

THE HAMPSHIRE CRICKET SOCIETY

Patrons: John Woodcock Frank Bailey Shaun Udal

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ANOTHER HISTORIC WINTER

Cricket has experienced another historic winter, dominated by off-field affairs which have detracted from events on the field of play. Stanford and Lahore were considered in the last Newsletter though the corollary to the latter was the transfer of the Indian Premier League (IPL) to South Africa as the Indian government could not guarantee the appropriate level of security because of state elections. It is surprising that England was even considered as the other alternative. Day/night games in April and early May would deter even the hardiest of souls. The IPL brand is now clearly in difficulty. Most backers lost money in 2008; they seem likely to incur higher losses this year. Whilst the rhetoric is that the IPL is a long-term venture, what is the threshold for the patience of the backers?

Another major issue has been the matter of referrals as a means of challenging umpiring decisions. The system has clearly not worked and it must be hoped that it will be abandoned, at least in its current form. Umpires, both on and off the field, have clearly been unclear on matters of interpretation. Some batsmen have selfishly invoked it in a futile attempt to preserve their wicket, to the detriment of the rest of their team. It has also held up play for an inordinate length of time on occasions.

Cricket followers in the UK will clearly be relishing the forthcoming Ashes series. It is difficult to be optimistic about an England victory. Their regression in the West Indies has been alarming. They have not won a Test all winter and their only two victories to date in an international have been decided by Duckworth-Lewis.

One benefit of the winter was that the England management seem to be inching away from the closed shop whereby the current incumbents were guaranteed their places, irrespective of form. This position is clearly unsustainable. The bowling in particular has looked as weak as at any time in England's Test history. Only the injury prone Andrew Flintoff is of Test match class. The wicket-keeping position is also problematical, though throughout the winter Matt Prior's technique and footwork with the bat were consistently better than that of all his colleagues. There is a compelling case for playing him solely as a batsman.

At the turn of the year, Australia appeared to be in decline. The new recruits for the South African tour, however, seemed to give the entire side a lift and in the first two Tests, as Johannesburg and Durban, they looked as formidable as at any time in the last decade. South Africa played, though, without the

intensity of the previous months in Australia but they then raised the level of their game to inflict a crushing defeat in the “dead” match at Newlands. So which is the real current Australia? In terms of playing against England, it probably does not matter. Their bowlers look more penetrative and they will score far more runs in the lower order than England. It is not inconceivable that they will play four pace bowlers in the Tests, with Marcus North and Michael Clarke infilling with spin.

The player of the winter was Mitchell Johnson. He is now a batsman to be reckoned with and in the process has become Australia’s first genuine Test-class all-rounder since Alan Davidson. Indeed, he may now be that country’s best since the great Keith Miller.

What of Hampshire’s fortunes in the summer? As usual, much will depend on the performances of the batsmen. Marcus North will be missed if Australia select him for the Ashes tour and withdraw him from his county commitments. The bowling would seem to be the strongest suit, particularly when Dimi Mascarenhas and Imran Tahir return. Much might depend on how often the former is away with the England side. If the County are able to pick up a couple of victories in the early season games then they will be genuine Championship contenders. However, Durham, reinforced by Ian Blackwell, and Lancashire, with Peter Moores now in harness, and Nottinghamshire will undoubtedly mount a serious challenge also. The battle for the Championship is therefore likely to be very tight again.

Finally, a cheer for the England Women’s Cricket team. Their form over the last two years was rewarded with a World Cup victory.

MEETINGS

Wednesday 8 April 2009 – Meeting

This evening’s speaker is **JOHN GRIMSLEY**, UK Representative for the Bradman Museum. He first became involved with the Museum, located in Bowral, as a volunteer. The Museum is a mecca for cricket fans all over the world and members will undoubtedly enjoy another interesting evening to conclude the winter programme.

Wednesday 11 March 2009 – Report

Those present at Test Valley Golf Club enjoyed yet another laughter-packed evening, this time in the company of Alan Haydock. It is difficult to remember a Society winter which has been so much fun. He began by mentioning that, as a member of the Nottinghamshire Committee, he has always been made welcome on his visits to the Rose Bowl. He described his league cricket career for the Hucknell Town and East Bridgford clubs, which, on his own volition, was mostly confined to 2nd XI cricket because of his professional duties.

