

# THE HAMPSHIRE CRICKET SOCIETY

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

**NEWSLETTER No. 343 – MARCH (1) 2015**

## MEETINGS

### **Wednesday 4 March 2015 – Meeting**

This evening's speaker is a distinguished figure indeed. **RONALD ALLISON** will be describing his life as a broadcaster with the BBC and their Court Correspondent, before becoming the Queen's Press Secretary.

### **Thursday 4 December 2014 – Report**

Dennis Amiss recalled his career with many stories of those players whom he played with and against. He was one of two men on the England side to run out Geoffrey Boycott in test matches. The Yorkshireman still reminds him of the fact every time they meet. The other man was Ian Botham and our speaker recalled him once bowling the first ball after the lunch interval at Taunton with a bar of soap! He thought that Gary Sobers was as fast as Wesley Hall when he chose to open the bowling. Given the death of Phillip Hughes a few days earlier, he spoke about helmets. He was the first English batsman to wear one, taking the field in World Series Cricket in 1977/78 in a motor cycle helmet. Whilst it provided head protection, the batsman couldn't hear! The design of helmets had now culminated in a British Standard. There were also stories of Derek Randall in the Centenary Test at Melbourne in 1978 and Alan Knott. Prior to his talk, the gathering stood in silence in memory of Phillip Hughes.

After Dennis Amiss' address, the Society enjoyed the Annual Dinner where there was a buzz of laughter and conversation as old acquaintances were renewed, and new ones developed. It was a most memorable evening. At the end, our Chairman, Susanne Marlow, thanked the Ageas Bowl staff for all their work and support.

### **Wednesday 7 January 2015 – Report**

A good-sized audience enjoyed an enthralling evening in the company of former England and Warwickshire captain, Mike Smith, and his biographer, Douglas Miller. The latter was instrumental in Mike Smith becoming President of the Association of Cricket Statisticians and Historians and, with his approval, started the acclaimed *Lives in Cricket* series. He then handed the reins to Mike Smith.

The latter recalled his early cricket at Stamford School, Lincolnshire, where his captain was Colin Dexter, author of the Inspector Morse books. He endured a torrid introduction to county cricket with Leicestershire; he was twice dismissed without scoring in his first three matches. He then embarked on a discursive miscellany on little known facts about famous players. There were those who were turned down by counties before making their names elsewhere. It was evidently galling to him that Warwickshire turned down Wilfred Rhodes and Hedley Verity. He also recalled they let "Butch" White, who "was keen as mustard", elude their grasp. Warwickshire also had first refusal on Glenn Turner and Kevin Pietersen. Frank Tyson, the quickest

bowler he ever faced, was not signed by Lancashire because they felt he wasn't strong enough; the same county let Norman Gifford slip away. Another example was Jack Hobbs, whom Essex turned down.

Then there were the notable players who started life as medium-pacers but then became off-spin bowlers: Roy Tattersall, Bob Appleyard, Fred Titmus, Don Shepherd and Eddie Hemmings.

There were also three men who converted to wicket-keepers. Arthur McIntyre was originally an off-spin bowler; Jim Parks was a batsman who bowled leg-breaks. Geoff Humpage rarely kept wicket before making the Warwickshire side.

He then commented on how luck played a part in his career. National Service was like an Academy as there were many other current or future county cricketers playing in the Services. He remembered that when he made his 200 not out in the Varsity match in 1954, he was dropped off an easy chance when on nought. He also recollected his son, Neil, was originally turned down by Warwickshire. He subsequently accepted an offer to play for MCC Youth Professionals before playing one match, very successfully, for Sussex 2nd XI. Warwickshire then showed further interest. It was astonishing that some of his county's committee thought that Allan Donald should be released. He also recalled Brian Lara joining Warwickshire. Manoj Prabhakar was their original choice as overseas player, but he dropped out very late in the close season. They signed Lara instead. He went on to score seven centuries in his first eight matches including a world record 500 not out. People queued around the ground to become members. In that season, 1994, Warwickshire enjoyed the most successful season ever by a county, winning all competitions except the Nat West Trophy where the loss of the toss was crucial.

