

## 18. WRECCLESHAM SPORT.

It is perhaps surprising that a small village like Wrecclesham should so consistently provide and nurture a range of high performers and in a number of sports. The Farnham Wall of fame in South Street provides recognition for four top sports performers, all internationals, who have lived and developed their talents in the village. In comparison the performance of the Wrecclesham village teams is somewhat modest. However the opportunity they provide for local young people is important.

Sporting achievement in Wrecclesham dates back to the 18/19<sup>th</sup> Century. It was then more or less confined to cricket. There were very few other sports identified as present in the village at this time. It must be remembered that the main occupation of the male members of the community was in agriculture. The men were hard working and probably had little time or energy for recreation. If anything the women worked even harder in the homes and with the children and there were few creature comforts. No electricity, no television, radio, central heating or motor cars. Water had to be gathered from wells or streams and the overall health of the population was generally as poor as their wealth.

One thing of which there was no shortage was public houses; there were five in the Street,<sup>1</sup> and three more on the fringe of the village. The men clearly spent a lot of time, and what little money they earned in these hostelries. Many of the publicans were also farmers and they were said to have often paid their workers in liquid form. We are indebted to the somewhat strange writings of Charles Grover<sup>2</sup> for some of the detail of the games, pastimes and behaviour of the villagers at this time.

With so little by way of alternative, and at weekends with ample time on their hands, the weekend leisure activities of the locals tend to be relatively simple, low key and, if one is to believe Grover, closely related to the twin vices of alcohol and betting. As Grover referring to Sunday says:

*'It was a common practice here to spend this holy day in scenes of profanity and vice. Their games were various, the most disgraceful of which were their various games of marbles. There was another game called pitch and toss and there were also many other minor ones' Now it might be thought that this was confined to boys and youths alone, but alas! It was not so, nor even to young men, for old and young, married and single, might be seen almost at any hour on the Sabbath Day either engaged in the play or as spectators to the game. Nor did it even stop here for girls and women used equally to assemble to engage in their sports.' When night came on it was a common custom to resort to the ale house close by, there to spend their hard earnings to inflame their passions and blind their consciences and thus pollute and end this holy day in the most disgraceful scenes of drunkenness.*

However there was genuine sport being played in the village<sup>3</sup> at this time as Grover recognises:

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<sup>1</sup> The Street was the main thoroughfare and focus for village activity.

<sup>2</sup> My Native Village by Charles Grover

<sup>3</sup> Actually a little way out of the village.

*One mile in continuation through the village brought you to a place called Holt Pound where there was a beautiful large cricket ground. It was banked and very level and free to all parties, and as the game is considered a most manly one. All classes used to engage in it most extensively, and at this time, few counties or towns could cope with Farnham and more particularly the little village of Wrecclesham, which could boast some of the most clever and celebrated at the game, as well as one of the best grounds. Matches would often last three or four days and when there would assemble thousands of spectators, and carriages very numerous.'*

That cricket had caught the imagination of Wrecclesham folk gives an opportunity for Grover to again point to the bad behaviour that surrounds the sport.

*'Throughout this cricket season might be seen hundreds of persons of all ages. They would pick and choose their number, when the wickets were pitched and soon all was sport and play. Different parties were engaged on the same green, from old men to almost child. They generally played for what they called a 'pint to a pot', and for sometimes double the quantity; and thus would they invariably pursue their sport until night came on, when they would return to the Public House in Wrecclesham, to spend and quaff what had been won and lost during the day.'*

Apart from Cricket, which clearly was being played seriously in the village in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Grover refers to another sport which was commonly seen in Wrecclesham at this time. This was skating which was regularly seen on the water meadows of the River Wey. In those days flooding was more prevalent than now and, when winter temperatures so allowed, the villagers would don their skates to take part in this activity on the frozen waters. Flood prevention schemes on the River Wey may have lessened this opportunity, and maybe our winters are warmer now, but it is understood that at this time many villagers kept skates in their cottages to use when winter arrived.

## **Cricket**

Cricket has been the major activity and it is the one about which we have the most information. It is interesting that the sport for which the village is most remembered was in fact being played at the outset just outside the village boundaries at Holt Pound. Holt Pound at this time was the home of Farnham Cricket Club, albeit there were a number of Wrecclesham cricketers playing in the Farnham team. There is a detailed history of Farnham Cricket<sup>4</sup> which shows that Farnham played their first matches in 1782 in places as far apart as Odiham, Bracknell, Maidenhead and Alresford. One can imagine that travelling even these short journeys in those times was difficult for there were few roads and horse or horse and cart were the main means of travelling any distance.

