

**7 March 2007 – Meeting**

Tonight's speaker **Robin Marlar** has spent a lifetime in cricket. Whether as a player for Cambridge University and Sussex, a journalist, an administrator for Sussex or President of MCC, he has been involved in the game for over 55 years. He contributed to the monumental Barclays World of Cricket, has written for Wisden and been the author of two books, 'The Story of Cricket' (pub. 1978) and 'Decisions against England' (pub. 1983). He is though, far from being one-dimensional, having taught at Eton College, been employed as a librarian at Arundel Castle, fought two parliamentary elections and formed his own management consultancy firm specialising in international recruitment.

**ROBIN GEOFFREY MARLAR** was born in Eastbourne on 2 January 1931. After attending King Edward School, Lichfield and Harrow, he went to Magdalene College, Cambridge. He was extremely successful as an off-spin bowler whilst at the University, taking 147 wickets as he gained a Blue in each of his three years there (1951 – 53). It was a golden age of university cricket. His Cambridge contemporaries included David Sheppard, Peter May, J.J. Warr, Raman Subba Row, Gerry Alexander, Cuan McCarthy and Dennis Silk. Among his opponents were Donald Carr, Colin Cowdrey and John Fellows-Smith. All, apart from Carr and Silk, played Test cricket though they both captained England 'A' sides. Our speaker was phenomenally successful in the University match taking 5 for 41 in 1951, 7 for 104 a year later and 5 for 94 and 7 for 49 in 1953. He regards the latter game as the most memorable in which he played. Despite the presence of such exulted names at Cambridge, he only finished on the winning side in 1953. The book 'Oxford and Cambridge Cricket' refers to his fine command of flight and spin and his competitive urge.

He took the latter instincts with him to Sussex, for whom he first played in 1952 and whom he captained from 1955 – 1959. He took the County to fourth place in his first season. He acquired a reputation for eccentricity – some writers claim his side followed him out of interest. However, Ted Dexter, in 'Gentlemen and Players, Conversations with Cricketers' commented "Those stories about Robin's eccentricity are greatly exaggerated. On occasions, we did not back him up as well as we should have done. I can remember at least one occasion when we threw a match away when Robin's instinct, quite rightly, was to deny the other side the points. And he was a fine bowler, you only have to look at his performances (for the Gentlemen) against the Players to see that. I certainly learnt from him when it came to my turn to captain the side ....."

Robin Marlar must have been preciously close to an England Test cap for much of the 1950's. He not only enjoyed himself playing at Lord's for Cambridge University but also for the Gentlemen in their annual fixture against the Players there – a fixture regarded for many years as one step removed from Test cricket. His quality is demonstrated by the fact that he was an ever-present in the Gentlemen side in this encounter from 1951 to 1958. He was never out of the wickets. He took 7 for 79 including the wickets of Cyril Washbrook, Tom Graveney, Dennis Compton in 1953,

and 6 for 47 a year later when his dismissals included Don Kenyon, Compton again and Jim Parks.

He took 740 wickets, average 24.21 in his Sussex career. In 1955 he took 9 for 46 (15 for 119 Match) against Lancashire at Hove. He had enjoyed match figures of 15 for 133 against Glamorgan at Swansea three years earlier. He was one of the game's natural number elevens but, against the 1956 Australians, he recorded a career best of 64.

He has made some of the most important contributions to his native County in their entire history. When they were incurring internal problems in 1968, he played in three matches as a member of the committee (just to see what was going on). Most crucially he was Chairman of the County in 1997 and 1998. He was part of a body which included Tony Pigott as Chief Executive and Director of Cricket, and which replaced the former Committee. Chris Adams joined the following season and the rest, as they say, is history.

In 'Class of '59' by Chris Westcott, he was quoted as saying that his most satisfying moment "was getting Ted Dexter to play for the County and then becoming captain. Everyone was after him at the time but I persuaded him that Brighton was the nearest place in England to Milan, where he was born!" He was also instrumental in Jim Parks becoming Sussex's wicketkeeper, ultimately to England's gain.

Our speaker became President of MCC last year. He has written for the Sunday Times for over fifty years. He penned his first piece in 1954, was their cricket correspondent from 1970 to 1996, and still writes the occasional piece. He also wrote for the Daily Telegraph from 1954 to 1960.

He has always held forthright and sometimes controversial views on how cricket should be played. He was in the vanguard of those who rebelled against the intervention of Kerry Packer thirty years ago. He has, by common consent, always retained the best interests of the game at heart. The Society is very privileged to host such a distinguished guest.

Robin Marlar's talk will be preceded by the Society's AGM.

