



# The Cricket Society

## THE CRICKET SOCIETY AT 75

My first vivid memory of watching cricket was a visit to Lord's in September 1963 to see Sussex play Worcestershire in the first Gillette Cup Final. I sat on a rug alongside my Godfather and older brother on the grass at the Nursery End, amidst picnic and a thermos of hot tea to keep us warm as the rain came down towards evening.

It was a joyous occasion, not just because Sussex emerged in the twilight as winners, but more because it has served as an example of all the good cricket does for our soul and well-being. A game which unfolds slowly, even the shorter forms, lends itself to friendship and conversation. A newspaper, or indeed a book, can be

read during quieter periods, between overs, or as the bowler plods back to the end of his run-up. The tempo of cricket allows for this and provides variety to the day. Picnic lunches and teas, whether on the village green or at great Test match grounds become as much a highlight of the day as the cricket itself.

I say all this not as some sort of romantic but because I believe this empathy with the game is what The Cricket Society is all about: friendship and good company often long after playing days are over; and an antidote to loneliness, a condition that has recently come into much sharper focus and for which Society meetings, lunches and dinners continue to be such reassuring get-togethers.

Long may this be the case. Seventy five years is a fine achievement made possible by devoted and selfless volunteers - secretaries, chairmen, treasurers and even Presidents! But, above all, it is you the Members who have provided the energy, expertise and love for the game that has made this Society such a successful and happy one. It has stood firm through so many changes and much evolution within the game and the world outside.

And now it continues to stand firm and true through this most recent crisis and shows that the resolute strength of our membership will overcome any threat that is cast in its path and enable it to adapt its ways in the spirit of the Society's culture.

**John Barclay DL**, *Eleventh President of The Cricket Society*

## THE CRICKET SOCIETY AS I SEE IT

A lot has changed in cricket since The Cricket Society was formed in November 1945. That was around 25 years before the first ODI match, 60 years before the first T20 match and 75 years before the planned Hundred at a time where not much first-class cricket had been played due to the Second World War.

When we were formed there was only one form of high level cricket – first class - being played. Now there is a broad variety. I liken cricket to music. Test matches are grand opera, the County Championship is classical, the 50 over game is rock. T20 is more modern so that's metal. And the Hundred? Well, that's so new that's grime. There are lots of different styles to choose from – go for one or all but accept that people's tastes will vary and be tolerant. "Don't criticise what you don't understand" ... to keep my music theme going.

The Cricket Society should be a progressive society that embraces all forms of the men's game. And increasingly women's cricket. As shorter forms of the game become more popular they will become the life-bread of our Counties, particularly in these extraordinary times we find ourselves in. We need to move with the times but relish our past too. There's plenty of space for Beethoven and Mozart on our playlists, along with Led Zeppelin and Metallica, and probably a bit of Stormzy too.

Recently we have had regular on-line broadcasts, our publications, the website, and a half season for the Society XI. I look forward to having back our meetings in four locations, our awards and other Lunches, events such as film nights, and an annual away trip following England. We need both to keep all you existing members and recruit some new ones. I relish the advent of our planned new website with a wider range of material and the ability to pay on-line for membership, attendance at events, and any cricket merchandise that attracts.

Who knows what cricket, and all sport more generally, might become as we take toll after the coronavirus pandemic has ended? But with the 75th anniversary upon us, we – the broad church that is our Society with varying tastes - will still be here to enjoy, dissect and debate cricket modern and ancient.

**Mick Kelly**

## A MEMBER SINCE 1951



Peter Wynne-Thomas, cricket writer, historian and the Trent Bridge librarian, says he was a shy and introverted seventeen-year-old when he joined the Cricket Society in 1951 nearly 70 years ago. Now he is an outgoing, good-humoured eighty-something year old with a fund of stories about his life in cricket. Cricket Society Chair Nigel Hancock and I were honoured to meet Peter, who has been at the forefront of cricket writing and research for over 50 years, and talk to him about the early days of the Society.

Nigel asked Peter first about his award of the British Empire Medal in 2019 "for services to cricket and the community of Nottinghamshire". Peter was awarded the medal by the Lord Lieutenant of Nottinghamshire and attended a Garden Party at Buckingham Palace with his wife, Edith. He sees it as a great honour and says an award for his kind of work is exceedingly rare.

Why did it take until 1945 for the Cricket Society to be formed? Peter said that statisticians are introverts and not social - "I spent all my time burrowing in libraries". Peter joined the Society in 1951 when he was still at school. He supported Nottinghamshire having moved to the county

when he was a young boy and he compiled the Notts averages every year. His first visit to Trent Bridge was in 1949 to see the New Zealanders. Joe Hardstaff scored a century and was his hero.

The Cricket Society met every month at the White Horse pub off Fleet Street. Peter was an eighteen-year-old architectural student living at the YMCA in London. No one talked to him at these small informal meetings and cricket in the 1920's and 1930's was the main topic of discussion. Peter remembers large well-attended meetings at Kingsway Hall with Arthur Langford and Douglas Jardine - "I can't remember what he said" - and a q & a with Len Hutton.

