

## NEWSLETTER No. 237 - SUMMER 2003

### MEETINGS

#### 24 SEPTEMBER 2003 – MEETING

**The first meeting of the Winter Season will be at The Rose Bowl, when the speaker will be the much loved and popular ROBIN SMITH.**

#### **9 April 2003 – Report**

Norman Giller took members on an evocative trip down Memory Lane. Aided by laptop computer and a visual presentation, he devoted the evening to his boyhood hero, Denis Compton, and the summer of 1947 in particular.

He began by showing photographs which illustrated the era. The Comet aircraft, various brands of Player's cigarettes, motorcars, ocean liners, Vera Lynn, Gracie Fields, Laurel and Hardy, a young Princess Elizabeth, Max Bygraves, Freddie Mills, Joe Louis, Stanley Matthews, Tom Finney, Len Hutton and Donald Bradman were among those who appeared on the screen.

Our speaker then recalled Compton's exploits of 1947. He set his feats against a background of the long cold winter and the fact that petrol coupons and food rationing were in force. The population needed light relief and Compton provided it. He took a while to register his first century, but once off the mark with 112 against Worcestershire at Lord's towards the end of May, he scarcely paused for breath. 3816 runs and 18 centuries flowed from his bat. Considering the elan with which he batted, his Championship average of 96.80 and season's average of 92.32 were astonishing. He also found the energy to capture 73 wickets (avge. 28.12) and hold 31 catches. A Middlesex Championship title followed in his wake.

Compton was, of course, aided and abetted by his great friend, Bill Edrich. Compton and Edrich, along with Jack Robertson, amassed over 8000 runs between them. The pair shared a third wicket partnership of 370 against South Africa at Lord's. He scored 1187 runs and 6 centuries against the tourists alone. At the end of the opening day of the match against Surrey at The Oval, Middlesex stood at 537 for 2, with Compton and Edrich both undefeated having put on 217. Compton then went on to demolish Surrey almost single-handedly as he took 6 for 94 and 6 for 80.

He equalled Jack Hobbs' record of sixteen centuries in a season (made in 1925) in the last Championship match against Lancashire at Lord's, before exceeding it as well as surpassing Tom Hayward's forty-one year old record aggregate of 3518 runs, in two festival games for the South of England at Hastings.

He finished the season in style by making 246 for Middlesex against the Rest of England at The Oval. This innings, though, extracted a terrible price as he fell and injured his knee whilst facing a ball from Tom Goddard. It was to become probably the most famous injury in the annals of all English sport, even exceeding that of Beckham prior to the last World Cup. Bill Edrich also passed Hayward's previous record as he and his partner fittingly saw out the season with a partnership of 210.

Norman Giller then finished the evening with some statistics from Compton's star-filled career. However, he felt that the statistics were superfluous. It was the eternal memory of the power of his cover driving and the delicate finesse of his late cut, leg glance and the sweep which would remain. He mentioned, though that his running between the wickets would have worked the third umpire to death had he been playing today!

He also touched on his football career. He made only 54 appearances in the Football League yet played in 14 wartime internationals for England. He also won a Championship winners medal as well as an F.A. Cup winners medal in 1950. The latter match was his last appearance on a football field.

At one of the Society's meetings a few years ago the ebullient Keith Hayhurst commented that the multi-faceted game of cricket was about the players. It was the players, more than anything else, that cricket followers would most remember. The splendid evening enjoyed in Norman Giller's company bore out those remarks. Even those who never saw Denis Compton play, of whom the editor was one, felt by the end of the evening that they had done so.

### **JOHN ARLOTT ON 1947**

Denis Compton made a profound impression on John Arlott in 1947. He later wrote a book in the 1960's entitled **1947 Vintage Summer**. However, in his book of the season **Gone To The Cricket** he captured Compton's contribution to the season by writing "that it was a dream that passed England cricket in a summer of amazing sun and lit the farthest corner of every field in the land".

### **DENIS COMPTON v. HAMPSHIRE**

Hampshire followers who did not travel to Lord's during Denis Compton's career saw him play on very few occasions. He made only seven appearances on a Hampshire ground, and one of those – at Bournemouth in his debut season of 1936 – was before the Second World War. He played at Bournemouth and Portsmouth on three occasions and Northlands Road only once, in his penultimate full season in county cricket in 1956.

However, visitors to picturesque Dean Park were rewarded with two centuries. In 1946 he made 115, and was at the wicket in the second innings, on 55, when Middlesex completed an eight wicket victory. The crowd were also treated to a foretaste of events the following season as Compton and Edrich shared century stands (126 and 125\*) in each innings.