## **7 February 2007 – Report**

The few members who braved the cold and forecast snow to listen to Stephen Chalke were treated to a delightful evening of reminiscence and cricket and social history. Our speaker, the most influential of current cricket authors and publishers, deserved a far larger audience as he spoke for nearly two hours, without notes. He kept his audience in thrall throughout as he recalled his interviews with county cricketers of the 1950s and 1960s. His first series of interviews culminated in *Runs In The Memory*. Nearly all of his interviewees, when asked to nominate their favourite and most memorable match, invariably chose one against Yorkshire. Another feature was that most of the matches concerned were played on outgrounds. He referred to enjoyable hours spent in the company of Ken Biddulph (Somerset) who started it all off when he arranged one-to-one coaching for him, Martin Horton of Worcestershire

and Arthur Milton, (Gloucestershire), England's last double football/cricket international. He averred that he had never met a man so at peace with the world as Milton. After retiring from the game, he became the village postman for twenty years and even now delivers newspapers. Ken Biddulph's recollections included reference to Roy Marshall. He, along with several other opening bowlers, feared bowling to the Hampshire batsman, as Marshall always attacked them from the start and therefore made it difficult for them to establish a rhythm. He also recalled Somerset's first victory over Yorkshire for 56 years in 1959. They won by 14 runs at Bath as a succession of batsmen, after forceful advice from Brian Close, attempted to sweep Brian Langford and paid the penalty. Biddulph was awarded his cap after the match. He also recalled Bertie Buse's benefit match against Lancashire at Bath six years earlier. It was completed in a day as the ball deviated mischievously off newly-laid turfs that had still not knitted together!

Our speaker mentioned that a common feature of the men he met was their respect for their fellow cricketers. They had all experienced deprivations of various kinds during the war and afterwards, which gave them a special bond. When he interviewed Dennis Brookes, who was part of the Northamptonshire scene for so many years, his subject recalled Geoff Edrich who scored 81 against Frank Tyson bowling at his fastest at Old Trafford in 1953. Brian Statham commented that his former England colleague never bowled faster than in that game, which was his first against the County who had rejected him. Edrich was a former Japanese Prisoner-of-War, whose weight fell to six stone and who arrived home to find his wife and son on a widow's pension. For the last seven years of his life, he suffered cancer of the throat, was never able to take solids, but refused to concede his hold on life. The evening was full of such stories.

Through such interviews he had obtained a unique grasp of social and cricket history, and the psychology of the game. He had obtained an outstanding understanding of cricket and cricketers.

He also recalled the inimitable Bomber Wells who spoke to him without a break for over seven hours at their first meeting, Ken Taylor of Yorkshire, gifted artist as well as a league footballer of high quality and an England batsman, and Brian Close. He ended a spellbinding evening recalling a recent meeting with Alan Rayment, formerly of Hampshire. The latter viewed all players through his eyes as a dancing instructor assessing their balance and movement. Rayment had enjoyed a varied and most interesting life, the details of which are only just coming to light. He has a story to tell and it is very probable that Hampshire supporters will hear more about him in the future.

(Editor's Note: Stephen Chalke wrote about Alan Rayment in the March edition of Wisden Cricketer)

### **JACK HOBBS and WALLY HAMMOND John Arlott Recollections**

At the February meeting Stephen Chalke commented that he had heard sufficient to be clear that England's greatest cricketer was Wally Hammond. However, because

Jack Hobbs was so universally popular and was a much more rounded and pleasant personality, he has usually taken precedence.

Stephen Chalke's comments reminded the Editor of two stories often told by John Arlott about the two men in relation to that very fine Gloucestershire bowler Charlie Parker. The latter was a destroyer of county batting line-ups. However, Hobbs felt that he could never respond to punishment and therefore he always looked to attack him and hit him over the top and down the ground early on. After a few boundaries he alleged that Parker always asked to be taken off.

As Hammond played for the same side, he obviously had to demonstrate his supremacy over Parker in a different manner. On one occasion after he had routed a county on a very poor wicket, the left-arm spin bowler was understandably reminding his team mates of his prowess. Hammond invited him to the middle where, on the same pitch, he played Parker with the edge of his bat, and middled everything.

Hampshire players of the 1970s alleged that Barry Richards sometimes adopted a similar approach in the nets.

## **WORLD CUP PREVIEW**

After all the woes of the preceding three months, England came to the party to win the Commonwealth Bank Series. It was a triumph of character and resilience. After being thoroughly outplayed, and it must be said, looking horribly abject on occasions, the turn around of form and fortune was a quite remarkable renaissance. The team played with confidence and spirit. Paul Collingwood was the unlikely talisman as he batted intelligently and resourcefully, fielded like a man possessed, catching brilliantly and running out batsmen as if second nature, and took vital wickets. Liam Plunkett, after spending weeks trailing around Australia off the field, gained a yard in pace in the meantime, and if wayward on occasions, produced a number of jaffers to dismiss the opposition top order batsmen.

