

HAMPSHIRE CRICKET SOCIETY

Patrons: Shaun Udal James Tomlinson Kevan James

NEWSLETTER NO. 444 – MARCH 2026

WEDNESDAY 11th MARCH 2026 – MEETING

The Society extends a warm welcome to **Ricky Ellcock** to this afternoon's meeting. He has quite a tale to relate. Born in St. Thomas, Barbados, his innate talent as a fast bowler resulted in him gaining a place at the prestigious Combermere School – alma mater to Sir Frank Worrell, and then on a scholarship to Malvern College. After a career in county cricket, he trained to be a pilot and was the first black captain of an aircraft with Virgin Atlantic.

He made his debut for Worcestershire in 1982, whilst still only 17 years old. His career was seriously dogged by injury and he eventually moved to Middlesex for the 1989 season. He did not appear until June, but went on to claim a season's best 32 wickets at under 20 apiece, which included a career best five for 35 against Yorkshire at Headingley. England were touring the West Indies in the ensuing winter and were seeking genuine fast bowlers. He therefore made the touring party, along with Devon Malcolm. He was obviously fast; at our last meeting, Chris Broad averred that the fastest spell he ever faced, albeit briefly, was from our speaker. Unfortunately, he only bowled a few balls in the nets at the start of the tour before suffering a stress fracture of the back. He missed all of the following season. He made a comeback in 1991 but retired mid-season when it became evident that his back would not be able to withstand the strains of county cricket.

He then disappeared from view in the cricket world until the publication of his autobiography *Balls To Fly* (Fairfield Books 2025). It is a riveting story.

RICARDO McDONALD ELLCOCK was born in Redmans Village, St. Thomas, Barbados on 17 June 1965. He played in 46 first-class matches, taking 117 wickets (avge. 29.01).

WEDNESDAY 18th FEBRUARY 2026 – REPORT

Chris Broad entertained the largest audience for some years with recollections of his career. His ambition was to play county cricket and, being a Bristolian, he was very proud to wear the attractive Gloucestershire sweater. He played there with Mike Procter, Zaheer Abbas and Sadiq Mohammad. He regarded Zaheer as an artistic batsman, capable of playing three shots off the same ball. He opened the innings with Sadiq, from whom he learnt much. Our speaker regarded him as a “lovely guy”. He relished playing fast bowling. His job was too see off the new ball. He admitted he was not so good against spin.

He left Gloucestershire as he felt he was not being challenged enough. He joined Nottinghamshire; where the presence of Clive Rice, Richard Hadlee, Derek Randall and Eddie Hemmings would improve his game. He made his test debut within two months of joining his new County. He wondered whether this would have occurred had he remained with Gloucestershire.

Throughout his career he remained a provocative, single-minded and passionate individual. He made no bones about refusing to walk in Pakistan and to knocking over stumps when he was dismissed in Australia (see previous Newsletter). These incidents seemed to be an integral part of his character, as was falling out with his County captains. However, he held Clive Rice in the highest regard; he was always challenging the members of his team.

He returned to Gloucestershire at the end of his career where after two years, in a conversation with his captain Courtney Walsh, he admitted that there had been a falling off in his fielding prowess. He therefore retired.

His re-entry to the test arena as a match referee was interesting. He was asked by the ICC, who were then based at Lord's, if he would be interested in the post. He asked what it would entail but was met with a somewhat elusive response. Nevertheless, he attended the interview, whereupon it was clear that he was virtually free to write his own job description. The only downside was that he would be unable to officiate in England.

He was immensely proud of his son's achievements. It was evident that the pair shared many of the same personality traits. He felt his greatest moment in the game was to call at Stuart's house to share a bottle of red wine, on their own, upon the latter's retirement.

In a talk of almost an hour and a half, Chris Broad, sporting a beard these days, held his audience in thrall with his "fly on the wall" stories, laced with much humour.

HAMPSHIRE PREVIEW 2026

It is impossible to assess Hampshire's prospects for the coming season without recalling the events at the end of last season. They imploded during September, and but for Durham's spectacular collapse against Yorkshire in their final match, the County would have been relegated. As it was, they survived by a single point. The eight point deduction that was applied at the end of the season for failing "to prepare the best quality pitch that they could" in their home defeat to Sussex *in May* did not help their cause, but there many fault lines in their performances throughout the summer. They won only two matches, one of which was at home against Yorkshire in the first match of the season.

The problems were easy to indentify. They won only 12 batting bonus points, the same as bottom-placed Worcestershire. Without James Vince, they generally scored their runs at a torpid rate. Only five men scored centuries, one of whom was their Indian temporary middle-order batting recruit Tilak Varma. Have the problems been rectified?

One plus point was that in the last two months of the season, Ali Orr showed definite signs of coming to terms with first division cricket. He enjoyed a successful One-Day Cup campaign, scoring three centuries, and adopted a more disciplined approach in the Championship. The enigmatic Joe Weatherley suffered a long-term injury in mid-season, after making two half-centuries at the top of the order in his only two matches. Opening the innings in the Championship is a very difficult task but if two of Fletcha Middleton, Weatherley and Orr can find some consistency and form a reliable opening partnership, then the later batting could prosper.

The presence of Australian Jake Lehmann should strengthen the middle order. He has experience of English conditions, albeit briefly, with Yorkshire and Lancashire. He is 34 years old and should know his

game. He has been one of the most consistent batsmen in the Sheffield Shield in the last four years.

