

THE HAMPSHIRE CRICKET SOCIETY

Patrons: John Woodcock Shaun Udal James Tomlinson

NEWSLETTER No. 368 – JANUARY 2018

MEETINGS

NEW PATRON

Members will note from the head of this Newsletter that the Society has a new patron. Our Chairman announced at the Annual Dinner that **JAMES TOMLINSON** had graciously accepted the Society's invitation to fulfil the role. Indeed, he attended that meeting and was greeted with warm applause. Members will recall an unforgettable evening in James' company at Test Valley Golf Club in February 2016. It is hoped that members will see him again at future meetings. He is the youngest Patron in the Society's history.

Wednesday 4 January 2018 - Meeting

The Society commences the New Year in the company of Mark Garaway. Members will recall him as being Hampshire's reserve wicket-keeper, always a difficult and frustrating role, during the 1990s. Since he left the County, however, he has enjoyed a fulfilling life in the coaching arena. He led Somerset to the 2nd XI title in 2004, and was promoted to first-team coach there in 2005. In the following year, he became England team analyst and assistant coach, before crossing the Irish Sea as High Performance Director, Ireland, from 2009 - 2011. He is now Director of Coaching at Millfield School.

MARK GARAWAY was born in Swindon on 20 July 1973. He spent much of his childhood on the Isle of Wight and was the first of a number of gifted cricketers from the island in the last 20 years or so to progress to the county scene. He played in three first-class matches and two List A matches for Hampshire between 1996 - 1999. Those first-class matches were against Cambridge University at Fenner's and versus the Sri Lankans and the New Zealanders. He also turned out for MCC against Pakistan A. Though his appearances were infrequent, therefore, he was able to play against some of the best cricketers in the world. A right-handed batsman, his highest score was 55 in his final match, against the Kiwis in 1999. A tally of 13 catches and two stumpings in his four matches give a good indication of a most talented 'keeper. He is assured a warm welcome this evening.

Wednesday 15 November 2017 – Report

A large audience gathered for the afternoon meeting at Test Valley Golf Club to listen to Alan Butcher, the former Surrey and Glamorgan opening batsman. His first few matches were memorable. He bowled to Barry Richards, Gordon Greenidge and Roy Marshall, Mike Procter and then Geoffrey Boycott at Scarborough, after which he was on the field when Pat Pocock took his seven wickets in 11 balls at Eastbourne. He never opened the batting in any match until he played first-class cricket; he volunteered to go in first when Surrey were short of openers.

He played in an era of a golden age in county cricket, laced with great fast bowlers, including Michael Holding (then at Lancashire), Malcolm Marshall, Imran Khan, Sylvester Clarke, Curtley Ambrose and Courtney Walsh. He remarked that they came in different shapes and sizes, and with contrasting actions and personal traits. He never knew which version of Imran was going to turn up. Imran once bowled gentle medium-pacers to him on a Hove green top. Clarke, of course, was on his side.

Robert Mugabe had resigned the day before the meeting and, having spent some time in Zimbabwe, our speaker had obviously enjoyed himself celebrating the event. He confirmed that Zimbabwean cricket was inextricably linked with the economy and political issues, which influenced the provision of sparse facilities, players not being paid and team selection. It was a most entertaining and informative address, which prompted a large number of questions from members.

Wednesday 6 December 2017 - Report

Pat Pocock's address was full of anecdotes and stories on the characters he had met during his playing days. It was also an incisive and wise one, derived from a great love of the game and from observing how cricket had changed since he played his first match for Surrey in 1964. In his early years he learnt from the great, and very experienced spin bowlers in the game: Jim Laker, Tony Lock, Fred Titmus and Lance Gibbs. They taught him how to bowl. He learnt further from talking to Ken Barrington and bowling to such as Garfield Sobers. Graeme Swann has kept the spinners' flag flying, but he wondered from whom today's bowlers would draw upon for advice. The men with comparable experience to those from whom he learnt just weren't there anymore. There was a need to teach teachers and coach coaches in the nets and in match situations. He felt spin bowling had not changed; but there was a lack of skill and knowledge nowadays. The Championship programme severely inhibited the development of spinners. He acknowledged that county cricket would never pay its way, but the format was important for players to acquire skills and it was the major contributor to test cricket. Test and county cricket were interdependent. Without one, it was not possible to have the other.

He thought t20 cricket had changed the game significantly. Batsmen were chasing down higher and higher totals in other formats, due to the skills they had learnt in t20. He also commented that it was important that India, cricket's major financier, had to be aware of their responsibilities for managing the game.

After Pat Pocock's priceless address, members sat down for the Society's Annual Dinner. The conversation from around the tables seemed more animated than usual. It was another thoroughly sociable and enjoyable occasion. The popularity of the event was demonstrated by the fact that members had travelled from as far afield as Peterborough, London, Surrey Poole and all parts of Hampshire to attend.

