

THE HAMPSHIRE CRICKET SOCIETY

Patrons: John Woodcock Shaun Udal

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ODE TO LEO, VIC AND JIMMY

*The shadows lengthen and the colours fade
As our heroes slip away
But those of us remaining
Will remember yesterday*

Mike Arnold

There can have been few months in Hampshire's history in which three men who contributed so much to the County's fortunes have died. Leo Harrison passed away on 12 October, and now Vic Cannings and Jimmy Gray have both died within hours of each other on 31 October. The three men played a total of 1070 first-class matches for Hampshire from 1939 to 1966. A tribute to Leo Harrison appeared in the October Newsletter. The achievements of those two other great servants are recorded below.

VIC CANNINGS

Vic Cannings died at the age of 97, and was the second oldest surviving Hampshire cricketer. John Manners is still with us aged 102.

He will always be remembered as Derek Shackleton's omnipresent opening partner during the 1950s. For a few years in the early part of that decade they literally were Hampshire's bowling; in 1952, they bowled unchanged throughout the match against Kent at Southampton. They dismissed their opponents for just 32 and 91. That first innings total would have been fewer had not the Kent number eleven, Jack Martin, slogged Shack for two sixes.

Victor Henry Douglas Cannings was born in the village of Bighton, near Alton on 3 April 1919. He served in the Palestine Police Force for seven years from the outbreak of WW2. He had a trial with Hampshire in 1946 but whilst the County were considering the financial implications he was offered a contract by Warwickshire. He played for the latter county from 1947 to 1949, earning his County Cap in the first of those years. He was therefore 31 years old when he joined Hampshire in 1950. He was capped within a month of the start of that season. He and Shackleton opened the bowling together for the first time at Lord's, dismissing Middlesex for 103. Alan Rayment remembers him dismissing Denis Compton. It was the first of nine occasions when he took the great batsman's wicket; Hampshire regarded "Compo" as his "rabbit". He went on to give the County unstinting service throughout the decade. When he left at the end of his benefit year in 1959 he had played in 230 matches, taking 834 wickets (avge 21.69). He was renowned for his stamina and steadiness. His natural ball was the away swinger but when the occasion demanded

he could bowl defensively to legside fields. He took one hundred wickets in a season four times, his highest aggregate being 112 (avge 21.56) in 1952.

He was involved in a number of tight finishes with both bat and ball. He was at the wicket when the ties with Kent at Southampton in 1950 and Eastbourne in 1955 were achieved. In the former year he dismissed Kent's Doug Wright lbw off the last ball to win the match. Against Oxford University one year later, Hampshire won by one run when he took two wickets with the last two balls of the match. His steely temperament must surely have been influenced by some of the events he saw in Palestine during the war.

His highest score was 61 for Warwickshire against Nottinghamshire at Edgbaston in 1947, which was to remain his only half century. His best score for Hampshire was 43 not out against Essex at Southampton in 1952. It was top score in the second innings. Jimmy Gray had made 139 in the first innings. His best bowling figures were seven for 52 versus Oxford University in The Parks in 1950.

Unbeknown to him, Billy Griffiths had recommended him to Eton College and he became their coach in 1960 until his retirement. Notwithstanding his coaching duties, he played minor counties cricket for Buckinghamshire from 1960 until 1962. He lived on the school site for the rest of his life. He was succeeded by John Rice. Both he and John Rice addressed the Society on 27 January 1988. It was a fascinating insight of life at Eton College. He spoke with great affection on John Barclay and the pair enjoyed a wonderful rapport until the end. One of the humorous stories he recounted was how he and Leo Harrison substituted the bails at Dean Park with a pair of sausages.

JIMMY GRAY

James Roy Gray was born in Southampton on 19 May 1926. He attended King Edward VI School, though was evacuated to Poole during WW2. Whilst there he started playing football and after some local success was taken onto the Arsenal staff along with other cricketers, including Arthur Milton, who became a lifelong friend, the Compton brothers and the Hampshire wicket-keeper Ralph Prouton. He spent four years at Highbury without making a first team appearance and went on to play for Bedford and Salisbury before concentrating on cricket.

He played club cricket for Deanery before making his Hampshire debut, with Derek Shackleton, in two matches at Aldershot in 1948. He struggled for the next two seasons but made a major breakthrough thanks to Neville Rogers' tuition in 1951 when he passed one thousand runs for the first time. He repeated the feat in every season until he left the game on a full-time basis in 1963; he scored 2000 runs three times: in 1959, Hampshire's championship season in 1961, and 1962, when he recorded both his best aggregate (2,224 runs) and his highest score of 213 not out against Derbyshire at Portsmouth. He was on the field for that entire match; he also made an unbeaten 85 in the second innings.