The worrying issue is that Hampshire felt they had to recruit a man in his mid-thirties when they have such highly talented batsmen in Tom Prest, Toby Albert and Ben Mayes on the staff. Prest has four first-class centuries to his credit, but his batting was very undisciplined last season. In these days of Bazball, the most negative issue is that batsmen do not appear to value their wicket. So batsmen coming through the system possess staggering flair, confidence and a variety of strokes; the issue is balancing these assets and attributes, whilst at the same time retaining their wicket. Most young batsmen have a difficult season as they develop. Let us hope that he can now move on positively to Hampshire's and his own benefit. Toby Albert enjoyed a wonderful season in t20 cricket last summer, culminating in an appearance in The Hundred, but made only one half century in ten first-class matches. He is a better batsman than that. His maiden first-class century against then County Champions, Surrey, was unforgettable as he personified patience. His second, against Essex at the Rose Bowl in 2024 was just as memorable, On that occasion, in partnership with Prest, he rendered the Essex bowling helpless. Not even Simon Harmer wanted to bowl to either of them. And now Hampshire have Ben Mayes, clearly another prodigy waiting in the wings. The editor feels that Hampshire's stock of young batsmen has never been so full, and exciting.

Ben Brown brought all his experience to bear last season, and rescued the batting time and again. Given all the off-field issues, he had much on his plate and responded supremely well. In the four-day game, Nick Gubbins, endured a blip as the season progressed; more than most he has to adjust to the vagaries of the programme, as he rarely plays t20 cricket. Continuity is always an issue for him.

As for the bowling, the great Kyle Abbott is returning for another year. It must be hoped that this brave, whole-hearted and highly skilled operator stays fit for another season. The Australian Michael Neser, who enjoyed a notable Ashes series, was originally signed for the first five matches, but his registration was withdrawn by Cricket Australia in the first week of March.

Hampshire reacted smartly in signing the West Indian fast bowler, **Jayden Seales**, within 24 hours. He will be available for the first six matches. He has been successful with Sussex in the last two seasons and has held a regular place in the West Indies side since his test debut

in 2021. For Sussex, his presence undoubtedly helped the bowlers at the other end. If he and Abbott gel together, then it opens up all sorts of possibilities.

(For the record, **JAYDEN NIGEL TRISTAN SEALES** was born in Trinidad and Tobago on 10 September 2001. He made his first-class debut for West Indies A against New Zealand A at Nelson (NZ) in December 2020. His next match was his first test appearance against South Africa at Gros Islet, St. Lucia in June 2021, when he took three for 75 in SA's only innings. His third Test was against Pakistan at Kingston, Jamaica two months later, when he claimed three for 70 and five for 55 and won the Player of the Match Award as the West Indies won by one wicket. He was at the wicket with Kemar Roach when the winnings runs were scored. No fewer than half of his first-class appearances (26 out of 52) have been in the test arena. His best figures to date are six for 61 (9-106) against South Africa at the Guyana National Stadium, Providence, in 2004).

Brad Wheal and James Fuller are faithful allies to Abbott. Fuller's pace always unsettles batsmen, and only Abbott took more than his 35 wickets last season. Wheal is due a stellar season.

Scott Currie was successful with both bat and ball when with Leicestershire in 2024 but was injured for much of last summer. He is highly regarded in white ball cricket; his performances in The Hundred attracted compliments all round and he was selected for the Lions in the winter. His attitude is exemplary. If he is struck for boundaries, he merely shrugs his shoulder and marches back to his mark. He doesn't dwell on misfortunes. There are no histrionics. If only there were more like him.

As with batsmen, Hampshire have a supply of young bowling talent. James Turner, Ed Jack and Sonny Baker are exciting prospects, though it is probably too much to expect of them at this stage of their careers. Jack and Baker may also be called upon by England representative sides. Hampshire may find themselves at the whim of the selectors more than they wish. Let us hope Turner remains injury-free. Manny Lumsden was influential in the Under-19 World Cup until the Final against India at the Harare Sports Club, where he ran into the truly precocious 14 year old Vaibhav Suryavanshi (175 off 80 balls opening the innings). He is, though, only sixteen years old and it would be surprising if he plays in the Championship.

And so to the spinners. Liam Dawson was given the confidence of the England selectors in white ball cricket in the winter and responded accordingly in the t20 World Cup. Just how much he will be available in County cricket is conjectural at the moment. Unfortunately, he received a mauling in the t20 semi-final in the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai, where the boundaries were ridiculously short. But so did all the other bowlers on both sides, apart from Jasprit Bumrah.

England do not start their season until June and so he should be available in April and May. He is a towering figure with both bat and ball in the County game. .

Felix Organ's late order runs are always invaluable but has been required to play second fiddle to Dawson with the ball for some years. Perhaps with more opportunities, he will develop. As demonstrated against Surrey at the Utilita Bowl in 2025, he is capable of running through sides on spin responsive surfaces.

Hampshire's other spin bowler is Andrew Neal who was so reliable in last summer's One Day Cup. It will be surprising if he does not come into the reckoning in Championship cricket at some stage.

As usual, looking ahead to the season is a matter of ifs and buts. Winning the County Championship looks well beyond them. There are a number of very strong sides in the competition; all Counties have sought to strengthen their sides. If the young batsmen and bowlers are able to kick on and consolidate their place then it will be a bonus, as will be to avoid a repetition of last season's fright.

NORMAN GIFFORD OBITUARY

Norman Gifford, the former Worcestershire and Warwickshire slow left-arm bowler died on 19 January 2026. He spoke to the Society at our inaugural meeting in Portsmouth (Portsmouth Rugby Club) on 20 November 1991. He recalled his first-class debut when Worcestershire were beaten by Kent in a single day at Tunbridge Wells in 1960 (Kent 187 - Gifford 4 for 63); Worcestershire 25 and 61).

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