

## **NEWSLETTER No. 255 - SUMMER 2005**

### **COLIN INGLEBY-MACKENZIE OBE**

The Society extends its heartfelt congratulations to its patron and former Hampshire Captain, Colin Ingleby-Mackenzie, on the award of the OBE for his services to cricket in the Queen's Birthday Honours List.

### **A CENTURY FROM WARNE**

When Shane Warne eventually retires from the game he will have good cause to reminisce nostalgically about Canterbury. In 2004 he turned a Totesport League game on its head with his bowling and shrewd captaincy. A year later, more memorably, he scored his maiden first-class century.

As with most things Warne does, it was out of the ordinary. On a bitterly cold morning Hampshire, after losing the wicket of James Adams in the first over, batted in untroubled fashion for the next hour or so. However, the introduction of the young Matthew Dennington into the attack heralded a more difficult phase of play. After being savaged by Simon Katich in his first over he kept the ball up to the bat and accounted for Michael Brown, John Crawley and Kevin Pietersen as they perished behind the wicket or at slip – where Martin van Jaarsveld looked a class act – driving against his outswing. Katich on the stroke of lunch, was run out trying to retrieve his ground after setting off for a non-existent single. At lunch Hampshire were 104 for 5 off 30 overs. About half an hour after the interval they were 130 for 7. Another low first innings score looked inevitable.

Enter Warne. His first three scoring shots were all boundaries. He immediately changed the tempo of the match. The sun came out. The pitch, which had hitherto looked green, suddenly appeared straw coloured. And Shane Warne made hay.

The Kent bowlers gave him an opportunity to swing his arms and use his immense strength. He square cut, pulled and drove powerfully. Just as he was approaching 50 the Kent captain, David Fulton, who had already been forced into several bowling changes, called upon Min Patel. After an exploratory first over, Warne eyed up the short leg side boundary and first drove him into the Colin Cowdrey stand at mid-on and then twice planted him over mid-wicket for six. It was at this stage that one wondered whether his first century for Hampshire – and indeed all first-class cricket – might be on the cards.

The Kent crowd may also have suspected it. Noisily partisan in the morning, they had suddenly become much quieter, though they continued to warmly applaud his positive strokeplay.

He had made sparkling fifties before but had never managed to go on. One remembered another innings against Kent, at Portsmouth, in 2000. He raced to 69, looked a certainty for a century, but then lost patience and was bowled heaving at Patel.

Perhaps Fulton also recollected that innings. He despatched his fielders to the distant boundary alongside the Dover Road, by the newly planted lime tree, to try and restrict him to singles. It worked to some extent but it was clear that Warne meant business and intended this time to reach the elusive three figure mark. Notwithstanding two fielders on the far boundary, such was his power, that he continually dissected them. Not even the fleetest foot of fieldsmen could have prevented the boundaries.

Warne may have been helped by having a rookie as his partner. It seemed to give him an extra sense of responsibility. Tom Burrows, making his first-class debut, kept pace with Warne in the early part of his innings. He showed little indication of being overawed. He showed himself to be a well organised and busy batsman. He drove well off both front and back foot and was never afraid to hook or pull the short ball. He was always on the look out for runs and both his tally, and that of his captain, mounted via some very quick running between the wickets. He was eventually bowled, shouldering arms to a break-back from Amjad Khan for an excellently constructed innings of 42. He had helped Warne add 131 off only 19 overs. He is definitely one for the future.

Upon Burrows' dismissal Warne lost the strike and momentum as the Kent bowlers kept offering his new partner, Chris Tremlett, singles at the end of each over. The tall quick bowler (or should we say all-rounder?) played respectfully until Warne went down the wicket to have a word with him. His inspirational sermon had a dramatic effect as Tremlett hit the next three balls to the boundary! The latter then dominated the partnership, scoring 28 out of 46 before mistiming a pull to mid-wicket.

