

NEWSLETTER No. 270 - FEBRUARY 2007

MEETINGS

Wednesday 7 February 2007 – Meeting

When Stephen Chalke wrote Runs in The Memory, an evocation of county cricket in the 1950's based on interviews with players of that period, he struck a chord with the cricketing public. The book was food and drink to members of the various Cricket Societies up and down the country who love to hear the tales of players of that era. Two more books quickly followed: Caught in The Memory, which recalled the 1960's in similar vein and a nostalgic volume One More Run, a wonderful celebration of the Cheltenham Festival, recreating the tense Gloucestershire/Yorkshire match there in 1957, emanating from conversations with that lovable and irascible character "Bomber" Wells.

He formed his own publishing company, Fairfield Books, which established, from the outset, a reputation for guaranteed quality in cricket books. Our speaker has since written two award-winning works. The first was At the Heart of English Cricket – winner of the Cricket Society Book of the Year award – which recalled the life and times of the former administrator, Geoffrey Howard. The other was No Coward Soul, jointly written with Derek Hodgson which was selected as the Wisden Book of the Year for 2003, and tells the fascinating and moving story of Bob Appleyard. He has also written biographies of Keith Andrew (Guess My Story). Also, in conjunction with its subject, Ken Taylor, formerly of Yorkshire and England and a most gifted artist, he produced Drawn to Sport. Latterly he has written a biography of Tom Cartright and another work recalling George Hirst's remarkable season of 1907 when he scored 2000 runs and also found the energy to take 200 wickets. Fairfield Books has also facilitated biographies of Don Shepherd and Charles Palmer, and works by that wonderful West County journalist David Foot, who always conjures such atmospheric visions in his writing, as well as one by former Sussex captain John Barclay.

Our speaker has also written a 150th anniversary history of the Wimbledon Club, a cricket, hockey and lawn tennis club set in sylvan surroundings directly across the road from its world renowned neighbour, the All-England Club. He also writes a regular column The Way It Was for the Wisden Cricketer magazine and has recently contributed a series on great Ashes contests to The Times.

Stephen Chalke was born in Salisbury and now lives in Bath. He still finds time to play about thirty games of cricket each summer for a wandering side The Journeymen, and for Trowbridge 3rd and 4th XIs. He still therefore retains his acquaintance with the roots of the game.

The Society is very proud to welcome Stephen Chalke to this evening's meeting. This is his second visit to the Society. The previous occasion was in September 1999, since when he has become probably the most prolific, as well as influential, of all cricket writers.

10 January 2007 – Report

The evening in the company of Peter Walker was an absolute joy as he recalled his life and career with Glamorgan. A natural storyteller, he held his audience spellbound as he spoke about the players of his era. It was a splendid evening laced with anecdote and humour. He also conveyed some trenchant views on England's performance in Australia, with which some Society members in the audience who had travelled out there in the early part of the tour concurred.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING WEDNESDAY 7 MARCH 2007

Notice of the 31st **Annual General Meeting** of the Society to be held on **Wednesday 7 March at TEST VALLEY GOLF CLUB at 7.30pm.**

Any resolutions and nominations for office and the Committee, duly proposed and seconded, should reach the Hon. Secretary at 1 Abbott Close, Basingstoke, RG22 6LA by 27 February 2007.

Please accept the above as formal notice.

HCS PLAYER OF THE YEAR 2006 JOHN CRAWLEY

For the first few seasons after the introduction of four-day cricket, the leading run scorers, by a significant margin, were John Crawley and Mark Ramprakash. Both men then ran into rougher waters, experiencing difficult times when captaining their respective Counties. They then decided to seek pastures new but lost their England places shortly afterwards. The technically masterful Ramprakash was quicker into his stride on the batting-friendly pitches at The Oval. John Crawley took longer to regain his previous form, having to adapt to the vagaries of the newly-laid square at the Rose Bowl, as well as captaining Hampshire unexpectedly a year after his arrival.

However, in 2006, both men restored the old order in dramatic fashion. Ramprakash dominated to such an extent that he scored 2211 runs, averaging a staggering 105.28 in the process, thus becoming only the sixth man to post a century batting average in an English season.

John Crawley went about his work out of the limelight and finished with 1737 runs (avge. 66.80). He was the most productive batsman in the First Division of the Championship. His nearest English rival was Kent's Matthew Walker (1419 runs). Only overseas player Darren Lehman (1706) – courtesy of a remarkable triple century in his last innings for Yorkshire – and the equally consistent Murray Goodwin, who was neck and neck with Crawley for much of the season, ran him close. His season's aggregate comfortably surpassed coach Paul Terry's previous record for the County in four-day cricket (1469 runs in 1993). His average has only ever been exceeded for the County by two men – Philip Mead and Gordon Greenidge – in a full season.