Farnham's first recorded games at Holt Pound were played in 1785. In 1791 Lord Stavel, who was the Ranger of Alice Holt Forest, employed Billy Beldham, from Wrecclesham to create a new ground at Holt Pound. Billy, his brother John and the Wells brothers, all Wrecclesham boys were by then established members of the Farnham side. There can be no doubt that this corner of the county was a stronghold of the sport. Alice Holt was a fine pitch and it soon became established as a major cricket ground. There were large crowds and betting on the games was intense. Collyer comments:

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<sup>4</sup> Farnham Cricket Club. A History by Graham Collyer. 1982

*'There was probably no greater focus on it than in 1808 and 1809 when Surrey beat All England. They were grand affairs with the players and their backers lunching in tents on the ground and drinking ale in the hostelry there.'*<sup>5</sup>

The cricket at this time was somewhat different from today. To start with there was underarm bowling, the equipment was more rudimentary and the numbers of players on each side could vary. Farnham once played a match at Elstead where the opposition numbered 22!

Billy Beldham, who was popularly known as Silver Billy and who lived at Yew Tree Cottage<sup>6</sup> in the Street, fittingly adjacent to the present Recreation Ground, was widely recognised as an outstanding professional cricketer. During a long career, he played for Farnham, Hambledon, Hampshire, Surrey, the MCC and All England. His entry in 'Wikipedia' says:

*'Beldham was widely acknowledged as one of the greatest batsmen of the sport's underarm era.'*

In 1997, he was selected by John Woodcock of The Times as one of his 100 Greatest Cricketers of All Time. Billy's portrait hangs in the Long Room at Lords, the home of cricket. The story of Billy Beldham deserves its own commentary at a later date.



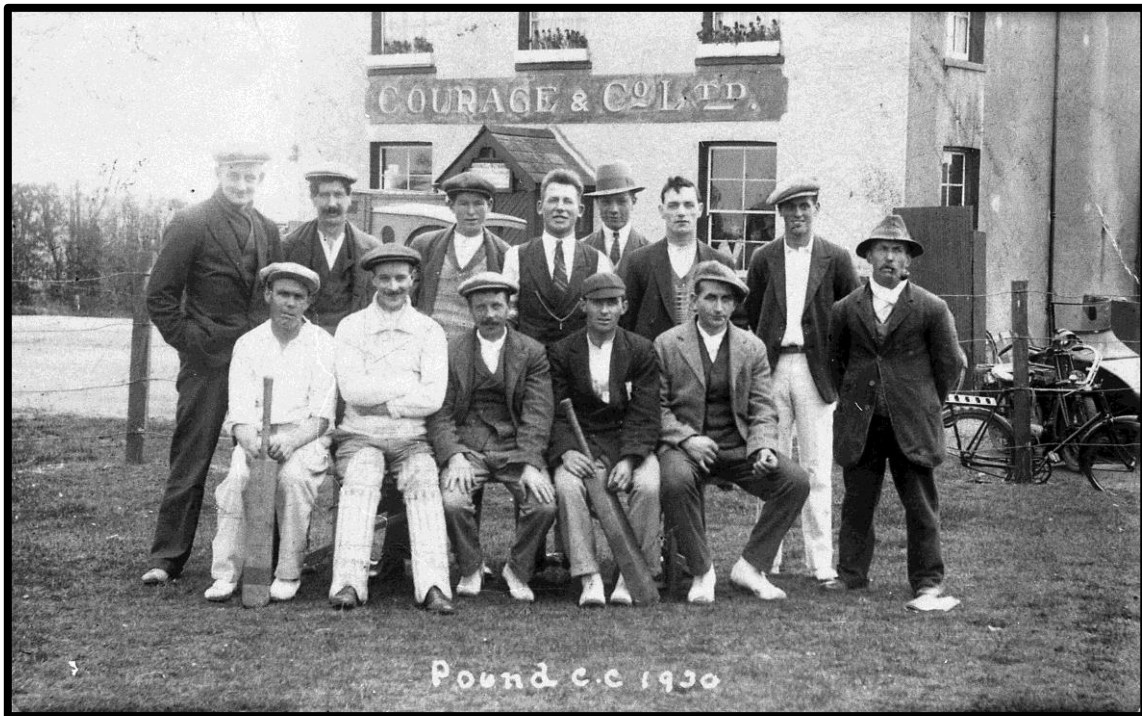
**Silver Billy Beldham**

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<sup>5</sup> Farnham Cricket Club. A History by Graham Collyer. 1982

<sup>6</sup> Yew Tree Cottage, which is on the Street at the junction with Riverdale, has recently been purchased by the Farnham Historic Buildings Trust because of its historic significance.