He reminisced that he never took a catch off Lance Gibbs and, even now, could not understand why. The West Indian bowled wide of the crease, was a big spinner of the ball, and obtained bounce. All those assets should have resulted in a bonanza for short-leg, where Smith invariably fielded, but it proved not to be the case.

### **Wednesday 4 February 2015 – Meeting**

Anthony Gibson splendidly entertained members by reading extracts of his father's work published in *Of Didcot and the Demon* and a merry jaunt in the idiosyncratic world of Wandering Club cricket.

In his foreword of the above mentioned book, our Patron John Woodcock mentioned that Alan Gibson always wrote about a day at the cricket rather than about the cricket itself. Hence, members were regaled with a story about a stunning catch at deep wicket by a pretty eight year old girl, wearing a flowered frock, whilst Hampshire were playing at May's Bounty against Glamorgan in 1975. She was playing, though, in the adjoining field in the Fairfields junior school inter-house Rounders competition. There were also stories about Bill Sheppard and John Arlott, as well as sundowners and retired admirals commenting on cricket at Portsmouth, one of whose number recalled a flogging from a whisky fuelled headmaster.

Stories from the Wandering Clubs drawn from his book *Gentlemen, Gypsies and Jesters* were no less amusing. The Gentlemen were the long-standing historic clubs such as I Zingari (the first of them all, founded in 1845) and Band of Brothers. The Gypsies were such as Hampshire Hogs (who used to be a wandering club but have had their own ground at Warnford since 1966). The Jesters included three clubs featured in recent best selling books: Captain Scott Invitation XI, Michael Simkins' Harry Baldwin Occasionals and Marcus Berkmann's Rainmen.

Wandering cricket was originally a rather exclusive, snobbish affair for the upper classes, many of whom attended the well established public schools and Oxbridge. Nowadays it is more a middle-class activity. Nevertheless, Wandering Clubs are an important traditional thread of the fabric of English cricket, particularly in southern England. It is a brand of cricket outside of the leagues where cricket is played with a smile on the face and the result is not that important. Clubs have come and gone; those who have survived have moved with the times. Originally all matches were "declaration" cricket but limited overs matches are now more commonplace. Some games are still played over two days. They always play at attractive grounds and some clubs at the more favoured venues, especially in Devon (eg Valley of the Rocks, Sidmouth and Instow) have the unenviable task of trying to field teams for many days in the school summer holidays.

One match featuring the Stoics changed the laws of cricket. There was no provision for declarations but when Hampstead ran up 815 on one afternoon in 1886, with future England captain, Andrew Stoddart, scoring 485 after being awake the entire previous night playing poker, it was evident that the law needed to be changed. It was duly amended three years later. Other tasty morsels of information were that the records of the Band of Brothers weigh several hundredweight (comprising scorebooks, reports, menus and similar ephemera), that the Icognitis are renowned for outrageous nicknames (past ones have included Crusher, Tossport and Jabberwocky) and that a match played by the Invalids formed the framework for that splendid evocation of Arcadian cricket: the game described by AG Macdonell in "England, Their England".

All proceeds from *Gentlemen, Gypsies and Jesters* have gone to the Chance to Shine Initiative, which has raised £45,000. The programme has raised the number of state schools playing cricket from below 10% to 30%. Anthony Gibson arrived at the meeting with the last seven copies of the book, all of which were sold after his address.

## **HARRY ALTHAM**

This month marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of one of cricket's great polymaths, Harry Altham. He died from a heart attack, aged 76, on 11 March 1965, shortly after addressing the Sheffield Cricket Lovers' Society. He spent his working life as a master and cricket coach at Winchester College. Though he played for Surrey in 1912, he became an integral part of the Hampshire cricket landscape as a player and then guiding hand behind the scenes thereafter. Moreover, he was a coach, a distinguished historian and an author, test selector and cricket legislator. For good measure, he was an authority on his beloved Winchester Cathedral, within

whose shadow he lived much of his life. There is a plaque to his memory on the floor at the entrance to Bishop Langton's Chantry Chapel at the rear of the building.

