

Patrons: John Woodcock Frank Bailey Shaun Udal

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Wednesday 19 September 2012 – Meeting

The Society is very pleased to welcome **NIGEL GRAY** to this evening's meeting. Nigel is, of course, enjoying a well-earned testimonial this year. This is his third appearance at a Society meeting, the previous two being April 1995 and then the same month in 2004.

Nigel was born in Leicester but left there at the age of seven for Southampton, where he has lived ever since. After school at Richard Taunton College in Southampton, he gained an honours degree in geography at Keele University. After leaving Keele he returned to Southampton, working on sports ground maintenance for the local education authority. He became particularly involved with cricket grounds and was eventually specifically assigned to his old school, which included the preparation of pitches for Old Tauntonians in the Southern League. Sadly, that cosy, enclosed ground was subsequently sold for development.

He came to the County Ground at Southampton at the start of the 1989 season, spending two years as assistant to Tom Flintoft. After the latter's departure to Durham, the County had no hesitation in appointing Nigel as Head Groundsman.

He has of course been Head Groundsman at Hampshire's Rose Bowl, now Ageas Bowl, since the County moved there in 2001. It has been a challenging time as the wicket took time to bed down and then became a featherbed on which it was difficult to achieve a result. Latterly, Nigel has also had to contend with much higher than average rainfalls, which has made a groundsman's task virtually 24/7.

It has also been a rewarding period in that the Ageas Bowl has staged 18 international matches (one Test, 15 ODIs and 2 T20s), as well as four women's internationals (two ODIs and two T20s) and two memorable T20 finals days. The wicket for the test between England and Sri Lanka in June 2011 received universal acclaim. It should also be remembered that he prepared two wickets for the 1999 World Cup at Northlands Road. Nigel has much of which to be proud.

HAMPSHIRE'S TWENTY20 AND CB 40 TRIUMPHS

The morning after Hampshire's thrilling CB40 Final win at Lord's. A time to try and put that victory, and the earlier Twenty20 triumph at Cardiff into some sort of context. The editor's conclusion is that to have won both competitions was a quite exceptional achievement. Throughout the final stages of both campaigns, Richard Nyren's statement that "do not bet against such men as we are" kept reverberating around the brain. The great Hambledon captain would surely have been impressed with the efforts of his 21st century successors.

Both titles were gained out of adversity. At virtually no stage were Hampshire expected by the pundits to win. At the start of their T20 campaign they obtained only one point from their first three matches. Thirty percent of the group stage had been completed. Any thoughts of a third consecutive appearance on finals day seemed far fetched. They could not afford to lose another match. They did not do so. On three occasions, at Tunbridge Wells, Richmond and Chelmsford, Hampshire came from behind to win after being in an extremely precarious position.

When pitched against Nottinghamshire in the quarter-finals at Trent Bridge, the home side were flying at the time. Notts had easily defeated Hampshire in a CB40 encounter a week earlier. It was the County's first defeat in that competition. As was to happen for the rest of the tournament, the opposing side started as favourites. And yet, thanks to a genius-laden innings of 76 not out by Neil McKenzie, Hampshire emerged victorious from a match which Notts always seemed to have their noses just in front. McKenzie's knock demonstrated that Twenty20 cricket can produce memorable moments to stand comparison with the longer formats of the game.

And so to finals day. Hampshire, were without the exciting, red-shoed Australian, Glenn Maxwell, whose blitzkriegs at Tunbridge Wells (66 not out off 32 balls) and Chelmsford (an even more ferocious 60 not out off 24 balls) had thundered the County to victory. He had also shown he was a more than useful off-spin bowler. Those performances had propelled him into the Australian ODI squad in the UAE. Hampshire, despite their appearances at finals day in the two previous years, were clear underdogs, especially as they had been drawn against Somerset, with Marcus Trescothick back in harness, in the semi-final. Of the Sky commentating team, only non-cricketer Charles Colville predicted they would go on to win the competition.