Peter met many cricket writers and historians through the Cricket Society including John Arlott, Jim Coldham and Irving Rosenwater, and some founder members: Geoffrey Copinger, Gerald Brodribb, Charles Oliver and Frank Peach as well as Eric Snow, and AH Wagg who kept his cricket collection locked from his wife. Another early member was Leslie Gutteridge who owned Epworth Books in London's City Road where he housed the Society library. Peter haunted Gutteridge's shop in the 1950's building up his cricket book collection, and had a long association with Rowland Bowen - "I always called him Major Bowen" - contributing to his Cricket Quarterly.

In the 1960's Peter started research on a book on Nottinghamshire cricketers (1821-1914) because "I wondered who the people were behind the statistics". His writing career had begun and gradually that took over from his career in architecture. The book won the Cricket Society Book of the Year Award in 1971. He spent time researching in the dusty corners of Somerset House, visited Nottinghamshire villages and knocked on people's doors. After an intervention from John Arlott, the then Chairman of Notts who was also the Company Secretary of Boots, Dick Milnes, agreed to print the book at Boots' own print works. Peter says Arlott was so helpful to everybody: "He was brilliant. I was a nobody and he helped with my book."

The offer to run the Trent Bridge Library came in 1978 from Milnes, when Notts were left a collection of 8000 books. Now named the Peter Wynne-Thomas Library and with 17000 books, it is the second biggest cricket library in the world. Normally he works five days a week but currently he is there once a week answering written correspondence. He has no assistant so the Library is shut when he is away on holiday. He has not been ill in 42 years.

Peter was a founder member of the ACS and Secretary for over 30 years, retiring in 2006. Of other cricket writers, Peter mentioned Duncan Hamilton who dedicated his recent book to him, Richard Hobson, Michael Henderson, Eric Midwinter, Gideon Haigh, David Frith and Stephen Chalke.

**Nick Tudball**

## BATTING WITH A BUDDY

"It's a great team game, it helps you make good friends. And it's a nice feeling if you can get a good partnership going with a buddy." Daniel Wright, at 10 years old The Cricket Society's youngest member, so explained his interest in cricket, which began when he was five or six. One of his two cricket-following uncles, Timothy Wilson, arranged his nephew's membership of our Society earlier in 2020. Dan has been netting at weekends with Kew Cricket Club and has played for their under-11 team; he opens the batting but also likes to bowl. He also plays at his school, Kew College. A trial at Surrey due this summer has had to be postponed but, added his Mum, "Dan's had a good cricketing year, despite Covid."

Who does Dan follow and how? "I suppose I'm a Surrey supporter. And Arsenal. I like all forms of cricket and follow the scores and watch highlights on Sky TV when I can. I was being taken to see England v West Indies this summer but that was not of course possible. I read *The Cricketer* every month and like books about playing techniques." What would he like The Cricket Society to provide for youngsters like him, and who is his favourite player? "Joe Root, he's good in all formats and I love to watch him when he gets going. You could arrange a day when all my heroes come in and I get their autographs."

The Cricket Society has a good record when it comes to identifying and rewarding talented young cricketers. They include, of the current England men's Test team, Stuart Broad at 19 and Rory Burns and Chris Woakes at 21. Let's hope that Daniel Wright follows in their footsteps and that this interview was the first of many.

**Nigel Hancock**



## THE SOCIETY SAW THE FUTURE



Derek Pringle (1977)



Neil Fairbrother and Mike Atherton (1983)





Nick Knight with Min Patel and Matt Walker (1989)



Our President John Barclay (1969)



Mark Ramprakash, along with Neil Lenham (Sussex) and Justin Benson (Leicestershire and Ireland) (1985)



Beth MacGregor (Essex and England) (2009)

## LUMINARIES



The Three Amigos – Vice-Presidents Sir Tim Rice and Vic Marks flanking current Chair Nigel Hancock



Our ninth President Hubert Doggart with Vic Marks at a BOTY dinner at Lord's



Vice-President Derek Underwood at our Day at the Cricket at Canterbury



CMJ (President No 10)

## VIEW FROM THE BRANCHES

**West of England Branch** The West of England branch began life in the winter of 1964-65. Held in the evenings in the pavilion of the Bath Cricket Club, the speaker meetings attracted an audience of about 40. There was also an annual dinner and a cricket quiz contested by teams from local clubs. For many years the Cricket Society forbade any payment of speakers, even to the extent that when the branch persuaded the former England captain Bob Wyatt, by then in his 80s, to come up from Cornwall, the national treasurer queried the bill for his overnight stay in a modest hotel.

There was a lively evening when a trio of former Somerset players – Harold Gimblett, Horace Hazell and Bill Andrews – shared their memories, and an even livelier one some years later when Brian Close drove down from Yorkshire. There must have been 100 packed into the room, and the air turned blue as Close did not hold back. Lowest attendance was the four who battled through snow and ice to hear Arthur Milton, who with typical generosity chatted for an hour, then came back the following month.