Harry Altham was known for his wonderful oratory powers. The Editor has spoken to many people who attended Hampshire's AGM just to listen to his Presidential address. Though the scope was historical, such was his love and knowledge of the Hambledon era and its players, his talk rarely progressed to later years in the allotted time. But people would come to listen time and again.

**HARRY SURTEES ALTHAM** was born in Camberley on 30 November 1888, the son of a distinguished soldier. He went to Repton School in 1902 and played in the XI for four years and was captain in 1907 and 1908. It has been said that the team in his last year was the best school side ever; it comprised four future county cricketers and two others who declined invitation to play county cricket. He gained his Blue at Oxford in 1911 and 1912. A contemporary alleged he was a "made" player rather than a natural one, his technique being honed on assiduous study of CB Fry's treatise on batsmanship. In a conversation with John Arlott, Altham, who was right-handed, commented that he was essentially a forcing player but his defence was suspect. His glory was the off-drive and he modestly thought he never learnt to play on the onside until after he left the first-class arena. He was renowned for his innate enthusiasm, and was a brilliant fielder at cover point.

In 1913 he began his teaching career at Winchester College. He served with bravery and distinction in the First World War. He was in France for four years and finished as a Major having been Mentioned in Despatches three times and awarded the DSO and MC.

On his return, he resumed his Winchester College duties and made up for lost time regarding his cricket career. Between 1919 and 1923, he played 24 times for Hampshire during the school holidays. It was never a case of him being selected by virtue of being an amateur. He was an automatic choice when he was available. He was aged 30 by the end of the war and, like many others whose career was lost to the conflict, he was past his prime. His figures of 713 runs (@ 22.28), were unexceptional, but they included a quite outstanding century in Frank Woolley's benefit match at Canterbury in 1921. The game started in bizarre circumstances. At the start of the first day's play, on Saturday, several of the Hampshire side had still to arrive. Lionel Tennyson had won the toss and, as his side was still depleted, he had no alternative but to bat. One of the late arrivals was Philip Mead who eventually came in at seven in the order. Undoubtedly, in normal circumstances, Tennyson would have chosen to bowl as there had been several hours of rain on the Friday and the pitch was still drying out. Predictably, Hampshire were hustled out for only 68 in 90 minutes by the two spin bowlers, Woolley (six for 28) and "Tich" Freeman (four for 18). Five Hampshire batsmen were dismissed without scoring, including Altham and Mead. Kent then eased their way to 316 for nine by close of play. They declared immediately on Monday morning. Virtually, all the Hampshire batsmen made a start but only Alec Kennedy (86), who opened the batting, and Altham stayed long. He recorded a faultless 141 in three and a half hours; he hit twenty fours. Many onlookers later recounted that it was one of the best innings ever played at Canterbury at that time, and especially remembered his off driving, and his chipping the ball over the infield for two or three runs. Hampshire were dismissed for

351, but Kent strolled to an eight wicket win. In the previous match, he had scored 58 against Gloucestershire, adding 80 in 45 minutes with Alec Hosie. Though he nearly always batted usefully, he never touched those heights again. His only other half century was a meritorious 71 against a strong Lancashire bowling on a difficult pitch at Old Trafford in 1923, when he and George Brown (104) added 139 for the second wicket in Hampshire's first innings.

In 1921, he had started writing a series of articles on the history of the game in *The Cricketer*. These later morphed into his magnum opus *A History of the Game*, published in 1926. For the quality of the writing, and scope, it still bears reading nearly 90 years later. He subsequently wrote a second volume in collaboration with EW Swanton. He continued to write for *The Cricketer*, *Wisden* and other publications for the rest of his life.

At Winchester College he took over as cricket coach from the legendary Rockley Wilson between 1928 until 1933. His most influential years in the game still lay ahead, particularly after he retired from the College staff in 1949, at the age of 60.