Warne was now on 93 and left with only Richard Logan. Fulton slowed down the game in an effort to disrupt his concentration. But Warne would not be denied. He turned Cook to leg for two and went to 99 with a remarkable deliberate chip over wicketkeeper Geraint Jones off virtually a perpendicular bat. It really was an extraordinarily inventive shot. After further procrastination from Fulton, Warne forced the next ball through the off side for four. He had attained his goal and punched the air with typically unrestrained glee.

His century had come off only 72 balls and had included 15 fours and 3 sixes. It was the fastest century of the season to date. He had also broken two bats along the way!

In a quite remarkable afternoon session between lunch and tea, which was taken when Logan was dismissed, Hampshire had scored 223 runs. The world's premier leg-spinner was left on 107 not out. It was a truly inspirational innings.

## THE IMMORTALS (2)

The February edition of the Newsletter celebrated the centenary of the first-class debut of Philip Mead, Hampshire's most prolific batsman. Another English batsman – perhaps the greatest of them all – took his first strides onto the country's county cricket grounds that summer. On 24 April, Jack Hobbs stepped onto his beloved Kennington Oval to make his Surrey debut against the Gentlemen of England. In a drawn match he made 18 and then a dazzling 88 in the second. In the opposing side was W.G. Grace, whose mantle as the Grand Old Man of English Cricket was to pass to Hobbs in the years ahead. However, as characters and men of integrity they were poles apart. A week later he scored the first of his 197 (or 199) centuries with 155 against Essex, a County who bizarrely rejected him, also at The Oval.

Jack Hobbs' career figures are unassailable. The revisionist figures of the Association of Cricket Statisticians and Historians show that, in 834 matches he scored 61,760 runs at an average 50.70, including 199 centuries. Given that he played over a span of almost 30 years on uncovered wickets his career average almost defies belief.

He was, of course, known as "The Master". His career coincided with a period when bowlers invented and mastered new innovations. In the words of his great admirer, John Arlott, he met the new challenges created by the googly, outswing, inswing and leg theory and "made it all look as natural as walking".

Hobbs was indeed a natural cricketer. One scribe wrote that after one of his long innings it was always difficult to remember a particular stroke. He played them all with ease. Quick on his feet, his shot selection, judgement and technique were flawless. Hobbs often commented that he was never the same batsman after the First World War and played much more off the back foot thereafter. Such was the man, it was obviously an honest appraisal, but the statistics show that, when he resumed his career at the age of 37 in 1919, he was to score another 40,000 runs and 134 centuries.

He confirmed his greatness as a batsman in Test cricket. In 61 Tests he stroked 5,410 runs at an average of 56.94. Other batsmen – though not many – have bettered his average. Only his famed partner, Herbert Sutcliffe, has a higher average among opening batsmen. However, for one feat he stands alone. He is still revered by Australians who always recognise those who perform well against them. He made 12 centuries against the baggy green caps, a total that stands on a pedestal high above all others.

It was against Australia that, in partnership with Sutcliffe, he played possibly the two best innings of his life. Both were played when England were in need of runs on a difficult wicket. The first was at The Oval in 1926 as England sought to regain the Ashes after several post-war maulings. By the end of the second day the pair had added 49 and seen England to a 27 run lead. However, an overnight thunderstorm and sun the next morning had produced an unpredictable drying wicket. Hobbs and Sutcliffe batted superbly as the ball turned, and lifted spitefully. Through uncanny running between the wickets – a feature of their partnership – allied to equally shrewd strokeplay, the pair added 172 before Hobbs was dismissed for exactly 100 just after lunch. England eventually won by 289 runs.

