

NEWSLETTER No. 252 - FEBRUARY 2005

9 February 2005 – Meeting

Tonight's speaker is Vic Isaacs, who last summer completed 30 years as Hampshire's scorer. Vic has been a good friend of the Society since its formation, attending meetings and having spoken twice before, in October 1982 and November 1995. He is therefore most welcome again as he completes his hat-trick.

VICTOR HENRY ISAACS was born of Jewish parents – his father was German and his mother Polish – in Glasgow on 26 August 1944. He grew up in Manchester and spent much of his early adult life in the Army.

He has, though, long associations with the County. He was secretary of Romsey Cricket Club for many years, before becoming Hampshire's scorer in 1975.

In the intervening years, he has contributed regularly to the Hampshire Handbook, seen the publication of his definitive Hampshire CCC First Class Records 1864-1992, and Hampshire CCC One-Day Records 1963-1995, contributed statistical appendices to the autobiographies of Barry Richards and the late Malcolm Marshall, and also helped with a host of other publications, including Wisden.

He was for many years a Committee member of The Association of Cricket Statisticians, during which time he contributed to their publication Hampshire Cricketers 1800-1982. He has also contributed to a number of the ACS' books, especially on limited-overs cricket. He partnered Bill Frindall in the production of the Wisden Book of One-Day Internationals, published in 1985. He has also scored for BSkyB during their coverage of England's overseas Test matches. One of his unfulfilled ambitions is to score for an England side overseas. His other ambition is to score a Hampshire County Championship title.

Vic maintains a number of computer databases, and given his computer literacy, he seemed the natural choice to be appointed the first secretary-treasurer of the Association of County Cricket Scorers upon its formation.

Vic was formerly a grade one football referee, but sickened by soccer, he turned his affections to rugby union which he now follows avidly during the winter months.

Vic has always been unfailingly helpful to all those who have sought his help; he is sure to be worth listening to this evening.

12 January 2005 - Report

Frank Duckworth captivated a disappointingly small gathering with a fascinating expose of the background to, and workings of, the Duckworth-Lewis method. He revealed that he completed the formula via FAX exchanges with his co-devisor, Tony Lewis, whilst on holiday in Hawaii! Though he had never met the latter before working on the project together, the pair ascertained that they had attended rival schools simultaneously in the same location in Lancashire and they lived only 5 miles apart from each other in Gloucestershire.

He then engaged those present with a unique form of audience participation as he worked through 5 examples of employing the formula in different match scenarios. There was no better way of learning the principles of the method.

He explained the nervousness of he and his partner prior to their presentation to the ICC before luminaries Clyde Walcott, Ali Bacher and Majid Khan in July 1996. Their system was adopted and first used in a rain-affected international between Zimbabwe and England in Harare in January 1997. England lost, and its compilers took the blame, as they would have won under the former system!

Scorers now have a ready reckoner for each ball, as the weather will often intervene before the completion of an over. The system is always being modified due to changes in circumstances, the last occasion being in 2002. The method is now called the Professional Edition.

Our speaker kept a record of every instance that Duckworth-Lewis had been invoked. Until 26 August 2004 it had been used on 523 occasions. Rain or bad light had accounted for 509, floodlight failure 9, crowd disturbance 3, sandstorm (in Rawalpindi) one and snow (in Durham) also once.

Despite his small audience, our speaker then faced a non-stop barrage of questions from the floor which would have gone on well into the night had not our Chairman called time. The editor could not recall any speaker who had elicited such an uninhibited response. In his appreciation of thanks Ken Chapman rightly drew attention to Frank Duckworth's enthusiastic delivery. Our speaker did strike a resonant chord with his audience and it is small wonder he had been recommended so wholeheartedly by other members of the Council of Cricket Societies.

THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING – WEDNESDAY 9 MARCH 2005

Notice of the 29th Annual General Meeting of the Society to be held on
WEDNESDAY 9 MARCH 2005 at **THE APOLLO HOTEL, BASINGSTOKE** at
7.30pm.

Any resolutions and nominations for office and the Committee, duly proposed and seconded, should reach David Fish, Hon. Secretary at 1 Abbott Close, Basingstoke, RG22 6LA by 24 February 2005.

Please accept the above as formal notice.

Our speaker after the AGM will be the recently retired Derbyshire and Somerset batsman **PETER BOWLER**. A practising solicitor he received the warmest of testimonies from his former Chief Executive of Somerset CCC, Peter Anderson, at the November meeting.

PHILIP MEAD

This year marks the centenary of Philip Mead's debut for Hampshire. He first set foot in first-class cricket at Northlands Road for the County's match against the Australians on 6 July. He spent the whole of the first day and part of the next in the field as the visitors amassed a mammoth 620. The immortal Victor Trumper made a princely 92, and Clem Hill (115), Monty Noble (101) and Sid Gregory (134) all scored centuries. Hampshire's debutant bowled respectably in the face of the onslaught taking two wickets (Armstrong and Hopkins – both bowled) for 56 in 16 overs. Indeed he was the only bowler to really trouble the Australians.