He will always be remembered as the perfect foil to the adventurous Roy Marshall, with whom he shared a record 33 century opening partnerships for Hampshire. Jimmy Gray was a thoughtful, intelligent technician. He would gladly give Marshall the strike. In the event with his illustrious partner being dismissed early, he was never afraid to take responsibility. They usually roomed together and would discuss any problems openly with each other. Marshall relied implicitly on his partner's sage judgement. Their overnight discussions on match situations and tactics often accrued to the County's advantage on the following day. They established the then record of 249 against Middlesex at Portsmouth in 1960 in his benefit match. The prequel to that event was that Colin Ingleby-Mackenzie had dropped Marshall for the match after he had refused to bowl in the preceding game at Canterbury. It was only when the skipper was reminded of the occasion that he rescinded the decision. He had to call at Marshall's home early on the morning of the match to tell him that he had been reinstated.

His career total of 22,450 runs (avge 30.83) has been acceded only by Mead, Marshall and Brown for the County and is the best recorded by a Hampshire born player. He also claimed 451 wickets (avge 29.95) with his right arm swing bowling and 349 catches. His best bowling performance was seven for 52 against Glamorgan at Swansea in 1955.

During the 1963/64 close season, he took up a teaching appointment at Stroud School, Romsey and played his final match for Hampshire in 1966. After retiring from teaching he and Peter Sainsbury took over the famous Holt and Haskell shop in Shirley, Southampton and in the 1990s became Chairman of the Cricket Committee working alongside his early mentor Neville Rogers. He was immensely respected by the playing staff as a batting coach.

Jimmy Gray visited the Society twice, in September 1976 and September 1982. On the latter occasion he formed a panel with Charles Knott and Mike Barnard to answer members' questions.

In emails received from members about Jimmy Gray the two most oft-quoted comments were that he was a "gentleman" and a "nice man".

In writing these tributes, the Editor drew upon David Allen's fine and comprehensive obituaries on his cricket blog; he also thanks Alan Rayment and Mike Arnold for their memories on all three men. The information on the section on Leo Harrison's life after cricket, described in the October Newsletter, was gleaned after reading *Class of '59* by Chris Westcott, which contains an interview with Leo.

MEETINGS

Wednesday 16 November 2016 – Meeting

The Society extends a warm welcome to **DEAN ALLEN** to this afternoon's meeting. A university lecturer, he is the author of *Empire, War and Cricket in South Africa: Logan of Matjiesfontein*, on which he will be talking. Mr Allen's address earned the plaudits of the Dorset Cricket Society last winter.

Wednesday 28 September 2016-Report

Members enjoyed an interesting evening in the company of Don Topley. He began by recounting his career as Zimbabwe's coach. Aged 27, he was coach when they famously beat England in the World Cup in Australasia in 1992/93. England had won six of their previous seven matches, Zimbabwe had lost all of theirs. Nevertheless, his team went on to win by nine runs.

Son of a naval officer, he enjoyed his early career on the Lord's ground staff. Under the guidance of Don Wilson, he learnt much about life in general, as well as cricket. His education was enhanced by listening to Garfield Sobers, Everton Weekes and Peter Parfitt. Weekes made an indelible impression; our speaker described him as a "stunning individual". He was on the ground staff with Asif Din, Dermot Reeve, Norman Cowans, Neil Williams, Geoff Holmes and Damian D'Oliveira. He regarded his time there as a "finishing school". He thought the talent pool for the Lord's ground staff was now reduced by county academies.

As for the "non-catch" for which he is well known in the Test against the West Indies (see September Newsletter), he said he received no prior warning that he was to take the field that day. Ian Botham and his entourage took him out to a nightclub in the evening. He woke up with no memory of the previous night! He joined Essex where the dressing room was full of internationals. It rankled that he never played in a Lord's final. He stood by everything he has ever said about match-fixing.

He was a schoolmaster for 23 years and regarded it as a fulfilling and privileged career. His prowess as a skilled teacher was evident from the way he held the attention of his audience all evening. Recently, he has started hosting England tours. He was fortunate that for his first three tours in 2015/16, his son, Reece, was in the England squads. He spoke highly of Hampshire's treatment of Reece's rehabilitation programme. He was positive both about Reece's and the County's future. He finished with an autobiographical poem about his life.

In the Q and A session, he was forthright in his support of the proposed new t20 tournament.

HAMPSHIRE NEWS

Hampshire have announced that Craig White has replaced Dale Benkenstein as Head Coach. He was previously assistant coach and bowling coach. Aged 46, the former Yorkshire and England test cricketer has signed a two year contract.

Hampshire have also extended the contracts for Liam Dawson, Tom Alsop and Lewis McManus until 2019. Alsop and McManus of course enjoyed successful seasons when they were promoted to the first team last season. Dawson was voted Player's Player of the Year in 2016 and has signed to play for Rangpur Riders in the Bangladesh Premier League, which will run from 4 November until 9 December.

THE HAMPSHIRE LIBRARY

A Beautiful Game: My Love Affair with Cricket by Mark Nicholas (pub. Allen & Unwin) price £20.

