

MACCONNAL-MASON

EST. 1893



EDWARD DUNCAN, RWS

1803 - 1882

A village cricket match in Kent

Inscribed twice '39

Oil on panel

17 x 28 in – 43.2 x 71.1 cm

Frame size

23 x 34 in – 58.4 x 86.4 cm

Provenance:

Private collection, UK, since pre-1920

Literature:

The Illustrated London News, 22 June 1850, p.442, illustrated p.441



A village cricket match in Kent

Edward Duncan has chosen to paint on a large, pinewood panel. Some artists had become accustomed to painting on wood, despite the repeal in 1831 of the tax that had been charged on artist's canvas, and panel gessoed with a blend of rabbit glue and powdered chalk gave the artist an even, opaque surface on which to work.



Fig.1 During the restoration process

The painting had remained in the same family for over a century and, as a result, over the years the varnish had discoloured owing to age, the abortion of grime, soot, tobacco smoke and atmospheric pollution. In point of fact, the painting had at least four layers of varnish, each applied over the previous coat, sealing in a generation of discoloration and grime on each occasion. This explains the transformation seen (fig.1) following the careful removal of the layers of old varnish, the painting and pigments restored to the artist's original vision of how the painting would be viewed.

The painting is dated '39, and it was on 22nd June 1850 that the wood engraving of this subject was published in *The Illustrated London News*. There are other instances of Duncan painting a subject that was engraved for use in the paper, 'Pheasant Shooting', 5th October 1850 (fig.2). Another earlier version of this work can be seen in Yale Center for British Art (fig.3). Duncan was one of a number of highly regarded artists employed by *The Illustrated London News*, and its success lay in the nature and quality of these illustrations.



Fig.2 Edward Duncan, *Pheasant Shooting*, *Illustrated London News*, 5th October 1850, p.1



Fig. 3 Edward Duncan, *Pheasant Shooting*,
© Yale Centre for British Art



Fig.4 Edward Duncan, *Laying the Foundation Stone of Birkenhead Docks*, 1845
© Walker Art Gallery

The illustration of our painting as it appears in the paper is described as: “*Kent has ever ranked first among our counties for its cricketers; and from one of its noblest domains has our artist pictured the game in the accompanying illustration*”. The location remains something of a mystery. Despite the description, Hambledon has been suggested given the nature of the surrounding landscape, as has been Canterbury with its lime tree within the confines of the ground, sadly no longer there. Another suggestion is West Malling, also in Kent, where Town Malling played, the club for which the renowned Fuller Pilch played, now known as the Old County Ground.

There are a number of discrepancies between the painting and engraving, the most notable being the addition of a church spire, possibly to reinforce the narrative that the subject is a ground in Kent, and alluding to the fact that it is perhaps Canterbury, or West Malling, the latter village having a church with a similar spire.

Duncan painted and sketched in Kent throughout the first half of his career, particularly Knole Park, Penshurst and Tonbridge.

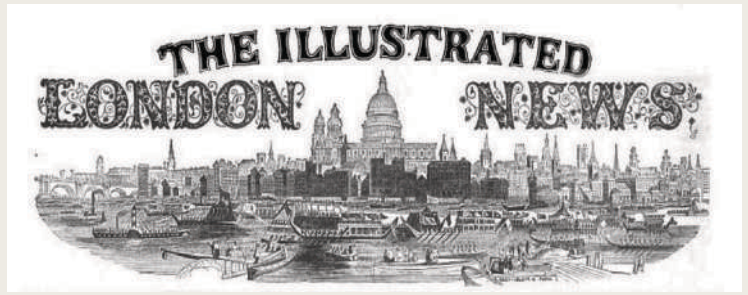
For the purposes of the paper, Duncan has portrayed a generic cricket match, a game that could have been played at Hambledon, in Kent, or in any village across the country, such was the game’s widespread popularity; however, as described in the paper and by previous writers, the history of the game has its roots in the villages of the Weald. Duncan has depicted a match at a seminal moment, the batsman facing a bowler, bowling roundarm, at the point of delivery his hand below the level of his shoulder, the batsman in position to execute a stroke known as ‘the home block’ (note 1). The fielders are alert, dressed in trousers, fashionable from the mid-1830’s, but denounced by some as ‘unbecoming and inconvenient’. In his rendering of the wicket with three stumps and a bail, the artist’s alterations can be seen in the ‘pentimenti’, the vague outline of his original positioning of the stumps subsequently corrected to align with the far wicket. There is a fair sized crowd assembled beneath the two commanding oaks and around the marquee, a common sight at matches, refreshments and gaming for the gentry. The portrayal of the mass of figures resembles Duncan’s rendering of crowds in his ‘*The Laying of a Foundation Stone, Birkenhead Docks, Wirral*’, 1845, (fig.4), Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool. No preparatory sketches for this work are recorded; however, in one of the three sales at Christies of Edward Duncan’s estate, on 11th March 1885, several albums were sold that included sketches for works for *The Illustrated London News*.



