling will be a part of an all-day event on July 7, 2019 hoping to attract 2,000 - 3,000 visitors. This will be the first time that baseball has been played on this pitch for 270 years! The wording on the plaque will read: 'The Prince of Wales played in the world's first recorded game of baseball on 12th September 1749 here in Ashley Park.'

PITCHING IN

Organised by British Plaque Trust Chairman Mike Read, BaseballSoftballUK, Walton Cricket Club and the Walton-on-Thames Trading Alliance (WoTTA), everyone is pitching in to create a community event to remember.

STRIKE!

As well as the Blue Plaque unveiling, there will be a demonstration baseball game by members of the Great Britain Baseball National Team programme before lunch. Afterwards, renowned American author, SABR member and American and British baseball historian David Block will talk about the discovery of the origins of baseball and its fascinating journey, leading us into a celebrity softball match.



BASEBALL & BLUE PLAQUE BOOKS

During the day there will be batting and pitching cages for visitors to test their abilities as well as live entertainment provided by local groups including choirs and cheerleaders. David Block will be signing copies of his book: *Pastime Lost: The Humble, Original, and Now Completely Forgotten Game of English Baseball* and Mike Read will be signing his latest book, *The Writing on the Wall: 100 Iconic Blue Plaques Commemorating Britain's History*, respectively. There will also be children's rides and food and beverages, making it a great day for the town and hopefully a new annual addition to Walton-on-Thames' events calendar.

THE YANKEES ARE COMING!

To misquote Paul Revere: "The Yankees are coming!" John Boyd of UK Baseball/Softball said, "There is so much excitement in the UK at the moment as the first ever Major League Baseball game between the New York Yankees and the Boston Red Sox takes place at the London Stadium over the weekend of 29 and 30 June. We are delighted to be part of this momentous historical event in Walton-on-Thames, creating a legacy for baseball fans across the world here in the UK".

Joanna Gordon, Managing Director of WoTTA added, "For a while we have been aware of the fact Walton played a huge part in the origins of baseball. When Mike Read and the Blue Plaque Trust approached Walton Cricket Club about creating an event, they came to WoTTA and we jumped at the chance. We really hope that, with sponsorship and local support, we will be able to fund a baseball statue to reside in Ashley Park so baseball fans can come and visit this historic baseball location for years to come."

- ENDS -

For more information visit: www.wotta.co.uk/baseballs-coming-home.html

NOTES TO EDITORS:

BaseballSoftballUK

BaseballSoftballUK (BSUK) is the development agency for baseball and softball in the United Kingdom. Since 2000, BSUK has provided services to the sports' governing bodies, the British Baseball Federation (BBF) and British Softball Federation (BSF) with the aim of developing and increasing the levels of participation, skill and achievement in UK baseball and softball. This occurs at both junior and adult levels, from school and grassroots through domestic adult clubs up to the Great Britain national teams.

www.baseballsoftballuk.com

British Plaque Trust

Mike Read is Chairman of the British Plaque Trust. A Blue Plaque is a recognised symbol of our national heritage and a living footprint of our history, serving as a permanent reminder of important and unique contributions made by men and women from all walks of life who have enriched the history of their country. The British Plaque Trust, commemorates all genres, including Literature, Philanthropy, Science, Sport, Music, Art, Discovery, Inventions, and Politics. Their footprint from the past is recognised by us in the present and will hopefully inspire others in the future.

Walton-on-Thames Cricket Club

Walton-on-Thames Cricket Club aims to be one of the best local community cricket clubs in Surrey. Reaching out and partnering with local schools, organisations, charities and local businesses. The club offers inclusive cricket participation and player development through specialist coaching and competitive cricket playing opportunities to all age groups, abilities and genders.

www.waltononthamescc.co.uk

Walton-on-Thames Trading Alliance (WoTTA)

The Walton-on-Thames Trading Alliance was set up in 2016 by local traders and residents as a Community Interest Company (CIC). We are a committed group of non-political volunteers, supporting companies in Walton-on-Thames to be a driving force for community-wide events, create a collective voice on town issues, promote Walton-on-Thames as a shopping and residential town and support and connect local businesses.

www.wotta.co.uk

Mitel and Major League Baseball – London Series 2019

The Boston Red Sox and the New York Yankees lay claim to one of the most heated rivalries in professional sport and for one weekend only, these two giants of baseball are coming to London.