The County's two previous matches against Somerset had produced the tightest finishes possible, one in favour of Hampshire in the Final at the Rose Bowl two years ago, and then victory for their opponents in the "Super Over" in the semi-final at Edgbaston last summer. This year's encounter bore an uncanny resemblance at times to 2010, with the performances in this season's group stages added to the mix. Good bowling by Mascarenhas, Ervine and Danny Briggs held the much vaunted Somerset strokeplayers in check. They lost wickets at regular intervals. As in 2010, Craig Kieswetter was unable to play his natural destructive game and he was on only 63 at the end of the innings at 124 for six. The Somerset innings would have been in a sorry mess without him.

Hampshire, though, conspired to dig themselves a hole as they subsided from 33 for nought to 72 for four. However, mature batting by the two experienced left-handers, Katich (32) and Ervine (34), ensured that, on this occasion, the result was more clear cut, as they steered their side home without any further alarms with an over to spare.

In the other semi-final, Yorkshire, somewhat surprisingly, accounted for Sussex, who had cruised to finals day. The Sky team now thought the former were favourites.

Hampshire had turned the run chase into an art form during their progress and so it was a new challenge for them to bat first. The only other occasion they had done so was in their defeat at the hands of Middlesex in their first completed match of the season at the Ageas Bowl. Cameos by Adams (43), James Vince (36), Ervine (25) and Katich (21) enabled Hampshire to post 150 for six, a competitive total at the SWALEC. Canny bowling changes by Dimi Mascarenhas kept the Yorkshire batting on its toes and held them in check throughout, except for the South African David Miller. He launched a furious assault on Ervine in particular. With only two overs remaining, and with Miller irresistible, the Hampshire captain entrusted the penultimate over to Danny Briggs, with Yorkshire requiring only 21. However, he bowled quite nervelessly – conceding only six. Fourteen were now needed. Mascarenhas now threw the ball to Chris Wood. He induced Tim Bresnan to sky to Ervine at cover off the first ball. He then bowled three yorkers to Miller and Richard Pyrah. 11 were required off the last two balls. Wood duly castled Pyrah off another yorker and had Rafiq caught off the final ball (again by Ervine) at extra cover. Hampshire had won the match by ten runs. Man of the match, Miller, was left undefeated on a day's best of 72 off 46 balls.

Hampshire fully deserved their victory. All the team chipped in with telling contributions at some stage during the day, but the ultimate accolade must be awarded to the captain, Dimitri Mascarenhas. He was positive and decisive throughout. It was evident that he commanded the total respect of his players. It later emerged he played with a damaged shoulder and was unlikely to appear again during the season. At that stage, Hampshire had reached the semi-finals of the CB40 competition. Their strength had therefore already been denuded.

Unlike the Twenty20 campaign, Hampshire's position for qualification to the semi-final of the CB40 always looked optimistic. They started by beating Glamorgan at home, and then accounted for Scotland away. Crucially, they then inflicted a nine wicket defeat of Somerset at Taunton, where Michael Carberry recorded a marvellous 103 not out. He was ably assisted by both Jimmy Adams (56) and James Vince (44 not out). Carberry then went on to strike a career-best 148 not out in the return against Scotland at the Ageas Bowl. He was already laying down a marker of what was to follow. Though Hampshire lost to Notts, as has already been mentioned, and Somerset at home, they qualified for the semi-finals by virtue of being the best runners up in the three groups.

They were drawn against Sussex at Hove. They were again not expected to win. Their opponents were able to play both Luke Wright and Matt Prior, whose form in recent years against the County at the ground was daunting. Hampshire were without both Mascarenhas, and the influential McKenzie.

When Sussex raced to 159 for 1 in the 28th over, with Prior and Wright in full cry, it looked as if Hampshire were going to chase a formidable total. However, a spectacular collapse then ensued and though Wright went on to score a fulminating 122, Sussex were restricted to 219 for eight.