He gave an informed account of cricket in the Annual Church Times Cup. His Southall Diocese reached the semi-finals on 12 occasions but invariably found

their route to the Final barred by the Liverpool Diocese, who were invariably managed by the then Bishop of Liverpool, the late David Sheppard, or the Oxford Diocese, for whom the leading light was the Reverend Andrew Wingfield-Digby. On the one occasion his team reached the final, which was played at Southgate, Wingfield-Digby scored a century to lead Oxford home by 5 wickets.

Our speaker then described his work as Chairman of both the Trent Bridge Taverners, and Community Development. He felt the latter was very rewarding as it made a useful contribution to the development of the game in the deprived areas of Nottingham and in the disadvantaged colliery areas. He also always made himself available to meet the ministering needs of staff and players employed by Nottinghamshire. He ended by saying that, as a Notts. County supporter, he was privileged to be able to wear, as an ordained minister, his team's colours morning, noon and night! That comment captured the tone of his address perfectly.

AGM NEWS

Susanne Marlow expressed the Society's heartfelt thanks for Brian Smith's contribution to the Society as Treasurer. Brian had also previously served the Society as Secretary for a while. Ken Blowe had kindly volunteered to take up the Treasurer's role for a maximum of one year.

Whilst all other existing officers were returned unopposed, both Susanne and Brian, in his valedictory presentation of the Society's accounts, reinforced the desirability, and indeed need, for members to nominate themselves to serve as Treasurer, as well as Committee members. Being a small organisation, neither is onerous. Volunteers are asked to contact David Fish (1 Abbott Close, Basingstoke RG22 6LA) or Susanne Marlow (telephone 01489 877200).

THE AUSTRALIANS FIRST APPEARANCE IN HAMPSHIRE IN 1880

The first appearance by an Australian side in Hampshire was that of the Aboriginal side in 1868. They played 47 matches on the tour, three of which were in the County. Two were played on the East Hants. Club Ground in Southsea, which was sold for housing in the 1880's, and the Antelope Ground in Southampton. These matches were described in Newsletter No. 107 - May 1988.

The latter ground was the venue for the debut of an official Australian touring party in Hampshire in 1880. This was the second such tour. The first was two years earlier, in 1878, when they played no matches in the County.

The decision to come to England in 1880 was not made until all the major fixtures for the season had been arranged. Therefore, when the tourists arrived in England on 3 May they became aware that only five County matches were on their fixture list, and two of those were against a Yorkshire team outside the control of the county committee. They had to resort to advertising for matches. Furthermore, there was much politicking in cricket circles about the tour in general. The English Authorities, and Lord Harris in particular, objected to the status of the Australians, whom they hypocritically regarded as professionals, and there was still much ill-feeling pervading after a serious riot in Sydney following a disputed run-out, when an English team, under the captaincy of Harris, played there in 1878-79. Indeed, two men were fined in the Sydney Courts for striking his Lordship and A.N. Hornby. The touring team were therefore largely unwelcome though a coup en route at Suez, when Harry Boyle was replaced as captain by the more affable, W.L. "Billy" Murdoch, was an important step in assuaging the English cricket hierarchy. Nevertheless, 26 of the 37 matches on the tour were non first-class matches played against teams of eighteen.

The first of these matches, and the first of the tour, was played against the St. Luke's Club at the Antelope Ground on 13 – 14 May in Southampton. The XVIII comprised of the best cricketers in Hampshire, strengthened by the addition of Gloucestershire's G.F. Grace - brother of W.G. (who barely seemed to have recognised Hampshire's existence throughout his long career) and W.R. Gilbert. After a practice match on Mitcham Green, where the giant G.J. – George – Bonnor, allegedly hit a ball some 135 metres into the far distance, the team made their way to Southampton on the Tuesday (11), before practising before a "great number of people on the following day". In glorious sunny weather, though the temperature was tempered by a cooling south-easterly breeze, the Australians won the toss and elected to bat on Thursday. The stonewaller, A.C. Bannerman, took the opening over but then fell in the next, caught at slip by Gilbert, for 3. Thereafter, the innings was dominated by Murdoch (97). He shared in partnerships of 61 for the third wicket with Percy McDonnell (38) and on 88 for the fifth with Boyle (50) before falling to a juggling catch in the outfield by the St. Luke's (and Hampshire) captain, Russell Bencraft, when attempting to reach his century with the score at 197. The local newspaper correspondent commented that the Australian captain, who had toured in 1878, "had improved both in style and hitting power". The field went out to Bonnor, whose exploit at Mitcham had obviously been made known to the opposition, but he responsibly farmed the tail, before he was last out for 20. The Australian innings was brought to a close on 250, at ten to five.

