

# **HAMPSHIRE CRICKET SOCIETY**

**Patrons: Shaun Udal James Tomlinson**

**NEWSLETTER No. 409 – FEBRUARY 2022**

## **WINTER TALKING POINTS**

Despite all the mitigating circumstances, particularly successive lockdowns, which must be debilitating, and lack of match preparation, it was inevitable that sackings would occur after another disastrous quest for the Ashes. The obvious casualties, Ashley Giles, Chris Silverwood and Graham Thorpe have been shown the door. Joe Root stays as captain for the tour to the West Indies in March. Sir Andrew Strauss has replaced Giles as director of cricket, on a short-term basis. He has indicated, not for the first time, that there will be an independent review into the role and structure of the first-class game.

One wonders just how “independent”. No review is ever such. The reviewers are given the preferred outcome, and then produce a report justifying that outcome. What is the subplot? Strauss and Tom Harrison, who somehow survives, are responsible for the emphasis on white ball cricket, for financial reasons, over red ball cricket. It was successful in the sense that England won the 50-over World Cup. However, the downside was horribly apparent over the last few months. Some mental gymnastics will be required to reconcile the competing demands. It must be hoped that the “structure” will include programming. The County Championship fixture list in 2022 is only a minor tinkering of that of last season. Half of the fixtures will be played in April, May and September. The adverse effect on the development of players and techniques needs no elucidation.

It is worth, though, dwelling on technique. There really does need to be a review of the overall coaching structure. Batters in particular are progressing into the first-class game with fundamental flaws which are always eventually exposed at test level. That has been the case for over forty years.

Sadly, Yorkshire’s travails continue, though the test against New Zealand and the ODI versus South Africa have been reinstated. On what evidence has not been revealed. It takes much more than a change in personnel to tackle endemic racism.

Can English cricket ever be competitive in the future? One glaring issue is that the talent pool has to be widened. It has now been demonstrated, very forcibly, that the game can no longer rely on independent schools, from which the test team and the majority of the County teams are drawn, to produce a competitive test team. The game needs to fully embrace diversity and equality of opportunity. From what the editor has read this winter, it seems as if there is a will, but the game’s managers patently lack the skills to enact these values. Some of the comments made to the House of Commons Select Committee have been positively cringe-worthy. Developing and

maintaining these values will have a significant financial implication. Nevertheless, we have too many managers who know the cost of everything and the value of nothing.

## MEETINGS

### Wednesday 16 February 2022 – Meeting

After Stephen Chalke's talk on the 1950s at our January meeting, we have a film this afternoon on the following decade: ***Shifting Boundaries – English Cricket in the 1960s***. The film has been produced by **MICHAEL BURNS**. He is a film maker and writer. The Editor has previously seen his films of the MCC tours to Australia in 1954/55 and South Africa in 1956/57; most of the footage was taken from cine-film from the tourists themselves, which give them a unique immediacy. His film ***A Gentleman Cricketer*** won the 2008 Cricket Society Media Award. His books include biographies of Edwardian cricketer Jack Crawford and South African Russell Endean. Unfortunately, Michael cannot be with us this afternoon but has sent us his DVD.

The Autumn edition of *The Journal of the Cricket Society* includes an interesting distanced conversation between Michael Burns and David Sydenham, the former Surrey left-arm fast-medium bowler of the 1950s and 1960s.

### Wednesday 12 January 2022 – Report

Members enjoyed a splendid afternoon in the company of Stephen Chalke. His subject was Characters of the 1950s. It was now a different and better world but there was a romanticism to that decade which still appealed. He recalled his coaching sessions with the former Somerset bowler, Ken Biddulph, after which the latter regaled him with stories of the cricketers of his era. These tales drew Stephen into the game and were to provide the catalyst for his writing and publishing career. He then described his diverting interviews with the irrepressible Bomber Wells, (Gloucestershire and Nottinghamshire).

The wealth of material was considerable and was later incorporated into *One More Run*, that marvellous evocation of the Cheltenham Cricket Festival. In the course of those interviews, Bomber mentioned Alan Rayment, with whom Society members will be very familiar. He mentioned that Alan always seemed to be enjoying the game and that he ran a Dancing School in Southampton. And so, Stephen went to interview him; their initial session lasted some six hours, such were the fund of stories which were different from the norm. The background to Alan's posthumous biography, which Stephen completed, was described in January's Newsletter.

He also spent some time describing his powerful biography of Bob Appleyard. The former Yorkshire bowler was a cricketer of great character who overcame monumental and heart rending childhood tragedies and health problems which formed his single-minded personality. He was a reluctant subject but the outcome *No Coward Soul*, was greeted with universal praise.

He also produced a biography in association with Nigel Howard, formerly of Middlesex, Secretary of both Lancashire and Surrey and a manager of three MCC tours: to India, Pakistan, and then that marvellously successful and memorable one to Australia in 1954-55. At the time, he was in declining health and another reticent interviewee.