For those who watched Hampshire in the 1970s, Barry Richards and Gordon Greenidge epitomised the destructive opening partnership. Though the County's opening batsmen since that period have broken a number of records, none ever dismantled an attack like those two peerless icons. Until 1 September 2012 at Hove. Michael Carberry and James Vince launched the most withering assault on a bowling attack by a Hampshire opening partnership that the writer of this piece can ever recall. The former virtually dealt only in boundaries as he raced to 50 (four sixes and six fours) off just 24 balls. His sixes were all mighty drives over mid on. He also drove powerfully through the covers and hit savagely to the cover point boundary. Vince unleashed a series of beautiful cover drives on the up, and finessed the ball to the mid wicket boundary. 95 were scored off the first 10 overs. Carberry cleared the ropes again before being dismissed, fittingly caught on the mid-on boundary, having scored 68 off 35 balls. The partnership had realised 129 off only 76 balls. Vince was out soon after for 58 off 43 balls. Hampshire now required just over three runs an over to win. Jimmy Adams (44 not out) and Simon Katich (47 not out) proceeded to take Hampshire to an eight wicket victory with little fuss. They first nudged and nurdled before opening up. Katich cover drove the boundary that secured a famous win with seven overs in hand. It really was a quite sensational victory.

For the final, Hampshire were now without Danny Briggs, who was with the England T20 squad in Sri Lanka, though they had flown McKenzie back from South Africa for the occasion. Warwickshire, though, were clear favourites. They had been crowned County Champions. Ian Bell, another with an outstanding recent record against Hampshire, was available to play. Of the six pundits in the Sky commentary box, only Michael Atherton thought Hampshire would win.

When Neil Carter hit the penultimate ball from Kabir Ali to the extra cover boundary to level the scores, a Warwickshire victory seemed inevitable. However, Ali, whose Hampshire career has been a tortured one, then bowled a low full toss which Carter missed. Michael Bates, brilliant all day, snaffled the ball but just to make sure that a run was not stolen, both whipped off the bails and then with Carter now out of his ground lifted a stump out with the ball in his hand. Hampshire had won their sixth Lord's final (out of seven attempts) by virtue of losing fewer wickets. The Hampshire section of the crowd (and those watching at home on Sky, or listening to Radio Solent) went into raptures.

Hampshire had played outstandingly throughout. Batting after losing the toss, Michael Carberry and James Vince seemed to be on the verge of giving a reprise of their Hove fireworks before the latter found Patel on the mid-wicket boundary. However, they had added 48 off 41 balls. Carberry (35 off 31 balls) had launched two sixes over mid-on, as well as a fierce straight driven

boundary. After he perished at 70, the innings lost momentum whilst Neil McKenzie never quite found his form. In the meantime, captain Jimmy Adams, batting at three, was working the ball intelligently around the field. It was a largely unobtrusive innings and yet he reached 51 off the same number of balls, shortly after McKenzie was bowled by Ian Blackwell. He eventually made a polished 66, thus emulating his boyhood hero Robin Smith as the only Hampshire men to score two fifties in Lord's Finals. He was later surpassed by Sean Ervine, whose 57 was coupled with his commanding century against the same opposition in 2005. Making light of the rough outside the off stump, he played aggressively after a quiet start. Upon his skipper's dismissal, he was joined by Simon Katich who scored a streetwise and delightful 35 not out. Ervine's dismissal off the last ball of the penultimate over probably deprived Hampshire of a few runs and they finished on 244 for 5. The four left-handers had delivered a collective batting masterclass.

In their reply, Hampshire found the happy knack of taking wickets at crucial moments. Warwickshire retained wickets in hand but with five overs remaining they still required another 52 runs. Bell (81), somewhat fortuitously on occasions, provided his side with much needed acceleration but when he struck a full toss from David Griffiths to the remarkable Carberry, whose speed over the ground and retrieval was on a different level to any other man on the day, it seemed as if Hampshire now held the advantage. However, Warwickshire's batting is long as numbers 6 – 10 were Rikki Clarke, Chris Woakes, Ian Blackwell and Carter. Thanks to some shrewd blows by the hugely talented Woakes off Chris Wood's final over, seven were required off the last over. However, by now, Warwickshire had lost six wickets and lost a seventh when Kabir Ali clean bowled Blackwell with his second ball of his last over. His last ball will undoubtedly earn him a permanent niche in the County's history.