He had come onto the MCC Committee in 1941 and continued to sit until his death. On his scholastic retirement he became Chairman of the MCC Youth Cricket Association, their remit being to inquire on the welfare of English cricket. He was subsequently at the head of initiatives to engender and encourage interest in the development of schools and youth cricket. He became the first, and only, Chairman of the MCC Youth Cricket Association.

In 1950 he was appointed Honorary Treasurer of MCC, a position he held for the rest of his life. He was President of MCC in 1960.

His influence on Hampshire cricket was profound. With Desmond Eagar and Arthur Holt, he plotted Hampshire's change of fortunes from a lower table side in the immediate post-War years to the heady era from 1955 to the great summer of 1961, when they won their first county championship. For all of this twenty year period he was first on the Committee and then President. However, as with all his presidential appointments, he was never just a figurehead. He always took an active part in proceedings.

Alan Rayment remembers that he was always prominent at Southampton's County Ground. He would stand behind the nets at practice and offer advice. On one occasion, Alan remembers that he encouraged the batsmen to develop the technique of hitting the ball over the inner circle of fielders. Such a method was anathema to most of the professionals who had spent their lives hitting the ball along the ground. Was he remembering that great innings at Canterbury some thirty years earlier? He would also come into the dressing room, usually with Desmond Eagar.

Alan remembers Harry Altham as a "wise enthusiast". He was always very approachable, kind-hearted and possessor of the best of Christian values. Alan recalls that that he was a very "human man".

His involvement extended beyond the county's affairs. Sixth form colleges in Hampshire still play for the Altham Trophy.

The great and the good came from far and wide to attend his Memorial Service in Winchester Cathedral. Alan Rayment remembers that Len Hutton was present. The gathering was fitting testament to a unique man who served cricket in so many of its facets to such great effect.

### **JAMES VINCE**

James Vince enjoyed yet more success for the England Lions in their 50-over series against South Africa A. He captained the side and led them to a 3-1 win in the rubber. Moreover, he scored 99 off 95 balls in the second match at Kimberley. His efforts on the tour earned praise from coach Mark Robinson and the batting coach Graham Thorpe. An international call-up is surely just around the corner.

### **WORLD CUP THOUGHT**

After Ireland's marvellous four wicket victory over the West Indies in Nelson, is it too outrageous to suggest that England are no longer the best one-day side in the British Isles?

### **FROM THE MAGAZINES**

*The Cricket Paper* emerged from its winter hibernation to cover the World Cup. It has, however, continued its coverage of county cricket and the first two editions contained much of interest to Hampshire followers. There were interviews with James Vince, Jimmy Adams and Matt Coles, as well as a review of Hampshire's 1978 JPL winning season, with brief biographies of all the staff and what has happened to them since. The Hampshire captain was featured in the "Dream Team" section, in which the subject is asked to pick the best XI they have played with and against. Invariably they select from former and current team-mates and Adams is no exception. His selection was Michael Carberry, Simon Katich, John Crawley, Neil McKenzie, Robin Smith, Nic Pothas, Sean Ervine, Dimitri Mascarenhas, Shane Warne, Shaun Udal and Kyle Abbott.

The current whereabouts of most of the 1978 side will be familiar. John Southern, however, is worthy of mention. The tall, angular slow left-arm bowler rarely played in one-day cricket and, indeed, appeared in only one match in the 1978 JPL campaign. He emigrated to New Zealand and for the last 30 years has been a chemistry teacher and master at Kings College in Auckland.

The edition of 20 February also revealed that Hampshire may play a Royal London 50-over match against Lancashire at the Newclose Ground, near Newport, on the Isle of Wight, on 17 August. The initiative is in the wake of the death of Brian Gardener who ploughed £2m of his own money to transform a former farm site into a cricket ground. It was his dream to bring county cricket there. It seems that in order to make it a reality more support (presumably financial) is still required from local businesses. However, the report indicates that there is some momentum behind the proposal. Hampshire last played county cricket on the island, at Cowes, in 1962.

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