Farnham continued playing at Holt Pound until about 1870 before they moved to play at their present ground in Farnham Park. There is however a record of a Pound Cricket team playing there in the 1930's as the picture below, with the Forest Inn in the background shows:



The origins of the Wrecclesham Club are more recent and this has been detailed in a small booklet written by Stephen Pinn.<sup>7</sup> Wrecclesham Cricket Club was not in fact the first Club to be formed in the village. In 1902 the Wrecclesham Institute played a game against the Farnham Post Office. This game was played at Willey Park. A year before in 1901, in a section of the Farnham Herald called Wrecclesham News, there is reference to an effort being made to form a cricket team. In 1902 there was a game at Holt Pound, reported in the Herald, between the married and single men of Wrecclesham. Following the game the two teams retired to the Bear Inn where a leg of mutton supper was provided by the proprietor Edward Reading.

From this event a cricket side was formed called Wrecclesham Village which was run as a separate entity from Wrecclesham Institute. There was no Recreation Ground in the Village at this time and both teams for many years looked for grounds to play outside the village. In 1903 Wrecclesham Institute played Wrecclesham Village at Holt Pound. On this occasion the Institute team won by an innings. Meanwhile the boys of Wrecclesham were not being forgotten and a youth team which was based on the Village school was playing in a meadow at Clayton Hurst, which was the house on the corner of the Street, opposite the Cricketers public House, which later became the Vicarage.

By 1910 the Institute had established itself as the premier club in the Village and they were playing in the Farnham Villages League at Willey Park. From 1914-1918 the Great War intervened but after the war cricket in Wrecclesham saw many changes and the game was concentrated in one team,

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<sup>7</sup> Wrecclesham Cricket. A Brief History by Stephen Pinn. 1980

known simply as Wrecclesham which played in the newly constituted Farnham and District League. Still with no ground to play on, in 1920 the team played its home matches in the grounds of Runwick House. Despite winning the last two matches of the season they finished bottom of the league.

Problems in finding a home greatly affected morale and there were a few seasons in the late 1920's when the club virtually ceased to exist. In 1923 the club had to leave Runwick House and for a year they played at Bellmead, a meadow off River Lane, alongside the A31. For a short time the club seemed to go out of existence and it was not until 1927 when Farnham Council purchased the Recreation Ground that the club came back into life.

In the following decade a revival in the club's fortunes came about. For three years between 1935 and 1936 Wrecclesham played in the Kingsley and District League. They were Champions in 1935 and 1936, when that league folded up. However, they had long wanted to move into a higher standard of competitive cricket and particularly the l'Anson and Miller Cup Competitions. It was not until the 1950 season before they were invited to play in the Miller Cup, a season in which they finished 3<sup>rd</sup>. In the following season 1952 they became Miller Cup Champions and were promoted to play in the l'Anson Cup. By this time they were running two teams and the 2<sup>nd</sup> team was able to compete in the Miller Cup. Having finished in 5<sup>th</sup> place in 1953,

In 1955 Wrecclesham were runners up in the l'Anson Cup and went on to become Champions in 1956. The Cricket Club has continued to compete in these two competitions and over the past thirty years they have had both their triumphs and their failures. After a spell in the lower league the Club gained promotion to the l'Anson again two years ago.

Although the senior teams may have struggled over this period the club has had great success in the Two Counties Youth Competitions. The Under 15's won the Caesar Cup in 1976 and there was a string of successes beginning in 1978. Many of those playing in the youth teams went on to play for Surrey and special mention has to be made to the Thorpe brothers all three of whom had graduated to play for Farnham and especially Graham who in recent years has played with distinction for Surrey and England.

Although the most significant of the cricketers from Wrecclesham were Billy Beldham in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and Graham Thorpe in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century both of whom gained international honours, it is appropriate to mention one more cricketer, Vic Cannings, from Dippenhall, on the edge of our parish, who played for Wrecclesham for two seasons before the Second World War, later blossoming to be one of the finest bowlers in the County Championship when he played for Hampshire between 1950 and 1959.