Fig.5 Edward Duncan, *A cricket match*
Illustrated London News, 22nd June 1850, p.441

Note (1): Felix, Nicholas Wanostrocht, *Felix on the bat*, a scientific inquiry into the use of the cricket bat, published 1845, Baily Brothers, London, Cornhill

Edward Duncan was renowned as a painter of sporting subjects and landscapes in oil, and of watercolours, largely coastal scenes. As a wood engraver and illustrator he worked extensively for *The Illustrated London News* providing illustrations of Shooting scenes, as seen in (fig.2) and 'A cricket match' on 22nd June 1850 (fig.5).



The Illustrated London News was the world's first fully illustrated newspaper. It was founded by Herbert Ingram (1811-1860), who had set up a printing and newsagents in Nottingham in the 1830's and, having seen that illustrated papers were markedly more popular, had resolved to set up a fully illustrated paper, publishing the first issue of *The Illustrated London News* on 14th May 1842.

With the advent of news being transmitted telegraphically Ingram was able to cover stories worldwide. The first issue included news of the war in Afghanistan, a train crash in France and a fancy dress party at Buckingham Palace, all accompanied by illustrations. A non-partisan paper, although Ingram was to become Liberal MP for Boston, it was firmly aimed at the growing middle class audience. The circulation grew from 65,000 copies a week to 300,000 copies by 1863, at which date *The Times* sold 70,000. The paper settled on a mix of both mainstream and eclectic world news, science, art, culture, politics and the Royal family. Ingram employed leading artists of the day to provide illustrations to these stories, and with advertising revenue the paper became extraordinarily successful enabling it to commission the foremost artists and writers of the day. Edward Duncan was one of these artists to be commissioned by the paper, along with Myles Birket Foster, Richard Caton Woodville, Sir John Gilbert, George Cruikshank and E.H. Shepherd. Literary contributors included Thomas Hardy, Robert Louis Stevenson, Rudyard Kipling, Wilkie Collins and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

In *The Illustrated London News* edition of 5th October 1850, the illustration of 'A cricket match' (fig.5) by Edward Duncan provided the context for an article on cricket:

CRICKET.

Hur was the prettiest fellow
At foot-ball or at cricket;
At hunting chase, or nimble race,
How featly hur could prick it.

THUS sang mirthful Tom d'Urfey, about a century and a half since—and the above line is believed to be the earliest mention of the game of Cricket, national though it be. It has been, from the first, popular among all ranks: here it was reared and matured, and hence it has an additional hold on our esteem. It is, in every sense, a game of the people generally, from the highest to the lowest: it excites no envy by its exclusiveness, as it equally engages the attention of the Prince and the peasant.

"We have several instances of Royal cricketers. George the Fourth formed a cricket ground adjoining the Pavilion, at Brighton, on which, if we mistake not, he has himself often figured both as batsman and fieldsman; and the Royal Clarence Cricket Club, at Hampton, was instituted by his late Majesty William the Fourth. The late Duke of Richmond and the Duke of Hamilton were not only warm admirers of Cricket, but also very excellent practitioners. The highly-esteemed Duke of Bedford patronised it as an exercise particularly calculated to keep up the manly character of the people, and his opinion of it was worthy of his patriotism and his acumen. By associating together the active, the ardent, and the dexterous of every grade, it encourages a friendly feeling between parties at other times widely separated, and that without destroying the respect and deference due to rank and wealth."—*Blaine*.

Kent has ever ranked first among our counties for its cricketers; and from one of its noblest domains has our Artist pictured the game in the accompanying Illustration.

The Cricket season commences late in May, and is, therefore, now in full force.

Cricket

By the mid-19th Century cricket had become a national sport with matches between villages, county teams and an All England team in Sussex played for '50 guineas a piece'.

Cricket had developed out of any number of games played with a ball and stick in the Middle Ages. One of the earliest references to the game being played was c.1550, when John Denwick, a county coroner, referred to an area of land where as a scholar at the Guildford Free School "*he and several of his fellows did run and play there at cricket and other plaies*". In 1598 'cricket' appears in John Florio's Italian-English dictionary, he defines the verb 'sgrillare' as 'to make a noise as a cricket, to play cricket-a-wicket, and be merry'; and in a less merry mode in 1611 in the Sussex village of Sidlesham two men were prosecuted for playing cricket instead of going to church.

Cricket continued to be played in villages primarily in the counties of Kent, Sussex, Surrey and Hampshire, but, following the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, was played more widely and with a greater involvement of the landed gentry and aristocracy, which in turn led to patronage and gambling. In 1696 it was reported that a match took place in Sussex played for '50 guineas a piece'.