The County were then bowled out twice for 239 and 269. In the first innings Johnnie Greig compiled 66 and Mead, batting at eight, a composed 41 not out. He opened in the second with Jimmy Stone but was run out without facing a ball.

However, he had given notice of his undoubted talent. Philip Mead was still completing his residential qualification – he made his way to Hampshire after being on the ground staff of his native Surrey – and he was not eligible to play Championship cricket until the following season. He passed 1000 runs, and from then on remained the mainstay of the Hampshire batting until his retirement in 1936.

It is impossible to over-emphasise the debt that Hampshire cricket owed to Philip Mead. He scored more runs (48,892) than any man has ever scored for any County. He made 1000 runs for the County in every English season throughout his career, passing 2000 runs eleven times. In two seasons (1921 and 1928) he aggregated 3000 runs in all matches. He finished with 153 centuries, 138 of which were made for his beloved Hampshire.

Unlike the other Masters at the top of cricket's runs/centuries list, Mead never received any consistent support from his county team mates throughout his long career. It was often stated that he was Hampshire's batting. The statistics also give credence to this view. On six occasions spread over his career (1914, 1921, 1922, 1923, 1928 and 1933) he scored over 1000 runs more in the season than his next County colleague and in 1921 and 1928 scored more than double the runs of the next man. In the first of these seasons he played in two Tests for England which makes the feat even more remarkable.

With two exceptions, he also topped the Hampshire averages in every season between 1913 and his final season in 1936. John Arnold interrupted the sequence in 1930 and

1932. On only two occasions between 1913 and 1929 did his seasonal average – on uncovered wickets – fall below 50.

He twice gathered over one thousand runs in a month, scored a century in each innings on three occasions and completed the “full set” of hundreds against each County. His appetite for scoring runs was truly voracious.

Film footage in David Frith’s invaluable and classic video Benson and Hedges Golden Greats – Batsmen captures his idiosyncratic rituals at the crease: three minute shuffling steps in his crease, a small tug at the omnipresent cap, a pat of the gloves, four light taps of the bat at the crease and a further four shuffling steps. He was now ready for the bowler, from a somewhat crouching stance and a leg-stump guard. John Arlott commented that some bowlers, seeking to steal a march, would try and deliver the ball before Mead had completed his routine. However, he merely would hold up his hand like a traffic policeman and go through the well known sequence again. He very often got off the mark with a single just behind square on the leg side, a tactic which the more felicitous David Gower – another left-hander of course – used to similar advantage in more recent times.

His defence was virtually impregnable. His judgement of line and length and what to play and what to leave alone was faultless and almost radar-like. On many occasions a bowler, seeing Mead leave the ball alone on off-stump, would raise his arms in expectation only to see it pass millimetres from the target. Like so many left-handers he was particularly strong square, and just behind, on both sides of the wicket. He also excelled in the cover drive. He was unflinching against fast bowling, and though a seemingly ponderous mover, he was remarkably light on his feet in moving down the pitch to counter spin.

Throughout his playing days he had the reputation of being a slow scorer. Yet Wisden is laced with examples of innings that stand comparison with modern rates. In 1911 he scored 207 not out in three hours against Warwickshire at Southampton and then next day stroked his way to 194 at a run a minute off the Sussex bowling at Portsmouth. His highest score of 280 not out against Nottinghamshire was compiled in a single day at Southampton in 1921. Most of his longer innings – and there were many – were made at the very acceptable rate of 40 runs an hour. He always kept the scoreboard moving by taking singles resulting from skilful placement of the ball.

Lyn Wellings, writing in the Society’s Newsletter in March 1987, testified to his ability to master all types of bowling. He cited his innings of 100 out of 201 against Yorkshire at Northlands Road in 1919 when he had to counter “the fast left-arm of Abe Waddington, the medium quick swing of Emmott Robinson, the orthodox left arm spin of Wilfred Rhodes and Roy Kilner and not least Rockley Wilson, a bowler of tantalising accuracy of a right hander based on leg-spin and devious flight”.

Charles Philip Mead was born in Battersea on 9 March 1887. When only ten years old he was the first ever centurion in South London league cricket. In 1902 he joined the Surrey staff as a slow left-arm bowler, dismissing another triallist, none other than Jack Hobbs, in an early-season practice match. Considering his later achievements, Surrey’s decision to release him in August 1903 seems almost bizarre. Though they

later tried to re-engage him, he had in the meantime made his way down to the south coast and signed a two-year contract with Hampshire.

He made his championship debut by a strange quirk of fate against Surrey, failing as an opener with 0 and 3. But then, in the next match against mighty Yorkshire, coming in at number four, he batted his way to 66 and 109 on a losing side. It was a performance that set the scene for future years, when he so often carried the team virtually single-handed on his powerful sloping shoulders.