The newspaper report offered an invaluable description of the Australian fieldsmen and their positions when St. Luke's batted. Blackham (wk), Murdoch (point), Slight (mid-off), Boyle (short mid-on), Bannerman (cover point), Bonnor (long stop to Spofforth and long on to Palmer), Groube (draw and long off), McDonnell (long off and slip), Jarvis (long on and long slip), Spofforth (long leg), and Palmer (long slip).

St. Luke's reached 45 for 2 overnight. The second day was very hot and played before a "record crowd". Some 8000 people were alleged to have attended over the two days. They were to witness an outstanding bowling display by the great Fred Spofforth. "Joey" Palmer (3 for 37), Spofforth (9 – 45) and Boyle (5 – 26) first swept St. Luke's aside for 115. Only Fred Grace with 45 not out resisted their wiles for any length of time. Bencraft later recounted that, on the eve of the match, Spofforth, whilst dining with his father, bet him half a crown that he would bowl him out first ball. The "Demon Bowler" duly did so.

Spofforth (8 – 50) and Boyle (9 – 38) then carried all before them in the second innings. Only three men – Grace (46), Gilbert (20) and Henley (13) - reached double figures in a total of 113. Bencraft made 4 before falling to Boyle. The tourists thus gained an overwhelming victory by an innings and 22 runs.

The match had been scheduled for three days but was over in two. A one-day game was muted for the Saturday but the tourists returned to London upon the conclusion of Friday's play.

The encounter had given early notice of the tourists' strength and also confirmed the paucity of the quality of Hampshire's cricket at the time. Though Australia were to appear in the County on 5 of their ensuing six visits, it was not until 1896 that they played Hampshire for the first time.

The meeting of Fred Grace and Billy Murdoch at Southampton during the match was to lay the foundations of an historic event later on the tour. The latter's geniality was to make a profound impression on the Grace family. Grace was sympathetic to the Australians, and with the aid of Murdoch and C.W. Alcock, the Surrey secretary, the still brooding Harris was won over with a proposal to stage the first Test on English soil at The Oval towards the end of the tour. W.G. celebrated the event by making 152 in England's five wicket victory. However, Murdoch, who bet Grace he could top his score, kept his hosts at bay for a long period in scoring 153. It was the first of the countless occasions when an Aussie would upstage England. Sadly, Fred Grace was to die, from congestion of the lungs, allegedly as a result of sleeping in a damp bed at The Red Lion Hotel, Basingstoke, only two weeks after that match.

The photograph above of the 1880 Australian team is included in many cricket books. The team in striped blazers is that which appeared at the Antelope Ground. There is every reason to believe that it was taken at the start of the tour at the ground, and it may well be, as far as the editor is aware, the only known photograph of Hampshire's first County ground.

(L to R) Standing, G.E. Palmer, W.H. Moule, G.J. Bonnor, G. Alexander (Manager), T. Groube. Seated, F.R. Spofforth, H. Boyle, W. L. Murdoch (Captain), P.S. McDonnell, A.C. Bannerman. Front, A.H. Jarvis, J. Slight, J.M. Blackham.

BOOK REVIEW

Life beyond The Airing Cupboard by John Barclay (pub. Fairfield Books – price £15).

It is impossible to review this book without mentioning Marcus Trescothick's powerful autobiography ('Coming Back To Me'). When John Barclay spoke to the Society in October 2007, he entitled his address Life Beyond The Airing Cupboard. This publication is therefore an expanded version of his talk, save for one important aspect which propels the book into the exceptional category. What John Barclay did not mention that evening was his almost lifelong battle against depression. He has a personality that automatically draws people to him and one can only marvel that he has given so much to so many people. His description of the condition is more elegant and subtler than that in Trescothick's autobiography (oh how England have missed the latter) but the impact on the reader is probably even greater. If the book had been published earlier in the last 12 months it would probably have won the William Hill Sports Book of the Year Award instead. It is highly recommended. This is not to decry, however, Trescothick's book - both are very important in understanding the pressures and psychology of a singular sport. In the latter book, Duncan Fletcher makes mention of a number of men (without naming them) who suddenly and seemingly inexplicably left the game and who he assumed, once he became aware of the Somerset opener's plight, must have been suffering from depression.

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