Some 18 months later the pair played with a wondrous display of technique and courage on a far more lethal wicket at Melbourne. Caught on a true Australian “sticky dog”, the worst of all wickets that batsmen have ever had to encounter, many experts could not foresee England reaching even 60 as they set off in pursuit of a victory target of 332. Indeed, one reporter commented that a state side would not reach 20. As the ball spat viciously, Hobbs and Sutcliffe played calmly, frequently taking the ball on the body deliberately, to avoid offering a catch to the vultures surrounding them. Their skill and judgement on what to play and leave alone bordered on the supernatural. Such was the unpredictability and occasional steepness of the bounce Hobbs once had his cap knocked off, and on another occasion suffered a glancing blow to the face. The pitch was pockmarked with holes. By tea, Hobbs and Sutcliffe, against all the odds, were still there with England 75 runs on the board. They continued to counter the bowling forensically on what was tantamount to a minefield and eventually put on 105 before Hobbs’ defences were finally breached. He had made 49. The opening partnership has claims to be the finest in all cricket history. Just before he was dismissed Hobbs called for his bat to be changed and suggested to his captain, Percy Chapman, that with the wicket still difficult, the obdurate Jardine be promoted to three. Chapman followed his advice and both Sutcliffe and Jardine saw out a tumultuous day. The former went on to score a truly magnificent 135. England eventually scraped home by 3 wickets.

In the last match of the series, also at Melbourne, Hobbs, aged 46 years 82 days, became the oldest man to score a Test hundred.

Hobbs’ talent was not only confined to batting. Lyn Wellings, most astute of cricket correspondents, felt that Hobbs was the finest cover fieldsman he had ever seen. It must be remembered that he had viewed Harvey, Bland, Lloyd, Randall and Gower, among others. On his first tour of Australia in 1911-12 he ran out 15 batsmen, an average of one a match.

Perhaps Hobbs’ most long-lasting achievement, among all his others, was that, due to his natural grace and dignity, he raised the status of the professional cricketer in what was predominantly an amateur and elitist environment during his playing days. His tactical awareness and knowledge were of immense benefit to his county captain, Percy Fender, who never had any qualms about entrusting Hobbs to the captaincy when he was off the field or away. No cricketer deserved a knighthood more.

Not surprisingly, given his unsurpassed number of centuries, Jack Hobbs posted more centuries – 11 against Hampshire – than any other player. He was only more prolific in reaching three figures against Warwickshire (14) and Kent (12). However, he scored most runs against Essex – how they must have regretted rejecting his referral for a trial – Middlesex, Nottinghamshire and Warwickshire. Hampshire were fifth on his order of preference, against whom he scored 3017 runs (avge. 55.87).

After his first two matches for Surrey during which he scored 289 runs, the Hampshire bowlers thwarted his progress in his third, Persse and Baldwin dismissing him for 6 and 43 respectively. In the return match a month later, in Hampshire’s inaugural fixture at Aldershot, he was again out cheaply in both innings.

In two Surrey trial matches in 1903 he was twice bowled by Philip Mead's slow left-arm spin. Surrey, of course, dithered about offering Mead a contract and by the time they finally made up their minds he had already signed for Hampshire. As both men eventually scored some 116,000 runs and 352 centuries between them it was perhaps in the game's best interests that they played for different Counties. Hampshire's great left-hander again took Hobbs' wicket when the Counties met at The Oval in 1906. However, he never did so again. It was in this match that Hobbs scored fifties – 79 and 69 – in each innings for the first time in his career. Hampshire again hosted Surrey at Aldershot a fortnight later, when he contributed 15 and 26 not out in a low scoring match.

Hampshire first felt the full weight of his bat in 1907. After 60 at The Oval, he made 135 on his debut at Northlands Road. In the following year at The Oval he put together a sparkling 161 out of 270 for seven declared in only 205 minutes, hitting seventeen fours and a five (which would have now counted as a six) along the way.

Portsmouth spectators had the pleasure of seeing him for the first time in July of that season and he did not disappoint them, scoring 56. It was to remain his highest score at Burnaby Road. For some reason he never enjoyed himself there scoring only 120 runs in three matches.