**Cricket on the Rec**



**Graham Thorpe**

## **Football**

I have yet to find detailed records of Wrecclesham Football Club and I am unaware of a written history of the club. A former player, Peter Clark, kept extensive records, but he is presently in an elderly persons home, however his son has kept the records and it is hoped we may be able to access some of them before the meeting.

It has been suggested that the football club predated the cricket club but I have no record of this at present. It is assumed that the Football Club was in existence prior to the provision of Wrecclesham Recreation Ground in 1927. In order to gain some information on Football I have been examining the Farnham Herald records between 1937 and 1988. As this is a tedious exercise I have confined it to the end of season position at 10 year intervals. This provides a glimpse of football in recent times.

In **1937** Wrecclesham reached the final of the Runwick Cup, a cup for Farnham village teams however they lost 4 nil to Badshot Lea. However the team names are given and they were clearly playing in the old 2 -3 - 5 formation.



		L.Baker		
	H.Eade		W.Dodd	
M.Fry		V. Spencer		G Ayres
Hall	B Guppy	J.Hanson	G. Diamond	H. Clark

In **1938 Wrecclesham** was playing in the Farnham League Division 1. A league mainly consisting of village clubs from around the district. They had two teams the 1<sup>st</sup> XI was playing in Division 1 and the 2<sup>nd</sup> XI in Division 2.

By **1948** Wrecclesham had moved into the Surrey Intermediate League, Division 1. A league that catered for teams who were slightly better than local teams but not yet playing senior football, a grade of football which was largely confined to the town clubs, such as Farnham. In that year Wrecclesham finished as Champions of Division 1 and were promoted to the Premier Division. They had a good playing record that year. Played 24, Won 22, Drawn 1, Lost 1. Goals for 158. Against 41. Wrecclesham Reserves were still playing in the Farnham League.

In 1958 Wrecclesham were 6<sup>th</sup> in Surrey Intermediate League, Premier Division, but they had won the Surrey Intermediate League Cup in 1952. During the 50's Wrecclesham were Champions of the Surrey Intermediate League for 3 consecutive years and were league and Cup winners in one season.



**Wrecclesham Football Club 1<sup>st</sup> XI 1958**

In 1968 Surrey were in 3<sup>rd</sup> place in the Surrey Intermediate League, Premier Division and although they reached the final of the Intermediate League Cup they lost to Burpham.

At this time Peter Clark was playing for Wrecclesham. There was an article in the Herald which said he had been playing for Wrecclesham for 20 years and that he had turned down 5 invitations to turn professional. Peter always took the penalties and it was reported that he had not missed a penalty in 28 years!!

In 1978 Wrecclesham were 2<sup>nd</sup> to Surrey Police in the Surrey Intermediate League . The team that year were Grimes, May, Alloway, Buckingham, Taylor, Phillips, Millard, Murray, Cox, Lucas and Page.

In 1988 struggled to avoid relegation from Surrey Intermediate League, Premier Division 1 . By 1998 Wrecclesham had dropped down to Surrey Intermediate League Premier Division 2 where they had a successful season. Finishing 5<sup>th</sup> but going 10 games unbeaten and reaching the final of the Invitation Cup where they lost 2-1 to Ockham. The team that year was:

Macdonald, Fyfield, Boyce, Hancock. Page, Booton, Scone, Flanagan, Taylor, Bridger, Osgood and Lloyd.

Sadly over the past two decades football in Wrecclesham has been in decline. The situation at present is that there has been no Wrecclesham Football Club for the past three years. The ground is being used by yet another 'Cuckoo', the United Football Club of Farnham. It is suggested they are going to become the Wrecclesham Phoenix Football Club next season and run two sides in the Guildford and Woking Alliance. There is little junior football played in the Village.

## **Wrecclesham Tennis Club**

The Wrecclesham Tennis Club was formed in the early 1930's on the present site at the Recreation ground with just one grass court which was converted from a potato patch the ground having previously been used as part of the war effort in WW II. A hard court was added in 1939/40 and the grass court was converted to a hard surface in 1949. The Club was very active after the war and into the late 1950's but membership gradually declined, the courts were neglected and the site was almost derelict.

In 1967 Jerry Blyth , a local resident reformed the club. The Club rapidly expanded under Jerry's leadership from the original two courts to three in 1973, and then to four all weather courts in 1988. In 1973 the club entered the Aldershot League. A large pavilion, formerly a classroom building at Olivetti's in Haslemere, was re-erected by the members and was opened in 1974.

In 1981 floodlights were installed on two courts and this was extended to a third court in 1995. Planning began to replace the old pavilion in 2007.