JAMES VINCE IN AUSTRALIA

It is difficult to remember any selection for any tour that attracted so much opprobrium as that of James Vince for the series in Australia. If he was not affected by it, then he must be a resilient man indeed. The see saw criticism directed at him has done no credit to the British cricket press corps. John Woodcock and John Arlott would never have written in such judgemental terms.

He was almost set up to fail. With Joe Root opting to bat at four in the order, and Gary Ballance being adjudged to be better suited at five, Vince was the only batsman on the tour party who could conceivably bat at three. For the majority of his Hampshire career, he has batted at four, though he has scored centuries for the county coming in first wicket down.

(Ballance of course was not selected for this Test side and, after Perth, Dawid Malan would seem to have made the number five birth his own).

There was an early indication that Vince was highly regarded in the England set-up. He, rather than Joe Root or Alastair Cooke, was selected to front the early press conferences. Also, in the matches preceding the test, he held his catches which suggested an inner confidence. He had endured a torrid time in the field when he was originally selected for the test side in 2016.

He duly scored a fine 83 in the first innings at Brisbane. The press, after curmudgeonly accepting that he must play in the first instance, performed a virtual volte-face and praised him to the heavens. Many referred to his well-timed driving through the covers, his trademark stroke with which Hampshire supporters are so familiar. However, after three low scores in his ensuing innings, including what was admittedly an irresponsible waft outside off-stump second time around at Adelaide, they were calling for his head despite at that stage having recorded England's highest score in the series.

Thankfully, the management ignored the hue and cry and picked him for Perth. He responded with 26 in the first innings, and again was pilloried for being caught at the wicket. Many ignored the fact that the ball moved back on him off the pitch. If he was "last chance saloon" in the second, then it never showed. In a serene calm and controlled display he produced one of the most memorable innings in recent history. His driving off both front foot and back was exemplary. Fielders were just left standing as the ball sped past them stemming from his bewitching timing. He moved well forward, and well back, unlike most of his colleagues who tend to play from the crease or a few inches either side. He was equally at home against the pace of Starc, Cummings and Hazlewood, and the spin of Lyon, whom he neutralised by moving down the pitch to drive him through mid-off. He also swept the Australian spinner brutally just before his dismissal.

He was out to Starc, bowled by what has already been termed "the ball of the century". Bowling (left-arm) round the wicket the ball pitched middle-stump, but instead of carrying on down the legside turned to hit the off-stump. It was the fabled "Barnes ball" (after SF Barnes). Alec Bedser once bowled Bradman with such a delivery on the 1946/47 tour of Australia. However, both Barnes and Bedser were some mph slower than Starc.

Vince's innings of 55 is one to treasure, terminated only by an exceptional delivery. It was a masterpiece cameo of rare beauty. Glenn McGrath commented that the ball would have bowled any batsman in history. His assured strokeplay earned the plaudits from both Graeme Swann and Geoffrey Boycott. The general view of seasoned English observers was that, despite the four centuries scored in the match – including a double by Steve Smith – it was the best batting in the game.

This piece has been written just after Australia have taken an unassailable 3 – 0 lead at Perth to regain the Ashes. By the time members read this piece, the series will be over. James Vince has currently made the highest score in two of England's six innings, and demonstrated that he is now adapting to the requirements of test match cricket. His place ought not to be in doubt for the final two tests at Melbourne and Sydney.

Mason Crane was, of course, also included in England's tour squad. He has appeared in two first-class matches against Cricket Australia XIs at Adelaide and Townsville, taking five wickets. Now that the series is decided it will be interesting to see if England alter the balance of the side by including him at the expense of a pace bowler. Moeen Ali, having missed all but one of the warm-up matches prior to the tests, owing to injury, is clearly struggling for form with both bat and ball. It seems inconceivable that he will be left out, but there will be an opportunity for the England selectors to bowl Moeen and Crane in tandem in at least one of the remaining matches, possibly at Sydney.

ENGLAND IN AUSTRALIA

This winter has demonstrated that it is devilishly difficult to win a series in Australia. In the century since the end of WW1, England have won only seven series there: in 1928/29, 1932/33, 1954/55, 1970/71, 1978/79 (when England played a virtual Australian second team because of World Series Cricket), 1986/87, and 2010/11. It can be seen that the task has become much more difficult in the last 30 years. Even drawn series are rare. There have been two: in 1962/63 and 1965/66. In both of those rubbers, England went into the lead, before being pegged back.

The reasons for this winter's defeats have been extensively examined in the media: the self-imposed absence of Stokes, which has been felt more keenly as the series has progressed, the virtual eclipse of Alastair Cook and Stuart Broad, Joe Root struggling with the bat, and the lack of penetration in the bowling. It has been sad to see Cook and Broad in decline. They will both leave imperishable memories. Australia's best performer has, of course, been Steve Smith. But, as has been claimed, can he really be compared with Bradman?! Australia also has a full hand of high class pace bowlers and Lyon is probably on a par with the Indian Ravi Ashwin as an off-spin bowler. For England to have been competitive, they would have needed to field a full strength side with all the team performing. Even then, Australia may still have prevailed.

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