1909 was a landmark season for Jack Hobbs as he made his Test debut against Australia, where, on a difficult wicket, his quick footed mastery allowed England to romp home by ten wickets at Edgbaston. After being dismissed for a duck in the first innings, he made a brilliant undefeated 62 in the second. He owed his selection to a highly productive May in which he scored 919 runs including four centuries. Three were against Warwickshire, including a hundred in each innings at Edgbaston. The other was his first double century – 205 against Hampshire at The Oval. Against a weak attack – the opening bowlers were Mead and the inexperienced George Brown – he and Hayes plundered a remarkable 371 in two and three quarter hours. He eventually fell to the bowling of wicketkeeper Jimmy Stone. Surrey amassed a prodigious 742 and meted out a thrashing by an innings and 468 runs, which is still Hampshire's heaviest defeat. This match was also notable for the Hampshire debut of C.B. Fry. He was the only batsman to resist the Surrey bowling, scoring 42 and 60.

Little more than a month later, in his first match at Dean Park, Bournemouth, Hobbs piled on the agony with a further 162.

The fledgling Jack Newman then enjoyed considerable success against him in the years leading up to the First World War. In 1910 he took Hobbs' wicket three times, twice bowling him. When Hampshire won the match at Northlands Road, by 61 runs, in July of that year it was the first time that Hobbs had finished on the losing side against the County.

Newman went on to dismiss Hobbs on a further five occasions before the outbreak of War. In 1913 Hobbs made a further century against the County, a second innings 109, which was crucial to Surrey's eventual victory by 5 runs in a tense, exciting match at Southampton.

Hobbs often claimed that he played his best cricket in 1914 and the Hampshire bowlers had an opportunity to admire his wonderful technique and free scoring range of shots during his innings of 163 at The Oval. Lyn Wellings, shrewdest of observers, once claimed he was as sound defensively as Mead and as exciting and as glorious a strokemaker as Woolley – an awesome, and indeed frightening combination and fusion of skills.

Wellings also wrote that had Hobbs not been such a superb batsman he could have made his way as a right arm fast-medium bowler. He gave proof of that assessment when he took four for 29 against Hampshire at The Oval in 1911. One of his victims was Philip Mead, thus gaining revenge for the reverse dismissal five years earlier.

If Jack Newman appeared to hold some form of tenuous ascendancy over Hobbs before the War, then Alec Kennedy did so afterwards. What magnificent bowlers these two men must have been! They spent all their careers bowling at some of cricket's demigods in Hobbs, Woolley, Hendren, Hammond and Sutcliffe, not forgetting Trumper and Bradman – and yet took over 4900 wickets between them. Newman eventually took Hobbs' wicket 13 times; Kennedy 12.

Kennedy accounted for him both innings in 1919 as Hampshire enjoyed a rare triumph at Surrey's expense. He again claimed Hobbs' wicket at The Oval a year later but when the latter returned to Northlands Road in July, he struck a princely 169 out of 265 for 5 declared in a rain-ruined fixture.

Hobbs missed nearly all of 1921 due to injury and then appendicitis. When he returned the following season he batted brilliantly scoring 10 centuries. However, Wisden commented that he tired easily, often giving his wicket away soon after reaching three figures. Mercifully, the Hampshire bowlers escaped his attention.

By the mid-1920s he was indisputably the world's greatest batsman. He reeled off century after century, including four against Hampshire. In 1926 he scored another double century – exactly 200 at Northlands Road – and then followed with a century in each innings – 112 and 104 – when the Counties next met at The Oval the following season. He had thus made three centuries in consecutive innings against the County.

Two years later, in 1929, immediately after his epic swansong tour of Australia, he scored 154 in the first match of the season at The Oval. During that season and those that followed, he began to pick up injuries, though he continued to return some astonishing seasonal aggregates and averages. He was, though, to play against Hampshire on only one more occasion in a drawn match between the Counties at The Oval in 1931. He signed off with 41 and 25, the successful bowlers being Kennedy and Stuart Boyes.

The final word on Hobbs' qualities must rest with Jack Newman. The kindly former off-spin bowler returned to Hampshire for the last time in 1969 (he had emigrated to South Africa some thirty years earlier). In a nostalgic evening around the dinner table with Desmond and Marjorie Eagar, Leo Harrison and Bill Shephard, he described him as “the greatest batsman on all wickets. When everything was in favour of the bowler he was at his best”.

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