If John Crawley was inwardly disappointed about being robbed, somewhat quixotically, of Hampshire's record score by an individual batsman in the final innings of the previous season, he put the matter behind him and batted with thorough professionalism throughout the summer.

He started slowly as Hampshire obtained minimum points from their first two matches. Rain washed away the final day at Old Trafford, and Naved-ul-Hasan and the adorably magical Mushtaq Ahmed, inflicted a home defeat at The Rose Bowl. The latter, with his infectious enthusiasm, really has been one of the most romantic figures ever to grace county cricket. The two Pakistanis were almost solely responsible for Sussex's rapid emergence from the starting blocks, which was the catalyst for their eventual Championship title success.

The arrival of Shane Warne heralded an upturn in Hampshire's fortunes and Crawley's batting form. He made 55 against Middlesex at the Rose Bowl and then a diligent 96 in five and a half hours at Edgbaston as Hampshire recorded victories in both matches. Rain dogged the next match against Kent at home but Hampshire's number three showed his quality and technique in two contrasting innings. Survival was the requirement first time round as Hampshire struggled in damp, murky conditions but, in the second, still in mainly poor light, he drove powerfully and punished any ball straying onto his legs in batting with great freedom in registering an unbeaten 83 off only 80 balls in less than two hours. It was an innings of undisputed class. He then scored 54 in the first innings of Hampshire's epic five wicket victory, when chasing 404 at Headingley. The match was most memorable, of course, for Jimmy Adams' maiden Championship century (168 not out) as he batted throughout the last innings.

Nottinghamshire must have approached their game at The Rose Bowl with some dread. John Crawley had scored triple centuries against them in each of the two previous seasons. He inflicted yet further pain with two more centuries - 106 and 116 – in another Hampshire victory. Crawley was the only Hampshire batsman to counter Durham's Australian fast-medium bowler Callum Thorp in the cataclysmic defeat in the next Championship match, again at home. It was a blow from which the County were never able to recover as they chased Sussex and Lancashire thereafter. He made the highest score of the match in Hampshire's first innings. On a difficult wicket – thankfully there were not too many such occurrences at The Rose Bowl in 2006 – he batted resourcefully and watchfully in striking ten boundaries in making 93. He then scored 31 (out of 104) in the second innings.

Until this time, watchful, diligent and sound technique were adjectives which recurred time and again in newspaper descriptions of John Crawley's innings. They were attributes which would have served England in Australia this winter. There were some who commented on his rate of scoring but Hampshire required his patience, especially in tight situations.

After the 20/20 competition, from which he was excused, and which more than ever before completely disrupted the flow of the season, normality returned in mid-July in near record temperatures. Spectators sought the sun cream and shade. Counties deployed their spinners more on the scorched wickets. John Crawley has long been regarded as the best player of spin bowling in the country and he took his game to

new heights. Fresh from his mid-season break, the long-suffering Nottinghamshire bowlers and - off-spinner Graeme Swann in particular – were the first to feel the pinch as he struck a sumptuous 148 in the return fixture at Trent Bridge. His quick footwork enabled him to dominate, never allowing Swann to find a length. The opposition must have felt that Christmas had arrived in mid-summer when he was dismissed for only 23 in the second innings, caught pulling to mid-on.

In the next match he gave a masterclass in coping with the leg-spin bowling of Yorkshire's Mark Lawson. The latter finished with 6 for 150 but Crawley, with 173 runs flowing from his bat, was not one of his victims. This innings was a landmark in John Crawley's career in that it was his 50th century in first-class cricket. Given that he had spent so much of his career at Lancashire, achieving this feat against the auld enemy must have been a double cause for celebration. He then turned his attentions to the slow left-arm spin of Min Patel at Canterbury as he scored yet another big century, 189 this time. He had now scored three centuries in four innings, and five centuries, as well as a 93, in five consecutive matches, over a two-month period. It had been one of the richest and most sustained veins of form by any Hampshire batsman in the County's history, made more noteworthy by the constant interruptions of limited-overs cricket. The sequence spoke volumes for his adaptability and powers of concentration.

Another feature of his batting during the season was that he made his most important runs in the first innings when they are always hardest to come by. Indeed, he reached double figures on every such occasion, a quite remarkable feat in itself. He added further half-centuries against Middlesex at Lord's and Lancashire at The Rose Bowl, and yet another hundred (150) against Durham at The Riverside before the season's end, again all in the first innings. In 18 matches, he thus made five centuries and five fifties (which included two nineties) in the first innings - a most meritorious accomplishment. The only time he failed to reach double figures in the whole of the season was when he fell for a duck in the second innings at Edgbaston.

2006 was a memorable season for John Crawley. He will be only 35 years old during this coming summer. There are surely still a few seasons for Hampshire supporters to enjoy his presence and elegance at the crease. He is an aesthetic cricketer who appeals to the purist. Such batsmen are becoming an endangered species.

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