

The Stroller



'World's oldest working cricket boots donated to Lord's museum' P.4 From skiffle to Saumur: the Fiala story P.21

Arise, Sir Ivor!

The Strollers' poet laureate has departed the crease but will forever be 104 not out

For 43 summers Ivor Fiala, Stroller number 66, carried his immaculate leather bag around the cricket grounds of England. He was poached by Simon Brodbeck after playing for Haymarket Advertising against an Evenings News side.

Ivor's debut came on 17th September 1978 against Ex Blues where he scored 32. Over 553 matches his highest score of 35 came against Blackfordby in 1980. He was most proud of his 104 not outs and his 87 catches in the gully.

But the figures, of course, are not important. Through 43 years Ivor was a much-loved and important member of the club - always encouraging of others, always enthusiastic and always willing to do the many jobs that always need doing.

He was cheerful; welcoming of new arrivals; and always had a word for the wives and camp followers around the boundary edge. He was the perfect tourist: uncomplaining on the field and relishing the after-match celebrations and festivities (see story, right).

A music lover, Ivor was also the Strollers' very own poet laureate, performing his traditional rhyming couplets verse at the annual dinner. He also doubled as quiz master.

After a two-year Covid hiatus, Ivor played his 553rd and final Strollers match at Tadworth on July 18 2021. He was born in 1942 in Royal Leamington Spa and was a lifelong Aston Villa supporter. His mother was a singer (see story, right) and his father a Czechoslovakian soldier.

He died aged 79, 41 years to the day after his top score. We will miss him dearly.

➤ Sir Ivor and his namesake celebrate his 550th appearance at Wall Cricket Club



OUR MAN AT THE BAR

Meet the wedding crasher extraordinaire

It is thought Ivor Fiala's love of parties was forged in the heady days of the 1960s West Midlands pop scene where a young Fiala fronted a skiffle band.

But perhaps his skills at joining - and enjoying - social occasions was honed years earlier. Ivor's mother, Pamela Devis, was a renowned singer and dancer in the 1940s and 1950s.

Later, Ivor joined Haymarket Advertising in Soho. Working with newspapers brought him into contact with Strollers founders Simon Brodbeck and Peter Patston.

And it was with the Strollers that Ivor's partying reached legendary status. He was an ever-present fixture on the Three Counties, Cotswolds and French tours. Often carrying a guitar, always with a poem in his pocket and a glass of wine on standby.

Sir Ivor himself, the club's official mascot, was born as a result of Ivor's revelry. On one early Three Counties tour the Strollers were in the pub earlier than usual after a quick win and Ivor entertained a local lady before heading back to Ashby for dinner.

The following year, the lady tracked down the Strollers at the Royal Hotel, the traditional tour lodgings. She arrived with Sir Ivor, a doll in Ivor's image dressed in the Strollers' kit.

"I think Ivor hid from her", Maggie Patston remembered.

"But the rest of us thought it was hilarious and the doll became our mascot and was named in Ivor's honour."

Cheers! King of Strollers tours, home and away

From bottom left: Ivor in one of his last games; 26 July 2010 - at The Grand Elephant, Nantes, celebrating Maggie's 60th birthday; 3 August 1980 - during a party at the Stoddarts' house in Watford after playing Watford Taverners; 19 July 2008 - on the banks of the Loire in Saumur where debutants were required to dress as a member of The Village People; August 1998 - Ivor sports his

new tour knitwear on the Three Counties; 3 May 2010 - three wise Strollers at Odney; 14 July 2012 - in Ferney-Voltaire on the Cern tour. It was Ivor's 70th birthday a few days earlier and he paid for all the evening's drinks. The cap was a memento from the Tour de France which passed nearby; 14 September 1985 - Al Capone and Andy Pandy have switched headgear.



Fiala's final score Ivor's illustrious Strollers career in numbers

1978 IVOR'S DEBUT	334 INNINGS	35 IVOR'S TOP SCORE, AGAINST BLACKFORDBY ON 6TH SEPTEMBER 1980	7.31 BATTING AVERAGE	17 WICKETS	104 NUMBER OF TIMES THE OPPOSITION FAILED TO DISLodge IVOR FROM THE CREASE	87 CATCHES, MOST IN THE GULLY	160 TOURS ATTENDED
553 MATCHES	1,682 RUNS		438 OVERS BOWLED	25.76 BOWLING AVERAGE		192 WEDDINGS CRASHED	14,827 SONGS SUNG & POEMS RECITED