He also scored a second innings 102 not out in 1949. The Middlesex captain, Walter Robins, declared upon Compton reaching his century setting Hampshire a target of 414. They were eventually dismissed for 276. In the first innings, Compton's accomplices in his golden year, shared a second wicket partnership of 204, Robertson making 123 in 195 minutes and Edrich 182 in four hours. Robertson had compiled a double century against the County at Lord's in 1947.

Hampshire just evaded his century habit in his great year when he was stumped Harrison, bowled Arnold for 88 in his only appearance against the County that summer, at Lord's. He had made hundreds in the preceding three games and in the following match – the First Test at Nottingham – he stroked yet another.

Compton played in 19 matches against Hampshire scoring 1259 runs (avge. 40.61), including 4 centuries. His other hundreds – 143 in 1939 and 117 in 1954 – were both made at Lord's. In the first of these matches he skipped to his century in only two hours, hitting 2 sixes and 14 fours along the way. In the second, he also took 5 for 19.

Compton posed Hampshire many problems with his left-arm unorthodox spin bowling, claiming 49 wickets, costing only 21.37 runs each. Vic Cannings enjoyed most success against him. The broad shouldered fast-medium bowler dismissed him on nine occasions, a number bettered only by Test cricketers Bedser, Johnston, Lindwall, Tayfield and Lock. Derek Shackleton defeated him on six occasions.

## OBITUARIES

Two of the Society's former speakers have passed away during the summer. **GUY WILLATT** died in Derby on 12 June, aged 85. He addressed the Society in March 1985. The report of the meeting stated:

“Mr. Willatt took as his theme Cricket: past, present and future. Thus boldly stated this sounds no different from many other cricket talks. In fact, it was an enthralling evening with Mr. Willatt drawing on his experience in pre and post-war first-class cricket, and as a current member of the Derbyshire Committee, to give a most perceptive talk, the interest aroused by his ideas being reflected in the flood of questions which followed.”

He was predeceased by **COLONEL JOHN STEPHENSON**, former secretary of the MCC and the ICC. He died on 2 June aged 72. He addressed the Society in February 1995. Jack Moore reported that he “spoke of the running of cricket's HQ and his unsuccessful efforts to curb the price of Test Match tickets.”

## SHAUN GRAF

Many will remember Shaun Graf who was Hampshire's overseas recruit in 1980, when Malcolm Marshall was on the West Indies tour to this country.

Graf went on to play in 11 limited overs internationals for Australia in the next two seasons. He also became one of only fifteen men to be 12<sup>th</sup> Man for Australia, but not play Test cricket. He was 12<sup>th</sup> man in the Tests v. New Zealand at Perth, and India at Sydney, both in 1980/81.

He is now General Manager, Cricket Operations for Cricket Victoria, and he spoke to the Australian Cricket Society on 7 March 2003. A report of his address, which appeared in the Society's Newsletter "Scoresheet" was full of interest. His function was to "organise the time and activities of Victoria's elite squad of professional cricketers". Besides being supported by three senior coaches, the squad also enjoy the services of a physiotherapist and fitness guru, a dietician, a sports psychologist, a career and welfare officer, a financial advisor, and a room attendant who also acts as a masseur.

## THE HAMPSHIRE LIBRARY

100 Greats – Hampshire County Cricket Club by Neil Jenkinson, Bill Ricquier and Dave Allen; published by Tempus – price £12.99.

This book is thoroughly recommended. Whilst the "100 Greats" nominations will always be contentious - a fact acknowledged by the authors – the book contains much new and invaluable information on some of the lesser known figures in the County's history, particularly those men who appeared in The Golden Age before World War I. Some of the biographies of more recent players are unexpectedly frank and hard-hitting. The decision to include John Arlott and Harry Altham was a splendidly imaginative one. The book is therefore a well researched and well-balanced publication, both in terms of the length of each biography, relative to the player's contribution to Hampshire cricket, the spread of players in each era and the respective representation of batsmen, bowlers and wicketkeepers.

Whilst it does not detract in any way from the publication it is a pity that the publishers appear to have limited selection to those men who have played for the County since the modern club was originally formed in 1863. The great men of Hambledon, particularly Richard Nyren, Tom Sueter, John Small, David Harris, Noah Mann, James Aylward and "Silver Billy" Beldham were therefore rendered ineligible for inclusion, as were Lord Frederick Beauclerk, William Ward, Sir Frederick Hervey-Bathurst, Thomas Beagley and Daniel Day of the first half of the nineteenth century. These were mighty men whose deeds made a huge contribution both to the history of cricket generally and Hampshire cricket folklore.