In 2010 the Club was awarded 'Clubmark' accredited status by the Lawn Tennis Association. 'Clubmark' is the universally acknowledged cross sport accreditation scheme for community sports clubs.





Clubmark is a standard that has been developed by Sport England and is adopted by most of the Governing Bodies of Sport. The Lawn Tennis Association adopts this standard which they call 'Tennis Mark'

It stands for:

- Higher standards of welfare, equity, coaching and management in community sports club
- Making sure the nation's sports club infrastructure is safer, stronger and more successful

It shows that a club provides the right environment which ensures the welfare of members and encourages everyone to enjoy sport and stay involved throughout their lives.

An accredited club is recognised as a safe, rewarding and fulfilling place for participants of all ages as well as helping parents and carers know that they're choosing the right club for their young people.

In 2011 a 25 year lease was agreed with Waverley Borough Council and the following year, 2012, the old pavilion, which was over 50 years old, was demolished and replaced with a modern club house. This club house then benefited from a grant of £34,280 from the 2012 London Olympic Legacy fund and with a grant of £7,600 from Waverley, both of which had been given because of the commitment of the club to maintain and develop tennis in the neighbourhood and to be mainly self-financing.

The Club continues to grow and has developed a thriving junior section and now is one of the largest clubs in the area with excellent facilities. Press Cuttings and Photographs illustrate this progress.

## **Wrecclesham Recreation Ground.**

At this stage it would be helpful to record some of the background to the Village's Recreation Ground. As Farnham grew, in the years following World War I, there was a demand for more sports facilities. Farnham Urban District Council had already provided Recreation Grounds in some of the Farnham villages e.g. Hale, Bourne and Rowledge. At the meeting of the Council's Recreation Ground Committee, in September 1920, members were advised that there was a need for similar provision in Wrecclesham. It was not until 1926 that this matter was raised again. Cllr Wakeford raised the matter and said that the inhabitants were prepared to raise money towards the cost of purchasing a suitable piece of land. The Committee expressed their support and directed that enquiries be made.

In October that year the committee were advised that a property to the north of the village was available for sale and that a portion of this would be very suitable for a recreation ground. At this time the land to the north of the Street was still largely farm land. This is evident from the photograph below which shows the land behind the Bear public house at about this time. With the demise of hop growing in the area much land now available for alternative uses. The Committee agreed that enquiries should be made and by December the Town Clerk advised that negotiations were proceeding. The land concerned was just over 12 acres, larger than was needed for the recreation ground, but it was felt that the balance of the land and the two cottages could be sold.



The Committee decided to visit the land and to meet the local residents. Representing Wrecclesham at that meeting were W.R.Tanner , who was representing the Church, and W. Collins and R. Dixon

representing the Institute. The Vicar, Rev. Starey, was unable to be present but sent his apologies. Walter Tanner who then lived in the old vicarage, which he had renamed Yatesbury House after the town in Wiltshire where he had been born, was taking the lead in promoting the Village's interest at this time. It was suggested that the local contribution towards the purchase might be £250. It was noted that the cost of purchase was expected to be £1,400 but that, with resale of land and the two cottages that were on site, it was likely that the cost to the Council would be c.£875. The Wrecclesham residents said that they were prepared to form a local committee to manage the ground, on similar lines to those existing in the other villages, and that an effort would be made to provide a pavilion for use with the ground that would be paid for by the local inhabitants. . It was decided to go ahead.

On 29<sup>th</sup> April 1927 the Council concluded the purchase which was to provide 6 acres for a recreation ground and a further 2 acres for allotments. The balance of the land would be sold.

By August 1927 the ground was in use and the Council members met again with the residents to set up an advisory committee who would manage the ground. It was agreed that control of the ground and allocation of pitches would be delegated to the Management Committee. It was also agreed that a tennis court could be laid out in the SW corner of the ground. It was not until March 1929 that the Management Committee applied to the Council for permission to erect a pavilion, and to seek a grant towards the cost. The first pavilion was estimated to cost £200 and the Management Committee had £120 available. It was agreed that the Council would contribute £50.

The Recreation Ground Management Committee has existed ever since and represents the interest of all clubs using the facilities. This arrangement has been very successful and over the years the extension of the club house has progressed. It is now an extensive facility, having been twice extended and provides the base for a very flourishing social club.