Bunty Longrigg, the former Somerset captain, chaired the meetings for some years, and there were people of great cricketing pedigree in the audience, but by the turn of the century the attendance was dwindling. The committee grew old together, a sense of decline hung over it all, and in the spring of 2011 the branch was wound up. Five years later it was decided to give it another go, this time with the meetings in the afternoon. Peter Robinson came up from Taunton, there was great relief when more than 40 people turned up, and a committee was formed.

Some magical afternoons followed – Fred Rumsey, Mark Alleyne, Mike Procter, Farokh Engineer, John Holder, John Barclay – and word spread. People arrived by train from Taunton and Torquay, Weymouth and Oxford, even London. Within two years the branch was moving to the Widcombe Social Club with a capacity of 170. Then, with numbers exceeding 220 for the visits of Micky Stewart, Mike Brearley and Mike Gatting, the next-door church was hired. “We’ll be needing the Theatre Royal soon,” one member observed.

Five minutes before the start of the Mike Brearley meeting the chairman was on his knees, wiping down fold-up pews that he had pulled out of a dusty cupboard. At the end of the afternoon, as the chairs were stacked and heaved away, the branch treasurer surveyed the scene: “What we could do with now,” he said, “is a couple of bad speakers.”

Old friends meet up monthly, some making a day of it in the pub before and after, and every speaker – though no longer unpaid – has been great value. We put them at ease with an interview format, the questions from the audience are intelligent and varied, and the result is good cricket talk, plenty of laughter and an uplifting atmosphere. May we gather again before long. As cricket lovers in winter, we need our monthly dose of good cheer.

### Stephen Chalke

**Midlands Branch** Although an absence of committee minutes, contemporaneous reports or collective memory for the period before about 1970 means some of this is has to be conjecture, the history of the Midlands Branch feels a bit like the batting performance of my recent fantasy eleven. Top order (late 1940’s and 1950’s) great start and steady consolidation, middle order collapse (1960’s and early 1970’s) and then the tail (since about 1972) making good late order runs.

The Branch was in a pretty poor state in the late sixties and early seventies and was eventually revived by a new Chairman, Kendall Adie, who sadly died in office and was succeeded by John Bridgman, who served as Chairman for over thirty years. They were helped and supported by a number of able secretaries including the Gallimore cousins, Les Bishop, “Red” Walker and Robert Brooke.

Apart from a relatively short period when meetings were held in an upstairs room at the Selly Park Tavern and one foray into the Black Country with a meeting at Smethwick Cricket Club (where the guest was renowned jazz musician and cricket author Benny Green), meetings continue to be held at Edgbaston.

Amongst the well over five hundred guests at meetings since the start, the branch has welcomed a whole host of international and county cricketers, authors (some of whom have chosen to launch new books at our meetings), cricket officials, journalists and broadcasters, and, at least three cricketing clergymen. Thoughts of one evening in my time as Chairman still raise the hairs on my neck. The guest was Peter Baxter, then recently retired as TMS producer, who came armed with his old radio sound desk and a myriad of recordings. It was so evocative to sit looking out across the Edgbaston outfield listening to commentary from the famous Cowdrey/May Test against the West Indies in 1957, summing up for me what the Cricket Society is all about - sparking great memories for those who were there that day, informing and entertaining those who were not, and bringing us all together to celebrate our great game.

### Mike Williams

**Durham and North East Branch** Originally existing as the North East Branch until 1985, the Durham and North East Branch is in its second incarnation. In 1995 John Bridgman (Midlands Branch) wrote to Don Robson (Chairman, Durham CCC) suggesting a revival and Roy Storer and I took that forward, with assistance from Eric Budd the then national society’s secretary. Branch rules were formulated, new members were obtained through local advertising and a committee was formed.

The first meeting was held in November 1995 with David Graveney, Durham’s First Class captain, in a Q and A session with me. There were 207 attendees including all board members of Durham CCC. Meetings continued on the first Thursday of each month from October to April. The final meeting became the Annual Dinner which was initially held at County Hall, Durham, as the Riverside was not then able to provide catering facilities. Attendance at meeting regularly topped 100. A tablecloth was bought, paid for by Durham CCC directors, and all subsequent speakers have signed and dated the cloth. Attendances numbered 70 plus for the first 10 years.

After ten years Roy Storer retired as secretary and Ian Jackson succeeded him. Ian’s enthusiasm was soon evident and the branch continued to thrive. His untimely death in 2008 aged 53, whilst Chairman of the national society, was a shock and left a huge hole at the Branch. The Society’s ‘spirit of cricket’ Ian Jackson Award reflects his stature. Michael Gauntlett became secretary and remained in post until his retirement in 2017 to be replaced by Steve Ransome, the current incumbent. I have now completed 25 years as Chairman.

The guest speakers over the years have included many excellent speakers from the world of cricket: those who play or have played, those who love writing about it, and those who organise behind the scenes, including: Graham Gooch, David Boon, David Steel, Jack Simmons, Paul Collingwood, Michael Gough, Mike (MJK) Smith, George Sharp, Norman Gifford, and Stephen Chalke. We have an enthusiastic committee and several potential speakers so we hope that the Branch will continue to flourish into 2021 and beyond.

### Ian Howie