However, Stephen, in *At The Heart of English Cricket*, revealed a man of great humanity and insight, whose stories covered much of the twentieth century.

It was a nostalgic afternoon. Virtually every County received a mention. Any afternoon in the company of Stephen Chalke is always an immersive experience. He demonstrated, once again, that he is a born raconteur.

The meeting marked a return, after almost three years, to Test Valley Golf Club. Their hosting arrangements were warm, attentive and exemplary. It was good to be back.

The meeting was also memorable in that friends of Alan Rayment came to listen to Stephen Chalke, who often brought them into the conversation. On a personal note, it was great to meet again, and talk to, Maurice Smith, who was the Society's first Hon. Treasurer. Memorable times.

## **NEW SIGNINGS**

### **BEN BROWN**

Ben Brown has joined Hampshire from neighbours Sussex. He still had two years left on his contract there but having indicated that he was feeling unsettled, Sussex agreed to release him.

For much of his career, he has been one of the most defensible batters in the country. Technically sound, he genuinely builds an innings. Early on, he assesses the wicket and the bowling, before expanding his range of strokes. There are no frills. His business is to score runs as safely as possible. Usually, batting at seven, he rescued the Sussex innings time and again throughout his career at Hove. In recent years it has seemed at times that *he was* the Sussex batting. Freed from the cares of wicket-keeping and captaincy towards the end of last season, he batted first wicket down, and eventually averaged 51 in scoring 976 runs. He scored four centuries, three of which after he moved up the order.

Upon his departure, he stepped into a select pantheon of outstanding Sussex wicket-keeper/ batsmen with Jim Parks and Matthew Prior. They were undoubtedly more attractive stroke-makers but Ben Brown stood comparison in his contribution to the side.

**BEN CHRISTOPHER BROWN** was born in Crawley on 23 November 1988. He was educated at Ardingly College and was on the Sussex staff since the age of 16. He made his first-class debut in one match against Sri Lanka A in 2007. At the time, he was first-choice wicket-keeper for the England Under-19 side. Among his contemporaries were Liam Dawson, Adam Lyth, Chris Woakes, Steve Finn and Tom Westley.

With Matt Prior normally in residence behind the stumps, he did not play again for the first team until 2010 when, opening the innings, he scored a maiden first-class century against Cambridge University at Fenner's. A further hundred, against Derbyshire at Horsham, followed towards the end of the season. He then shared the gloves with Prior and Andrew Hodd in 2013. In the following season, he made his highest first-

class score of 163 against Durham at Hove; in the process, he added 335 for the sixth wicket with Luke Wright (189), a Sussex record. He was also capped during the year. He captained the County in a time of almost endless transition from 2012 until the start of last summer. Sometimes the batting was weak and the bowling strong, and vice-versa.

Whilst he has appeared in List A and Twenty20 matches, his forte is the four day game. Such is his ability with the bat and as a wicket-keeper, it is perhaps surprising that he never gained representative honours. All of his 157 first-class appearances have been for Sussex.

Hampshire supporters will have seen very little of him. He has played in only four matches against his new County. In the second in 2015 he and Wright dug their side out of a hole by sharing a sixth wicket partnership of 163 (Wright 96; Brown 144 not out) after they had slipped to 128 for five.

His future role for Hampshire is intriguing. As a top-order batsman or wicket-keeper/batsman he will be worth his place. Will he be stand-in captain whilst James Vince is away? His presence will strengthen Hampshire immeasurably.

To date, he has scored 8647 runs (avge 40.41), including 22 centuries and 44 fifties. He has held 434 catches and effected 21 stumpings. He also has a wicket to his name. He took the gloves off to dismiss Graham Napier at Colchester in 2016, to bring an end to a hectic eighth wicket partnership of 131 in 28 overs, as the match had long since lost any interest.

## **ROSS WHITELEY**

Hampshire have also signed Ross Whitely on a 3-year white ball contract. He is a forcing left-handed middle-order batter who has now chosen to concentrate on white ball cricket. He has much experience in that format of the game. He was in the Worcestershire Rapids side that won the T20 Blast final in 2018. Hampshire will also have undoubtedly been influenced by his unbeaten 44 off 19 balls for Southern Brave against Birmingham Phoenix in the inaugural final of The Hundred, at Lord's, last season. James Vince was, of course, captain of the Southern Brave side.

Whiteley has also played for Sylhet Sixers in the Bangladesh Premier league and Multan Sultans in the Pakistan Super League. (Vince has also played for the Sultans though his time with the franchise did not overlap). In the last few months, he turned out for the Northern Warriors in the T10 competition in Abu Dhabi. He has therefore become the personification of the modern cricketer, by taking the opportunity to extend his career, in white ball cricket.

He has played in 153 T20 matches, and possesses a handsome strike rate of 141.87.