## **THE ARRIVAL OF THE CUCKOOS**

### **RUGBY FOOTBALL**

Wrecclesham seem to have attracted a number of sporting 'cuckoos' who have found a nesting place in the village. Following Farnham Cricket Club who began playing at Holt Pound on the edge of the village in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, in 1975 the newly formed Farnham Rugby Football Club was struggling to find a ground. For a short while they played on Farnham Park but the pitch there was rather small and uneven. They approached Waverley Borough Council's, newly appointed Chief Leisure and Cultural Services Officer, a young man by the name of John Birch, to see if he could find them a ground. All of the Farnham Recreation Grounds were occupied by football and cricket teams so a search was made for a piece of land which they could convert. There was in fact very little publicly owned flat land in Farnham and it was suggested they might like to put a pitch on the Wrecclesham Allotments alongside the recreation ground. The allotments were not being well used at this time and the Rugby Club jumped at the opportunity. They were extremely energetic and levelled a main pitch, built a club house and erected floodlights. They even marched through the streets with their rugby posts having felled them from their Chairman's large garden in Churt.

Wrecclesham provided the home for Farnham Rugby Club for over 30 years and as a club they had great success. They were always suffering from an extremely wet pitch and this never provided



them with a good playing surface. However they also produced a junior pitch on the adjacent land and over the years the club developed, having particular success with their Junior development. The Farnham youth seemed to take to the sport enthusiastically and among the players who have passed through the hands are a number of players who have progressed to major club sides. The star among these is of course Jonny Wilkinson who for many years played at fly half for England and was significantly to the fore in the World Cup which England won with his last kick, in the final minutes of the match against Australia in 2003.



### **Jonny Wilkinson**

The Club spent many years at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century looking for improved facilities and in 2013 they were able to complete a significant planning deal with Waverley, which delivered not only an excellent new ground, with three pitches and an excellent club house, and which was on the back of the development of a David Lloyd Leisure and Fitness Centre in Monkton Lane in Weybourne, on the far side of Farnham.

### **Badshot Lea Football Club - Another 'Cuckoo'.**

The ground vacated by the Rugby Cub in Wrecclesham is regrettably being leased by Waverley to Badshot Lea Football Club. It is felt unfortunate that another Farnham Village club is being encouraged to move out of their village and to establish themselves on our doorstep in Wrecclesham. It is regrettable that there is no active Wrecclesham Football Club to discourage this move and that they do not intend to change their name to recognise their new geographical situation. With Waverley also trying to move Farnham Football Club from the Memorial Hall onto waste land in Weydon Lane, another 'Cuckoo', there seems to be no sensible and coordinated approach being made to the development of Sport in Waverley. Meanwhile both Farnham and Badshot Lea are filling places in the lower half of the Combined Counties League. It might have been better if they had combined and redeveloped the Memorial Ground. The £50,000 that is being spent on a feasibility study for this proposal could have been better spent in putting proper drainage into the memorial Ground Pitch.

## **SCHOOL SPORT**

The two schools in Wrecclesham have excellent facilities for sport. St Peter's School has always been keen on promoting sport and takes part in many Farnham Schools competitions. Their ground is modest but suitable for games for this age group. In the absence at presence of both Football and Cricket junior coaching at the Recreation Ground the contribution from St Peter's is welcomed. Many Wrecclesham youngsters now go elsewhere for good Junior coaching opportunities. Bourne Blades for football and Rowledge Cricket club both cater for many of the Wrecclesham young enthusiasts.

Weydon School has always had good outdoor playing facilities but has not been recognised as a high achieving school in sport. However they have recently had significant new facilities developed which are second to none in the country. The new high tech, floodlit all weather surfaces and athletics track, will, together with the sports hall and the floodlit tennis/netball courts, make Weydon School one of the best provided in the country. Arrangements are now made for these facilities to be widely used by the community as well as the school.

## **THE FARNHAM HALL OF FAME**

I mentioned earlier that four Wrecclesham based sports people have their names on the Hall of Fame. Pictures of three of them have been included already the fourth is Rachel Morris, a double amputee, losing her legs following illness when she was just 17. She took up hand cycling and is a familiar figure on Wrecclesham roads. She won a gold medal at the 2008 Paralympic Games and was favourite for Gold at London in 2012 before a road accident nearly ruined her chances. Losing her cycle and badly injured she eventually recovered to finish in 3<sup>rd</sup> place. Not content with this success Rachel has taken up rowing and last year won Gold Medal for the arm and shoulder single sculls at the World Rowing Championships. Rachel won a Gold Medal in this event at the Rio Olympics Paralympics in 2016. And became one of the elite group of athletes who have won Olympic Gold Medals in two different sports.



**Rachel Morris**