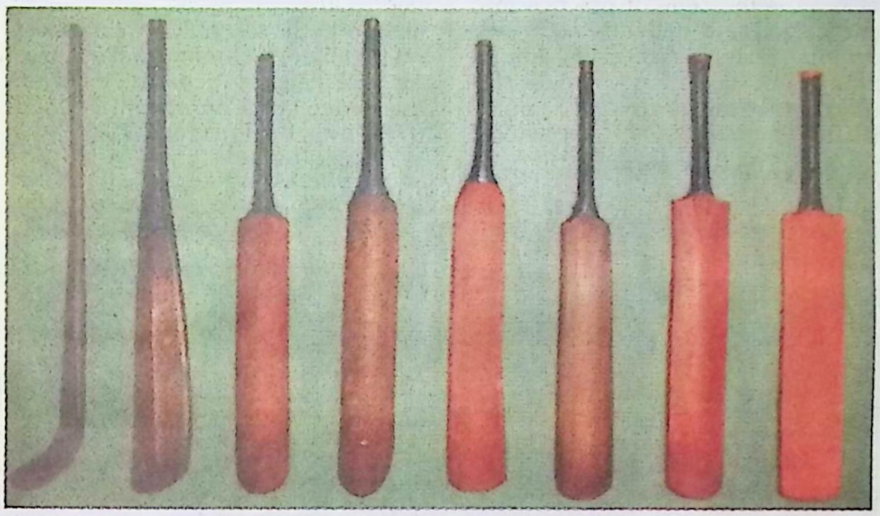
History of cricket

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THE game of **cricket** has a known **history** spanning from the 16th century to the present day, with international matches played since 1844, although the official history of international Test cricket began in 1877. During this time, the game developed from its origins in England into a game which is now played professionally in most of the Commonwealth of Nations.

Origin

No one knows when or where cricket began but there is a body of evidence, much of it circumstantial, that strongly suggests the game was devised during Saxon or Norman times by children living in the Weald, an area of dense woodlands and clearings in south-east England that lies across Kent and Sussex. It is generally believed that cricket survived as a children's game for many centuries before it was increasingly taken up by adults around the beginning of the 17th century. There is also a theory that it originated from ancient bat-and-ball games played in the Indian subcontinent, which were then transported to Europe via Persia and the near east by merchants, and eventually developed into the game of cricket in England.

Derivation of the name of "cricket"

A number of words are thought to be possible sources for the term *cricket*, which could refer to the bat or the wicket. In old French, the word *criquet* meant a kind of club which probably gave its name to croquet. Some believe that cricket and croquet have a common origin. In Flemish, *krick(e)* means a stick, and, in Old English, *cricc* or *cryce* means a crutch or staff (though the hard "k" sound suggests the North or Northeast midlands, rather than the Southeast, where cricket seems to have begun).

Alternatively, the French *criquet* apparently comes from the Flemish word *krickstoel*, which is a long low stool on which one kneels in church which may appear similar to the long low wicket with two stumps used in early cricket, or the early stool in stoolball. The word *stool* is old [Sussex] dialect for a tree stump in a forest, and *stool ball* is a sport similar to cricket played by the Dutch and otherwise considered a precursor to cricket, rounders and baseball.

First definite reference

Despite many prior suggested references, the first definite reference to the game is found in a 1597 court case concerning dispute over a school's ownership of a plot of land. A 59-year old coroner, John Derrick, testified that he and his school friends had played *kreckett* on the site fifty years earlier. The school was the Royal Grammar School, Guildford, and Mr Derrick's account proves beyond reasonable doubt that the game was being played in Surrey c.1550.

The first reference to it being played as an adult sport was in 1611, when two men in Sussex were prosecuted for playing cricket on Sunday instead of going to church. In the same year, a dictionary defines cricket as a boys' game and this suggests that adult participation was a recent development.

Early Seventeenth Century

A number of references occur up to the English Civil War and these indicate that it had become an adult game contested by parish teams, but there is no evidence of county strength teams at this time. Equally, there is little evidence of the rampant gambling that characterised the game throughout the 18th century. It is generally believed, therefore, that "village cricket" had developed by the middle of the 17th century but that county cricket had not and that investment in the game had not begun.

The Commonwealth

After the Civil War ended in 1648, the new Puritan government clamped down on "unlawful assemblies", in particular the more raucous sports such as football. Their laws also demanded a stricter observance of the Sabbath than there had been previously. As the Sabbath was the only free time available to the lower classes, cricket's popularity may have waned during the Commonwealth. Having said that, it did flourish in public fee-paying schools such as Winchester and St Paul's. There is no actual evidence that Cromwell's government banned cricket specifically and there are references to it during the interregnum that suggest it was acceptable to the authorities providing it did not cause any "breach of the Sabbath".