The popularity of the game grew exponentially in the 18th Century, played in villages and on country estates. In 1744 Kent v. All England was watched by a large crowd, among them the Prince of Wales and Duke of Cumberland. In London, the aristocracy and gentry wished to watch cricket when in town, and the Artillery Ground in Finsbury was a popular venue with games attracting crowds of 'six and seven thousand'; other favoured grounds included Marylebone Fields, White Conduit Street and Lambs Conduit Street. The Earl of Sandwich, in 1751 captained Old Etonians v. All England, played for £1500 with many side bets, and was a keen follower of the game, so much so that he wrote "*I'll at your Board (the Admiralty) when at leisure from cricket*".

Many of the gentry employed leading cricketers in some capacity on their estates to secure their services and deny others. Sir Horace Mann was a great patron of Kent, hosting Kent v. Hants at Bishopsbourne Paddock in 1772, watched by twenty thousand, and the Sackvilles of Knole were also among the greatest patrons of Kent with games played at Sevenoaks and Knole Park. This aristocratic patronage was not confined to watching and gambling. In the years of the following century, The Reverend Lord Frederick Beauclerk claimed to earn 'six hundred guineas a year' from cricket, both batting and bowling against the best of the professionals.

Prior to the formation of the MCC and Lords cricket ground in Dorset Square, *Hambledon*, a village in Hampshire had been the 'cradle of cricket' drawing players from the surrounding areas with Richard Nyren, innkeeper of the Bat and Ball, at its heart. The village played counties and All England, as often as not triumphant, with Lumpy Stevens, Tom Sueter and David Harris among the foremost players.

The laws of cricket had been drawn up in 1744 by the *Star and Garter Club*, the members of which formed the MCC at Lords in 1787, and were amended in 1774 to allow for a third stump, lbw, and a maximum width of the bat of four and one half inches. Bowling was all underarm and fast, and the bat curved, but with the advent of bowlers pitching the ball the straight bat was introduced. With the introduction of a second wicket came a second umpire usually found at a leg slip position. The fast underarm bowling gave way to pitched bowling, still underarm, but, to counter this, batting evolved with the batsman advancing down the pitch, and batting averages rose. As early as 1806 bowlers had sought an advantage, the laws stated that the hand had to be below the elbow when delivering the ball, more pace and bounce could be generated bowling round arm, and bowlers would stretch the limits aided by acquiescent umpires until the opposition protested. It was only in 1835 with the new style bowling being practised and advocated by the great William Lillywhite that the MCC altered the law to "*The ball must be bowled and if it be thrown jerked or if the hand be above the shoulder in the delivery, the umpire must call 'No Ball'*". The acrimony this caused in the MCC was in part explained by the fact of batsmen outnumbering bowlers in the hierarchy.

Cricket continued to expand. It became more widely played and watched in London and, with the encroachment of development in the city, in the counties. The Reverend John Mitford, a keen cricketer and editor of *Gentleman's Magazine* c.1820 wrote "*Kent has always stood proudly pre-eminent; Kent is emphatically the field of the cricketers' glory*". Other counties would lay claim as the game's appeal grew. Books, prints and lithographs were published, and the foremost players, George Parr, William Clarke, Fuller Pilch, William Caffyn, William Beldham of Farnham, Alfred Mynn the fast bowler and William Lillywhite became household names.

Bibliography:

Derek Birley: *A Social History of English Cricket*, published Aurum 1999

H.S. Altham and E.W. Swanton: *A History of Cricket*, published George Allen and Unwin, 1926

Edward Duncan (1803 - 1882)



Portrait of Edward Duncan by
Ferdinand Jean de la Ferté Joubert
National Portrait Gallery

Born in St. Pancras, London on 21st October 1803, Edward Duncan was the son of Thomas Duncan (1781-1841) and Peggy, née Watson. He was apprenticed to Robert Havell (1793-1878), a painter and also the foremost engraver in aquatint, who with his father, also Robert, engraved all but ten plates of Audubon's *Birds of America*. Following his apprenticeship Duncan set up his own engraving studio producing prints for, among others, the publisher Samuel Fores of Piccadilly.

In 1835 he married Berthia, the daughter of William J. Huggins (1781-1845), a marine painter to both George IV and William IV, under whose influence Duncan included marine paintings, specifically coastal scenes, to his oeuvre.

As a painter in oils, Duncan painted shooting scenes, landscapes and coastal subjects, and of course '*A village cricket match*'. He also received an important commission to portray '*The Laying of a Foundation Stone, Birkenhead Docks, Wirral*', (fig.6), now in the collection of Williamson Art Gallery and Museum.

Duncan exhibited at the Royal Academy between 1846 and 1873 and was elected a member of the New Society of Painters in Watercolour in 1833, and of the Royal Watercolour Society in 1850.

In his latter years he spent almost every summer painting coastal scenes in South Wales, on the Gower Peninsular. He died in Hampstead, London, on 11th April 1882.

He had seven children, one of whom, Walter Duncan, followed in his father's footsteps, being elected Associate of the Royal Watercolour Society in 1874.



Fig.6 Edward Duncan
The Laying of a Foundation Stone, Birkenhead Docks, Wirral
© Williamson Art Gallery and Museum

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