



# SUSSEX CRICKET SOCIETY.

## NEWSLETTER

**FOUNDED: 1965**

**CHAIR: DAVID BOWDEN MBE**

**APRIL 2025 ISSUE 686**

*Any views expressed in the newsletter are those of the writer, not those of the Committee of the Society*

www.sussexcricketsociety.org

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### **Previous 2024/5 speakers**

July 7 Barry Richards

Sept. 25 Jeff Thomson

Oct 23 AGM plus Jon Filby  
& Peter Fitzboyden

Nov 20 John Barclay,  
John Snow &  
Peter Graves

December 11 Christmas  
lunch Graham Gooch  
OBE

January 15, Jonathan  
Agnew MBE

February 19, speaker  
John Simpson, with  
Paul Farbrace

March 19 speaker Vic  
Marks

This month the Society reaches its 60th anniversary having been formed following an initiative by former Sussex player Alan Oakman. Alan wrote the below which appeared in a newsletter supplement celebrating the 50th anniversary.

### **SUSSEX CRICKET SOCIETY - THE BEGINNING**

In the 1950's invitations from Cricket Clubs to speak at their Annual Dinners were popular with both clubs and players. However, towards the end of the 50's and early 60's invitations were being received from Cricket Societies, mainly from the North of England. Cricketers were invited to talk and answer questions. In 1965, during my benefit year, I remember driving home from a Yorkshire Cricket Society evening thinking that we should form a Sussex Cricket Society.

I spoke to Arthur Dumbrell, Secretary of Sussex County Cricket Club, along with Percy Edwards, both of whom were prepared to be involved in forming a society. Jack Arlidge, the Argus cricket reporter, promised to publicise it if interest was shown.

A meeting of any interested members was arranged for 6<sup>th</sup> April 1965 at the County Ground when I showed them a 16mm coloured film of Sussex taken during the previous season. After this I explained to a good attendance how successful cricket societies were with cricket lovers. Unfortunately, I had to leave early to attend a meeting regarding one of my benefit matches, but Arthur Dumbrell and Percy Edwards took over. They phoned me the next morning to report that all the people attending thought it was an excellent idea and from this the Sussex Cricket Society was formed. I am obviously delighted that 50 years later it is still going strong under the Presidency of Kathy Bennett, who was present at the inaugural meeting.

A member of the Sussex Cricket Committee had said to me there was a feeling we were trying to take over the County Club, but I assured him this was not our intention.

During the intervening years, the Sussex Cricket Society has gone from strength to strength and I was honoured to be invited to follow John Langridge as your Patron. I wish the Society continued success.

Alan Oakman, Patron, Sussex Cricket Society



Alan Oakman pictured at the Society's 2015 spring lunch when, he was guest of honour. (Spring and also Autumn lunches were traditions in the Society for many years). Alan's playing career lasted from 1947 to 1968 mainly for Sussex with two tests for England in 1956 one of which was in the famous Jim Laker 19 wickets Test, he took five catches from Laker's bowling.

**Renewals**. Annual renewals were due on the 1st of April, thank you to those who have already renewed. For those yet to do so details on the renewal process and a renewal form were included with the last newsletter. And a brief reminder that this renewal process does not apply to members who either joined or renewed last year via the society website or who are members via the Sussex Cricket Foundation scheme. Any queries contact Chris Scovell

**Death** - it is with sadness we report the death of Society member Mike Connor, Hove who joined the Society in the last year. Our sympathies and condolences go to his family and friends

**2025 First Class Season**. It is the time of the year for cricket followers to look forward often with excitement and relish of going to grounds to see cricket live, meeting with old friends, whereas in recent months for most, certainly me it has been following cricket from abroad, often short format and normally on pay TV. For many Society members the monthly events have possibly been winter high spots for those attending. The English County season is almost upon us. Friendly's out of the way mostly in good weather though the Surrey home game ended with a heavy sea mist and pleasing to see that in particular Dan Hughes after missing much of the last Australian season featured in these. The Championship will be underway by the time this newsletter is issued with Sussex visiting Edgbaston before two home games in successive weeks against Somerset and then defending champions Surrey, the latter over the Easter weekend. For Sussex a season where they can test themselves against the best counties now that they are in Division One and an opportunity to see how far the team has progressed. Some younger individuals for instance Jack Carson and James Coles will look to confirm their progress and development - both have impressed in recent seasons with a real potential for possible higher honours.

On the international front another busy English season in prospect. A headline is possibly the World Test Championship final (11<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> June at Lord's) between South Africa who topped the preliminary qualifying table and Australia. South Africa's qualification owed much to a number of two test series wins in our recent winter. Australia qualified largely based on their victory over India in a five-test series last winter which effectively ruled India out of contention. (In that series Jasprit Bumrah's contributions could not be overstated, his penetrative bowling was a threat throughout and but for injury during the fifth test could possibly have earned a drawn series – he could well be a serious challenge to England this coming summer.)