Chris Wood had earlier demonstrated his temperament and growing ability with figures of three for 39. Liam Dawson and Sean Ervine had also bowled economically, particularly in the middle overs.

Jimmy Adams won the Man of the Match for his batting, two catches and, above all, his captaincy. He held his nerve wonderfully in those last five overs when Warwickshire made their victory dash.

HAMPSHIRE TENTH WICKET PARTNERSHIPS (2)

Members will be aware that, in the wake of two noteworthy tenth wicket partnerships this summer, the Summer Newsletter majored on the subject. Within four days of that Newsletter being posted, Chris Wood and David Balcombe featured in an extraordinary last wicket stand at Grace Road, Leicester. In a match in which their colleagues had struggled with the bat throughout, they put on 168 in Hampshire's second innings, the second highest ever recorded for the County. It was also the longest partnership of the match. After being set 440 to win, Hampshire lost wickets at regular intervals on the third evening and final morning. The ninth wicket fell on 146. The pair obviously thought that they had nothing to lose. They played their shots and succeeded spectacularly. Wood struck his maiden century, scoring

105 not out off 88 balls. He raced to 50 off 37 balls and reached his hundred off 80, hitting two sixes and 15 fours along the way. Balcombe, dropped at slip on six, moved to a career best 73 off 70 balls (two sixes and nine fours) before being bowled by Nathan Buck. The partnership was completed off only 136 balls, a rate of over seven an over, similar to what might be expected in a Twenty20 match.

STRAUSS/PIETERSEN/AML/ALEPPO

Andrew Strauss' resignation was rightly greeted with almost universal regret. He has always behaved with immense dignity and the manner of his resignation was in the same vein. He wrote a letter to all the England team informing them of his decision. He played 100 tests (he deserved better than to have to deal with the distraction of Pietersen in his last on his home ground at Lord's), captained his country on 50 occasions (a number exceeded only by Michael Atherton (54) and Michael Vaughan (51)), of which 24 were won. He will always be remembered, of course, for captaining England to victory in two Ashes series in 2009 and 2010/2011. As a batsman, he scored 21 Test centuries, one fewer than Wally Hammond, Colin Cowdrey and Geoffrey Boycott. Andrew Strauss was a very fine leader of men. Sometimes, perhaps, he could have been a little more imaginative as captain, but despite his always personable demeanour, he played the game hard and knew the value of percentages. He was a considerable batsman of whom we shall recall his positive and fearless shots either side of the wicket when the ball was pitched short. When he was in form, he cover drove sublimely. English, indeed world cricket, will be the poorer for his absence.

Those of us who were fortunate enough to secure tickets in the ballot for the Olympic Stadium enjoyed the most uplifting sporting experience of our lives. The superbly landscaped and designed Olympic Park resembled a multi-national, multi-cultural street party of 200,000, with everybody smiling and exuding goodwill, the event being enhanced by those wonderful volunteers. The Olympics captured the imagination of the nation. All other news stories, apart from Syria, disappeared from our consciousness. Kevin Pietersen chose the moment to fly his kite. Says it all really. Few cared or even knew. His whole approach is the antithesis of those Olympians whose stories of sacrifice, selfless courage and fortitude filled our screens for those magical three weeks. The reaction of the crowd following his first ball dismissal by Liam Dawson in the CB 40 at the Ageas Bowl was particularly informative.

Those present at the Ageas Bowl for the ODI between England and South Africa were privileged to watch a fine innings of 150 by Hashim Amla, an Ageas Bowl ODI record. The first half was fretful, watchful, filled with ungainly strokes. However, the second was blessed with genius as he adeptly stroked the ball into the gaps. He rightfully received a standing ovation.

Spare a thought for Aleppo, the city which has suffered so much from the internecine strife in Syria. It was the location for the first reference to cricket abroad, played by British residents in 1676.