

## **"Batting On A Sticky Wicket"**

The Shakespearean origins of "Batting On A Sticky Wicket"

When I was growing up, I was told that there is nothing more English than cricket.

A number of phrases from that game, such as "bowling a maiden over" and "batting on a sticky wicket" are still in use today. But where are their origins?

The answer for the latter lies with Shakespeare, not William Shakespeare who made many words and phrases popular, but his dad, John Shakespeare.

Amongst many other things, John was a beer tester in Stratford on Avon, and the technique involved pouring a quantity of ale onto a wooden bench and then sitting on it, while wearing leather breeches. Upon rising, if able to do so easily, it showed that the beer had been watered down, and so failed the test.

However, if difficult to get up, it showed the beer was sufficiently strong, and sticky, and so passed the test.

But Mary Arden, Mrs Shakespeare, wasn't best pleased at having to clean these beer-soaked breeches, and implored her husband to find a better method.

John subsequently did so.

His inspiration came when watching Will and his friends playing the game of muddy stick.

Where a flat piece of wood was used to try and pick up as many muddy wicker sticks as possible.

John's system involved dipping a length of wicker stick into the ale, and trying to pick it up with a flat batten of wood. This became known as "batting on a sticky wicker".

Like many phrases, this got corrupted, and taken up by the cricketing community as "Batting On A Sticky Wicket".

As for "bowling a maiden over" that is altogether another story.