For England Men in 2025 there is a test match against Zimbabwe in May then a five test series against India in a hectic 45 day period starting on 20<sup>th</sup> June and to finish in the first week of August. (Could this turn out to be a survival of the fittest or won by the team with most depth and resources.) There are also a batch of one day internationals and T20s against both West Indies early on and South Africa returning in September. The Women have two series against West Indies and later on against India. One of the West Indies games will be played under the Hove floodlights on 23<sup>rd</sup> May.

Second Eleven fixtures There is one T20 at Arundel Castle (May 27 versus Kent), another four T20s at Horsham which also hosts two four day Second Eleven Championship games (June 16 v Leics, and 23 v Lancs.). And finally, a three day friendly against South Asia Cricket Academy starting on July 22 also at Horsham. So it looks as though Horsham is now considered as the primary Second Eleven home venue this year, much as it was last season. After the SACA game Sussex have one further championship game at the end of July away to Gloucestershire and two away games in September but none in August. This I think looks like a concerted ECB effort to avoid Second Eleven fixtures during the period of the Hundred, when a number of players would be representing their Counties in the Metro Bank One Day Cup. Some members may be pleased to see the fixtures at Horsham though I'm aware that a number of Hove regulars will miss the opportunity to see the second team at the County Ground, And nothing at Blackstone (possibly it's role is best as a junior /development ground) nor any in the east of the County.

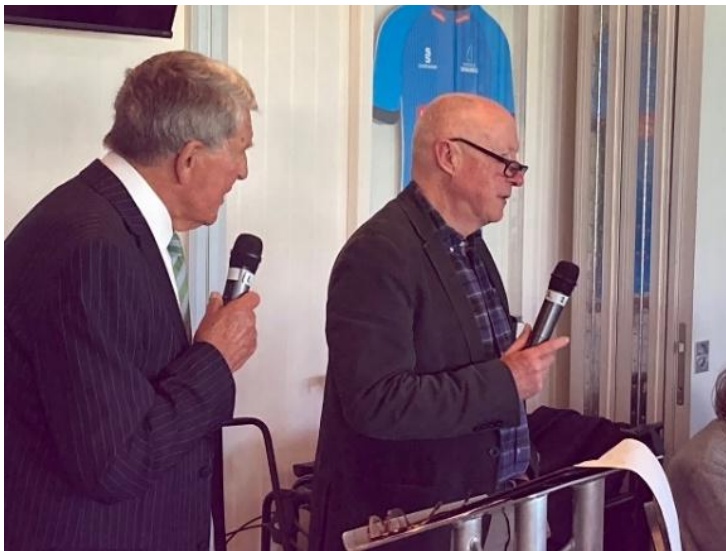
**Newsletter contributions** from members are always welcome on cricketing and Society topics that they would like to share, not least any Society memories going back to the early days? Please send any contributions to Chris Scovell and I will try to include them.

### To begin at the beginning

As Frank first sang to us in 1968, 'And now the end is near and so I face the final curtain.....' And so it is, at least for Society gatherings in 2024/25. Vic Marks was the fifth and final speaker of the season. Ninety five people booked for the event.

For your reviewer at least this was a first. The first being that he could ever remember being at Society event while the Sussex squad were on the field practicing. This gathering co-incided with Sussex Cricket's invitation to members to come and watch the squad's training session. The following day they were off to Hampshire for a pre-season practice match.

### Chair's Introduction



Our chair introduced Vic, by quoting an extract from the ESPN cricket website; ' a mild, nervy self-deprecating farm boy with a (first class) degree from Oxford and no enemies. Vic Marks was the most unlikely member of the fiery Somerset dressing room in the 1980's.' Vic has also been a committee member at Somerset. He played in six test matches, thirty four one day internationals and three hundred and forty two first class games scoring 12,419 runs and taking 859 wickets.

After retiring from playing, Vic became a journalist (The Observer) and a summariser on

Test Match Special (TMS), being both witty and shrewd.

### Vic Marks

Vic shared one additional fact with the gathering. In the 1980's no one on the entire planet conceded as many runs as he had. It was not a great record, but it was his own. He had asked Andy Zaltzman the TMS statistician to check whether it was fact rather than someone, somewhere who had made up – it was and it is.

### Sussex Memories (1)

The first ball Vic ever faced in first class cricket was against John Snow in a game at The Parks. In both innings in that game, he was dismissed by John Spencer.

Vic also roomed with Jim Parks when he spent the last seasons of his career at Somerset.

Vic recalled playing Sussex at Hove. If Somerset were batting, towards the end of play, an (unnamed) nightwatchman would disappear. The prospect of facing Imran and Garth Le Roux was all too much for him.