On June 29-30, history will be made as two regular season MLB games will be hosted in Europe for the very first time. The London Stadium, one of the capital's most iconic sporting venues, will be dramatically transformed into a 60,000-seater ballpark and play home to the Red Sox as they look to settle old scores against their most formidable foes, the Yankees. The games sold out within minutes.

www.mlb.com/london-series

THE BACK STORY

Frederick Lewis, son of George II, the Prince of Wales played the first ever documented game of baseball more than 250 years ago - in Walton-on-Thames, Surrey!

Combing through a 1749 copy of The Whitehall Evening Post, Block spotted the following news item: "On Tuesday last, his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, and Lord Middlesex, played at Bass-Ball (sic), at Walton in Surry (sic); notwithstanding the Weather was extreme (sic) bad, they continued playing several Hours."

Though Block and other baseball historians have long been aware that the game originated in Britain before migrating to the North American colonies, this discovery overturns their assumption that it was played only by children and young adults. Frederick, the Prince of Wales, and his playing partner Charles Sackville, (1711-1769), Earl of Middlesex were not only members of the aristocracy, but also men entering their early middle age.

Surrey County Council's archivists at Surrey History Centre identified the area where the game was played in Walton-on-Thames as Ashley Park. Sackville's wife, Grace Boyle, had inherited the property from her parents in 1740 and the park, described by Owen Manning and William Bray in their History and Antiquities of Surrey as 'a capital mansion with a park of 136 acres' is shown in some detail on a John 1762 map of Surrey, held at Surrey History Centre. William Bray was himself no stranger to baseball. His reference to playing the game in his diary entry for Easter Monday, 1755, remains the earliest known manuscript reference to the game.

Curiously, it is not the first time Frederick's name has been associated with the game. The Prince may have played it on 13 November 1748 together with his 10-year-old son George, who 12 years later would be crowned George III of England. Lady Hervey, a well-known 18th-century courtier, is believed to have described it in a letter. However, the letter is not known to have survived in its original form.

David Block announced his discovery at the Surrey History Centre in June 2013. Julian Pooley, Head of Public Services at Surrey History Centre, commented: The discovery of this very early reference to baseball in Surrey is particularly exciting given the county's rich and varied sporting history. From the earliest reference to cricket in the Guildford borough records, William Bray's diary reference to baseball in 1755 through to the battle of the Somme, when the 8th battalion of the East Surrey Regiment charged across no-man's land kicking footballs in front of them, sport has played a major part in Surrey's history.



Baseball in mid-18th-century England would have looked very different than modern American baseball. Block's analysis of dozens of references to English baseball from the 18th and 19th centuries suggests that the game would have been played on a smaller scale than the modern pastime, with shorter distances between the bases and with the pitcher standing much closer to the batter. It was also a game that required less athleticism. The ball was much softer than today's; and instead of a bat, the palm of the batter's hand was used to strike the ball. After hitting a ball, a batter could be retired if a fielder was able to catch the ball on the fly, or retrieve it and strike a runner with it before the latter reached base. Yet despite these differences, the basic elements of 18th-century English baseball — pitching, batting, base-running and fielding — were comparable to those found in its later American namesake, and Block believes there is little doubt that English game was the forerunner of the modern American pastime.

According to Block, the issue of *The Whitehall Evening Post* in which he found the article about the Prince of Wales can be found in the collections of several libraries in the U.S. and the U.K. These may, in fact, be the oldest documents to mention the game of baseball that still actually exist. Two earlier references to the game, including the aforementioned 1748 letter by Lady Hervey, are not known to have survived in their original form. Block found a handwritten copy of Lady Hervey's letter, probably made later in the 18th century, in an archive in Suffolk, England, and her collected letters, including the one mentioning baseball, were published in 1821.

An even earlier reference to baseball probably appeared in a children's book, *A Little Pretty Pocket-book* that was first published in 1744. However, the earliest known surviving copy of that book is a 1760 edition in the British Library.

Block is the author of the 2005 book *Baseball Before We Knew It*, published by University of Nebraska Press, and the new, 2019 book *Pastime Lost: The Humble, Original, and Now Completely Forgotten Game of English Baseball*. He is also a member of Major League Baseball's "Baseball Origins Committee" under the chairmanship of MLB's Official Baseball Historian, John Thorn.

In 2013, Surrey County Council stated, 'Baseball is an integral part of American life and this news about a national obsession in the US, where home grown sports have traditionally dominated, will reverberate far and wide. It is a game steeped in history and now the Surrey County Council's History Centre and the inquisitive historians David Block, Tricia St. John Barry and Julian Pooley have provided the earliest manuscript proof that the game the Americans gave to the world came from England'.

References:

Article from Society for American Baseball Research (SABR), published June 13 2013

Article in Online Daily Mail: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2340053/U-S-baseball-expert-proves-baseballplayed-England-royalty.html>