Despite his prolific run scoring he played in only seventeen Tests for England. His great left-handed rival, Frank Woolley of Kent, often gained precedence. Though the latter was more elegant and appealed more to the senses, both his first-class and Test averages were some points below Mead's. Woolley was, though, a faster scorer, an important asset in an era when Tests in England were only of three days' duration.

His Test record was one of which to be proud. In 26 visits to the crease he scored 1185 runs at an average of 49.37. Only the truly great players average more than 50 in Test cricket and this statistic perhaps more than any other illustrates his quality. His average was achieved despite a problematic first tour of Australia in 1911-12 when he was somewhat overawed and never came to terms with the conditions. Mead played in four Tests on that tour scoring only 105 runs (avge. 21.00).

If his first matches against Australia were a disappointment the remaining three more than offered compensations. In 1921, taking an impressive 129 off the Australians at Southampton, he was selected for the fourth Test at Old Trafford. Many felt he should have been chosen for the earlier Test at Lord's when he was in the midst of a purple patch in June in which he scored 1000 runs in the month. Nevertheless, he made 47 and retained his place for the final Test at The Oval. He hung on grimly on the first day, Saturday, making 19 in seventy minutes. However, he batted much more positively on the Monday, particularly after being joined by Lionel Tennyson. His captain took him to one side with some whispered advice almost as soon as he joined him. The well-chosen words had a remarkable effect. The great left-hander scored another 109 in two and a half hours before lunch and eventually reached 182 not out in 309 minutes. Surviving two chances, he drove Armstrong to distraction as he stepped away from his wicket to hit the defensive leg-stump bowling through the sparsely populated off-side field. His score was a record at that time for England in home Tests against Australia. His Wisden obituary commented that his performances suggested that he might with advantage have been called upon earlier to break the stranglehold on batsmen gained by that deadly pair of fast bowlers, McDonald and Gregory.

After a prolific summer in 1928 he was selected for the tour of Australia the following winter – seventeen years after his previous visit. He played in the first Test at Brisbane, scoring 8 and 73. It proved to be his final Test appearance as England chose to play an extra bowler in the remaining four Tests.

In the interim he had appeared in ten Tests on the MCC tours to South Africa in 1913-14 and 1922-23. He much enjoyed the matting wickets there, compiling two centuries on the first tour – a splendid 102 in three and a half hours at Johannesburg and 117 at

Port Elizabeth – and a monumental 181 in 500 minutes at Kingsmead, Durban in the second.

In his early days in the game his slow left-arm spin bowling was almost as important to Hampshire as his batting. He bowled frequently between 1906 and 1911 – his first great year with the bat when he leapt to the top and was selected for the forthcoming winter tour of Australia. Thereafter he bowled rarely, mainly because he spent so much time at the crease. He also developed varicose veins, a condition which once famously got him into hot water with his captain, Lionel Tennyson, and the Hampshire Committee, through his refusal to bowl.

However, in his first four full seasons he captured 113 wickets. His best year was in 1907 when he dismissed 42 batsmen. He returned career best bowling figures of 7 for 18 against Northamptonshire at Northlands Road the following year. It was an astonishing performance as he taunted the opposition batsmen on a drying wicket and set up a most unlikely victory for his team in a rain-marred encounter.

He finished his career with 277 wickets (avge. 34.46).

As a slip fielder par excellence he pouched 647 catches – another Hampshire record. However, it was for his insatiable appetite for runs that he will always be remembered. His final tally was 55,060 (avge.47.87)

After leaving Hampshire in 1936 he turned out for Suffolk in Minor Counties cricket in 1938 and 1939, whilst coaching at Framlingham School. He met with considerable success, averaging 76 and 71. By this time, though, his sight was failing. The man who had broken the hearts of the finest bowlers eventually became blind. In his declining years, he made his way to Dean Park to ‘hear’ cricket in the company of Wilfred Rhodes, who had suffered the same affliction. They could still determine the quality of stroke-play by the sound of bat on ball. He passed away at Bournemouth, following an operation for an internal haemorrhage, on 26 March 1958.

IMOGEN GROSBERG A PERSONAL NOTE

There is another anniversary in 2005 which should not go unmarked. The poetry of Imogen Grosberg first appeared in the 1955 edition of the Hampshire Handbook. She therefore celebrates 50 years as Hampshire’s undisputed resident poet. Her poetry is now an indispensable part of the County’s literary heritage. The evocative pictures she has painted with her words on Hampshire cricketers and cricket in general have left an immensely powerful impression on the mind. Though cricket has received the attention of the poetic pen of more famous published writers, Imogen’s work stands comparison with them all.

Imogen is, of course, a Society member and has been a marvellous supporter of the Newsletter virtually since its inception. The editor has always felt it a privilege to include her work in the Newsletter. Congratulations Genny on both 50 distinguished years and on your 70th birthday this month.

© Copyright Alan Edwards 2005