This is a book to be savoured in so many different ways. It is part autobiography embracing Mark's playing career and his subsequent, successful life in the media. For those who remember Hampshire's very fine team of the 1980s the book will evoke special memories. But there is much more besides. There are three penetrating and informed chapters on batting, bowling, fielding, wicket-keeping and captaincy, all of which include Hampshire references, and another on the spirit of cricket prompted by the death of Philip Hughes. There are behind the scenes accounts of Kerry Packer, World Series Cricket, and Australian cricket in general, and a world view of the game. That great summer of 2005 receives much coverage as it was the first test series covered by Channel 4. His influence on the channel's coverage of the series was enormous. One revealing fact is that his tv career has been crowned by the award of three BAFTAs for programmes in which he has been involved. There are affectionate portraits of those cricketers whom he has particularly admired and spent time with, particularly Chris and Robin Smith (his tale of Robin's subsequent life after cricket is heart rending), Malcolm Marshall and Martin Crowe. Richie Benaud's presence pervades throughout the work. There is also a "blue sky thinking" chapter on the game which traditionalists might find rather disturbing but it is undoubtedly underpinned by his vast knowledge of the current game, and one suspects, behind-the-scenes discussions that have taken place over the years. The cricketers he has met and played with and against read like a who's who. His address book also includes influential people from other walks of life. His sheer love and enthusiasm for the game permeates through every page. The book reflects the fact that Mark is a most gifted writer. It is a page turner and hugely enjoyable. It is thoroughly recommended.

TALKING POINTS

Much still remains unresolved regarding developments which occurred at the end of last season. Hampshire finished 8th in the Championship and were originally relegated. The ECB then docked Durham 48 points for financial mismanagement, though some was directly attributable to the ECB themselves. To add insult to injury Durham were docked a further 48 points for 2017. Hampshire were reinstated to Division 1, only for Kent, runners-up in Division 2, to lodge an appeal. At the time of writing, the latter issue is ongoing.

Hampshire and their supporters will, of course, be thankful for the lifeline. There is, though, a considerable undercurrent of feeling that Durham's punishment is draconian. Having won last year's 2nd XI and under-age championships, Durham will surely come again and quite quickly. In the meantime, however, they have lost Mark Stoneman and Steve Borthwick to Surrey. Both have made significant contributions with the bat in recent seasons.

The ECB's new t20 competition has resulted in a storm of protest from members all over the country. The ECB's stance seems to have been a most confused one. The

start date has been deferred from 2018 to 2020. Initial reports indicated matches would be played over a two-week period in August; more recent disclosures indicate the tournament will be played over four weeks. Recent statements have been about “regional” teams rather than “city-based” ones, with matches being played on more than one ground in the areas concerned. The latter would point to the fact that some sanity is being exercised, though the impression that implementation of the proposal is being made up on the hoof is inescapable. One leading writer, a former player steeped in the game, feels that the proposal is being driven by ego rather than rational analysis. Others fear for cricket’s values if the proposal is driven purely by finance. Understandably, it is evident that many counties still remain to be convinced on the venture. When coupled with the new arrangements for the County Championship in 2017, which have received a mixed reception (players, who will spend less time on the field, are in favour, whilst the cricket paying public who will watch less cricket, are generally not); some counties in division 2 are fearful of being regarded as second class citizens because of the lop sided fixture list, in which they won’t play all the other Counties twice. It is difficult to remember a time in which the ECB has attracted such swingeing criticism, and divided their constituency so greatly.

Another deeply troubling issue is the reaction of Australian players-past and present-to the Coroner’s inquest on the death of Philip Hughes. The NSW Coroner strongly criticised sledging and on-field abuse as an “unsavoury aspect” of cricket and urged players to reconsider before verbally abusing opponents. He added “An outsider is left to wonder why such a beautiful game would need such an ugly underside”. The players seem to be in complete denial that there is a problem. Brendon McCullum’s wonderful contribution to “the spirit of cricket” seems to have been laid aside already.

In the wake of the Coroner’s comments, BBC Radio 5 produced a programme on the subject matter regarding club cricket in England on 6 November. The feature clearly indicated there were significant problems. More than half of cricket umpires say they have been a victim of verbal abuse and that the incidence was increasing, according to research conducted by the University of Portsmouth. The survey was drawn from responses by 763 umpires and so it has credence. Just over 40% said that abuse was making them question whether or not to continue umpiring. Umpires are the lifeblood of the game. Fewer umpires will reduce opportunities to participate in cricket. From the editor’s own observations, the situation has deteriorated markedly following the unacceptable on and off field incidents in the Ashes series in Australia in 2010/11. It demonstrates that the example set at the highest levels percolate down through the game. The MCC has been trialling new on-field sanctions in an attempt to improve behaviour, ranging from penalty runs to giving umpires the power to dismiss players. A final decision has yet to be made on whether they would be enshrined in cricket’s laws.

Editor’s Note: the next instalment on Hampshire on Away Grounds, which will feature Glamorgan, has been held over until the New Year.

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