The events in their final three matches must have given the Australians a huge wake-up call. Matthew Hayden, Adam Gilchrist and Glenn McGrath looked discernibly in decline; the injury to Andrew Symonds, who had only become a regular relatively recently, seemed to unbalance the side; he looks almost certain to miss the World Cup. In the past, Ricky Ponting could turn to McGrath or Shane Warne if events threatened to become uncontrollable. He now had no bowler to exert constraint. Australia's batting also looked unexpectedly threadbare once Ponting was dismissed. Their collective fragility was an eye opener and one can only speculate on the future course of events in the Ashes series had England not capitulated in such timid fashion on the final day of the second Test at Adelaide. The Australian juggernaut, once halted, seemed incapable of regaining momentum. The Australians decline continued, of course, in New Zealand.

So who will now win the World Cup? In mid-January, it seemed as if Australia were such clear favourites that the fortunes of all the other sides were only of academic interest. The tournament is no longer such a foregone conclusion. Any of the recognised Test-playing nations now have a realistic chance. The difference between

all these sides is now very marginal indeed. The side with the fewest injuries seems the one most likely to prevail. Only time will tell if England's selection of injury-prone players was a wise one. Recent instances on tour selection have shown that such gambles have been miscalculated. Successive Ashes tours have been bedevilled from the outset by overly optimistic risk assessment of the physical and other health of the squad. This year's World Cup will be the last great occasion for some of the finest players the world has seen. It is likely to be the final one-day hurrah for Sachin Tendulkar, Brian Lara, and that great cavalier, Sanath Jayasuriya. It will also give an opportunity for cricketers of promise to make their mark. Sri Lankans judge Chamara Silva in the same category as Aravinda de Silva. If this is the case, then they have unearthed a real gem who will give us all pleasure in the years ahead.

### **HAMPSHIRE BATSMEN AVERAGING MORE THAN SIXTY IN A SEASON**

John Crawley's average of 66.80 has only been bettered five times in Hampshire's history by a batsman *playing a full season*:-

	Year	Runs	Avge.
C.P. Mead	1928	2854	79.27
C.P. Mead	1927	2331	75.19
C.P. Mead	1912	1700	68.00
C.G. Greenidge	1986	2035	67.83
C.P. Mead	1933	2576	67.78
J.P. Crawley	2006	1737	66.80

Philip Mead and Gordon Greenidge are, with Crawley, the only batsmen to average more than 65 in a summer's play:-

C.P. Mead	1921	2671	66.71
C.G. Greenidge	1983	1438	65.36
C.P. Mead	1923	2406	65.02

Three other batsmen have averaged more than 60:-

<b>C.L. Smith</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>1553</b>	<b>64.70</b>
C.P. Mead	1919	1423	64.68
C.P. Mead	1922	2270	63.05
C.P. Mead	1926	2326	62.86
<b>B.A. Richards</b>	<b>1974</b>	<b>1297</b>	<b>61.76</b>
C.G. Greenidge	1977	1771	61.06
<b>S.M. Katich</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>1143</b>	<b>60.15</b>
<b>B.A. Richards</b>	<b>1975</b>	<b>1621</b>	<b>60.03</b>

These figures demonstrate that Philip Mead's consistency, given he played in an era of uncovered wickets, was truly amazing. He averaged more than 50 in every season from 1912 to 1923, again from 1926 to 1929 and then enjoyed Indian summers in 1933 and 1934. In the three summers of 1926 to 1928 he hit no fewer than 30 centuries. Remarkable statistics indeed.

Just for the record, four other batsmen averaged more than 60 in a summer, but played in less than a full season for the County for various reasons:-

R.M. Poore (Military duties)	1899	1449	101.07
C.B. Fry (Work commitments on TS Mercury)	1911	1348	70.94
R.A. Smith (England)	1900	941	62.73
K.D. James (Omitted from the side)	1987	620	62.00

The first three players appeared, of course, in Test cricket. The class of Charles Fry and Robin Smith was indisputable. Kevan James' appearance in the list confirms just how unlucky a cricketer he was, much of his career coinciding with the most powerful batting line-up in the County's history. Very few men can have averaged more than 60 over 17 matches (which would be a full season these days) but not be secure of their place.

### **David Allen's Book**

Members will be aware of David Allen's wonderfully evocative interviews with ex-Hampshire players in recent editions of the Hampshire Handbook. David has now written a history of the County from 1946 to 2006, which will draw heavily on all his interviews with Hampshire cricketers over that period. David hopes to launch his book at the Members' Meeting on 23 April. Its draft title is "Entertain or Perish". It will contain around a hundred photos. All profits from the book will go to Hampshire Heritage to support the displays at the Rose Bowl.

### **Hampshire return to Tunbridge Wells**

Hampshire will return to Tunbridge Wells for the first time since 1974 when they play against Kent in the ECB Trophy on Sunday 10 June.

©Copyright Alan Edwards 2007 (alcricketmad@hotmail.com)