

# **THE HAMPSHIRE CRICKET SOCIETY**

**Patrons:** John Woodcock Frank Bailey Shaun Udal

## **NEWSLETTER NO. 322 – DECEMBER 2012**

### **Wednesday 5 December 2012 – Meeting**

The Society is delighted to welcome John Woodcock to this evening's meeting. With John Arlott and Desmond Eagar, he was one of the Society's original patrons upon its foundation towards the end of 1975. He makes a return visit for the annual dinner which he attended whenever he was able to do so in the Society's formative years. He has addressed the Society twice previously. The first occasion was at our third meeting on 3 March 1976, when he talked about the West Indies' tour of Australia, from where he had just returned. Australia won 4-1 and he concluded that, as through history, the Test series was won by fast bowlers demolishing opposing batsmen. The West Indies captain, Clive Lloyd, took on board the lesson by subsequently playing a quartet of genuinely quick bowlers to create the most feared side in Test history. The West Indies never lost another series for almost twenty years.

John came to the Society to speak again on 4 March 1987 in the first meeting to be held in Portsmouth. It was at a rather noisy Mountbatten Centre, which if the editor remembers correctly was playing host to a National League basketball match that evening. In spite of the hubbub, members enjoyed a diverting discourse on another recently concluded tour to Australia, this time by England. England famously won the series 3-1 but Australia subsequently began a long period of dominance over the old country that lasted until 2005. Our patron's two previous appearances have therefore coincided with historic watersheds in the game. The report in the Newsletter contained the following: "he paused to recall, nostalgically, earlier tours to the Antipodes which were...more leisurely and less frenzied affairs. Times have changed....but he acknowledged....great empathy with the stresses and strains suffered by players in the modern game. The main factor was the surfeit of limited overs matches". Not much change, therefore, in the last 25 years! Indeed T20 matches have made tours even more hectic nowadays.

John Woodcock was always supportive of cricketers and cricket teams in his reports in The Times. He earned their trust. He always sought the positive in their personality and play. Any criticism was expressed sensitively. That very fine writer, Frank Keating, echoed these observations when he wrote about him on his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. On his relationship with colleagues in the press box, Keating remarked: "...his sweet essence....has continued to bestow on the press box his judgments, acute insights, wise innocence, benign bonhomie and a fraternal feeling and time for tyros".

Such was his wisdom that the polymath Alan Gibson dubbed him "The Sage of Longparish". It was a sobriquet that endures to this day.

JOHN CHARLES WOODCOCK was born in Longparish in the Test Valley on 7 August 1926. His father was a vicar there and John still lives in the village, opposite the church. When the editor and his wife visited the church some 18 months ago, we noted that he continues to be active in the church's affairs. He went to Trinity College, Oxford, where he won hockey blues in 1946 and 1947. As a wicket-keeper/batsman he played good class club cricket for MCC, Free Foresters, Oxford University Authentics, the Cypatics and the Arabs, among others. He has also kept a watchful eye on his local village club.

After a spell in teaching in Basingstoke, he started his journalism career as a newsreel camera man for the BBC, and as assistant to EW Swanton, on England's tour of Australia in 1950/51. He then worked for the Manchester Guardian for two years before becoming cricket correspondent of The Times in 1954. He held that post until his retirement in 1988. It is possible that, apart from Richie Benaud, he has watched more Test matches than any other man today. He saw his first Test at Lord's in the mid-thirties. He was also editor of Wisden Cricketers' Almanack for six years from 1981 to 1986. Thankfully, he continued to write some wonderfully nostalgic and historical pieces for The Times until quite recently (the editor has kept many in scrapbooks).

He was also President of the Cricket Writers' Club from 1986 until 2004. He was made an OBE in the 1996 New Years' Honours List for his services to sports journalism.

It is a pity that his work is mainly buried in newspaper and magazine archives, and in various anthologies, though he has written Forewords to recent books on his former colleague Alan Gibson and the South African Clive Van Ryneveld. He did, though, write *The Times One Hundred Greatest Cricketers* (pub. Macmillan 1998). He demonstrated the depth of his knowledge on the sweep of cricket history by including John Small, the celebrated 18<sup>th</sup> century Hambledon batsman, and the giant Kent all-rounder, Alfred Mynn, of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

He also contributed to the monumental *Barclays World of Cricket*. He was Consultant Editor, and wrote some of the biographies, a lengthy history of Hampshire and some of the chapter on Grounds of the World.

He has been a long-time Hampshire supporter and, indeed, is a Vice-President of the club.

The Society is very fortunate that John is able to join us for tonight's Annual Dinner.