He has reserved two of his most vivid performances against Yorkshire, the County of his birth. His highest score is 95 not out (off 36 balls including 11 sixes) for Worcestershire in 2015. Two years later he hit six sixes in an over against them!

**ROSS ANDREW WHITELEY** was born in Sheffield on 13 September 1988. Educated at Repton School, he originally played for Derbyshire (2008-13), before joining Worcestershire.

### **NICK GUBBINS IN ZIMBABWE**

Nick Gubbins has been making an impression for Tuskers in the Logan Cup in Zimbabwe this winter. At the time of writing, he has played in two matches. In the first, he returned career best figures of four for 41 against Eagles at the Old Hararians ground in Harare. In the second, he scored 174 against Mountaineers at Harare Sports Club. Both matches were drawn.

Members may recall that he enjoyed a fine all-round match for Hampshire against Sussex in the Royal London Cup at the Ageas Bowl last summer. First, he made 131 not out and then took four for 38 with leg-breaks to cement Hampshire's hold. All his victims were bowled. His fourth wicket was the crucial one of Travis Head, Man of the Series, in the recent Ashes rubber. The former Ventnor player was just beginning to accelerate and look threatening.

### **JAMES VINCE AND LIAM DAWSON IN THE WEST INDIES**

James Vince played in all five of England's T20 matches in Bridgetown, Barbados in January, scoring 123 runs (avge 24.60). By far his best innings was 55 off only 35 balls in the deciding match. It was vintage Vince. His timing and placement were sublime as he continually bisected the field with no apparent effort. Whether it was the introduction of spin, or the ball going soft, or a combination of both, he suddenly lost his timing. He decided to adopt a more violent approach but was caught on the boundary. It remained the highest individual score of the match. He has now played 17 international games, which means he is still quite inexperienced at that level. It must be hoped that he is afforded more opportunities. Directly after the series, both he and Liam Dawson flew to Pakistan to join the Quetta Gladiators and Islamabad United respectively in their Super League.

Liam Dawson bowled economically in the first match (4 overs for 12) but after conceding 13 runs off his only over in the next, he was omitted for the rest of the series. He scored two and four in his two innings. He has now made eight T20 appearances in his international career

### **DON CROSSLEY**

Members will be sad to learn that Don Crossley passed away in a Hedge End nursing home on 5 February, aged 83. Don was a long-standing member of the Society, a regular attender of meetings until his health declined, and also served on the Committee. He also addressed the Society in March 1988 and made occasional contributions to the Newsletter.

His interests in the game were wide ranging, whether as a player, administrator, historian, collector, and spectator. He was born in Blackburn, which was the catalyst for his lifelong affinity with the Lancashire Leagues. He always spoke with some authority on the feats of the West Indian Everton Weekes, who created a number of league batting records during the 1950's. He made a nostalgic tour of the County a few years ago to renew acquaintance with the grounds.

His family subsequently moved to Essex. The match in which he watched the Australians score 721 in a day's play at Southend in 1948 was life changing. He was bewitched by Don Bradman, who made 187. The great Australian run scorer always remained his favourite player thereafter. In due course, he corresponded with him; he sold his valuable cache of those letters a few years ago. Though a Hampshire member, Essex cricket was always dear to his heart.

During a career at sea and then portfolio working, he never lost the opportunity to visit and talk to the legends of the game, particularly those who played in the immediate post-war era. He would travel far and wide to do so. In an article for the Newsletter in 2016, he recalled a trip to Knypersley in the early 70's, to call upon Frank Tyson, who had decimated the Australians on the tour of 1954/55. Don always thought that Tyson was the fastest bowler he ever saw. He had actually batted against him for a few balls in the nets as a 13-year-old at Middleton – allegedly without wearing pads, gloves or a box!

Don was a very technically correct left-handed batsman, who played most of his career for Hursley Park. He later served on the Club's committee as secretary and fixture secretary, a busy task in those days, with league fixtures on Saturdays, Sunday matches, a number of midweek games, as well as evening league. Because of his formative years watching Lancashire League he was always a great supporter of league cricket. He was a well-known character on Hampshire club grounds. He held dear the traditions of the game, but was far removed from being a die-hard supporter, stuck in the past. He had been an advocate of city franchises for some forty years, though this was long before the advent of T20 cricket.

He was co-founder of the Cricket Memorabilia Society and became Vice-President. He was an astute collector, always sensitive to the fluctuations in value of various items. His book and autograph collections were extensive. One item which he purchased was a Wisden which, unbeknown to him, had been hollowed out to include a valuable gold chain (since auctioned). He also supported the Cricket Society movement as a whole. He always enjoyed his visits to Hurn for meetings of the Dorset Cricket Society. When watching cricket, he invariably wore his Hursley Park sweater. For formal occasions, he would take Sir Leonard Hutton's England blazer from his wardrobe.

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