Cricket is one of many games in the "club ball" sphere that basically involve hitting a ball with a hand-held implement; others include [baseball](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baseball) (which shares many [similarities](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comparison_of_baseball_and_cricket) with cricket, both belonging in the more specific [bat-and-ball games](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bat-and-ball_games) category[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cricket" \l "cite_note-2)), [golf](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golf), [hockey](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hockey), [tennis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tennis), [squash](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Squash_(sport)), [badminton](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Badminton) and [table tennis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_tennis).[[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cricket" \l "cite_note-JM17-3) In cricket's case, a key difference is the existence of a solid target structure, the wicket (originally, it is thought, a "wicket gate" through which sheep were herded), that the batter must defend.[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cricket" \l "cite_note-BWC1-4) The cricket historian [Harry Altham](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harry_Altham) identified three "groups" of "club ball" games: the "[hockey](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hockey) group", in which the ball is driven to and from between two targets (the goals); the "golf group", in which the ball is driven towards an undefended target (the hole); and the "cricket group", in which "the ball is aimed at a mark (the wicket) and driven away from it".[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cricket" \l "cite_note-HSA19-5)

It is generally believed that cricket originated as a [children's game](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Children's_game) in the south-eastern counties of England, sometime during the [medieval period](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/England_in_the_Middle_Ages).[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cricket" \l "cite_note-BWC1-4) Although there are claims for prior dates, the earliest definite reference to cricket being played comes from evidence given at a court case in [Guildford](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guildford) in January 1597 ([Old Style](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Style_and_New_Style_dates), equating to January 1598 in the modern calendar). The case concerned ownership of a certain plot of land and the court heard the testimony of a 59-year-old [coroner](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coroner), [John Derrick](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Derrick_(coroner)), who gave witness that:[[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cricket" \l "cite_note-HSA21-6)[[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cricket" \l "cite_note-DU3-7)[[8]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cricket" \l "cite_note-JM19-8)