In the 1980's at Hove in a Benson & Hedges game. Somerset shot Sussex out for 65 in 40.4 overs with both Botham and Garner taking four for not a lot. As the Man of the Match

adjudicator, Arthur Milton could not separate the two, he gave the award to wicketkeeper, Trevor Gard who had taken five catches.

Vic was a late replacement for Steve Finn to summarise at the recent Champions League in Pakistan. Steve had received a better offer to play for England Legends in India. He lasted about seven balls before either his back or hamstring gave out. What will probably be his last ever ball was driven through extra cover by Sachin Tendulkar.

Most of the former cricketers we have heard at Hove in recent times have a reminiscence of Geoffrey Boycott. Vic recalled his England One-day debut against the West Indies in 1980. Boycott scored seventy odd. England won; Boycott was Man of the Match. However, he hadn't stayed until the end. He had left and was on the train to Middlesbrough for Yorkshire's game against Sussex the following day. Forty years ago, the cricketing schedule was relentless. Vic didn't blame Boycott one iota for leaving early.

## Somerset

Boycott however was not his favourite Yorkie. That honour went to Brian Close who was Vic's first County captain at Somerset. He wasn't into psychobabble and always trying to find positives. If you had had a bad day in the field he gave it to you straight. He was an inspirational captain; he knew how to drive a team towards victory; set bizarre fields and bowl unlikely players. Close was a talented sportsman, playing for Arsenal as a barn storming centre forward and a near scratch golfer, both left and righthanded. He could quite an impetuous character. On



one occasion, things weren't going well on the golf course, he left the game and threw his golf bag in to the lake and stormed off. Others carried on got to the lake and noticed a bald headed man swimming in it – it was Close; he'd forgotten that he'd left his car keys in the bag.

Vic thought that it had been an absolute privilege to play with and for him. Viv Richards thought the absolute world of him. Botham likewise although he pretended not to listen to him – he did.

It was happenstance to play with the likes of Close and Richards. You knew that within five minutes that you were with someone who was going to be one of the great players of all time. It wasn't so immediately obvious with Ian. No one would have predicted one hundred Test matches, or the House of Lords.

The Viv you saw on and off the pitch were very different. On the pitch he'd wait before he entered the field with a swagger, tapping the top of his bat, making the bowler wait. All of which would suggest an arrogance. However, off the field. He was quite shy and didn't particularly enjoy the limelight.

## Post Cricket – Sussex Connections - CMJ

Vic recalled working with Christopher Martin-Jenkins. Sussex had reached the final and Robin, his son was made twelfth man. CMJ was about as close to fuming as he could recall. Other than when CMJ was commentating it was often chaos all around him. After he died, Mike Selvey described CMJ as cricket's greatest ever friend.

Towards the end of one summer, journalists had to list their sides for that winter's tour. He asked Vic whether he could/should include Robin in his team. Vic said that probably wasn't a good idea, CMJ thought that he was probably right, but suggested however to Vic that he include Robin in his own squad – he didn't.

CMJ was a very gracious person; very polite. If ever a guest came into the commentary box, albeit a star, celebrity or a youngster doing work experience, he would always be the first to get up, welcome them and make them feel comfortable.

## TMS

One question he is often asked is who was his favourite commentator. He will say Tony Crozier and for one specific episode.

Crozier and Boycott (again) were commentating and summarising. Crozier was finding Boycott's humour a bit tiring. In retaliation for one commentary session Crozier spoke for the entire twenty minutes not allowing Boycott to get in a single word – a first. Ergo – Crozier



Vic thinks Jonathan Agnew is a terrific interviewer. Many of the interviewees he probably doesn't really know or much about them. He'll look people in the eye, he listens and doesn't parrot out questions. He is always very calm and is able to conduct an articulate interview. Politicians like to come on. Teresa May and Ed Miliband have one thing in common – they are both fans of Geoffrey Boycott (a third reference).

Vic finished off with one great story about Rod Eddington, former chief executive of British Airways who was a guest on the View from the Boundary slot. Rod had been up at Oxford with Vic, played cricket for the university and was in the squad to play Cambridge but wasn't selected. You only get a blue when you play against Cambridge. Vic suggested to

Agnew that he didn't mention to Eddington that he had failed to get a blue. Eddington arrives early sitting at the back of the box. Agnew and Vic are commentating. Vic had taken off his jacket as it was a hot day. It slips off the chair, Eddington picks it up and quick as flash, Agnew says spins round in his chair and says, 'still doing those twelfth man duties I see Rod.' – much better in the hearing than the telling.

## Questions From The Floor

**The most memorable wicket** – Vic like most bowlers enjoyed bowling and pitting himself against Geoffrey Boycott and Viv Richards, He never succeeded against Richards but got Boycott out on a couple of occasions. The wonderful thing with Boycott, that even thirty five years later, he still couldn't get his head around one dismissal; stumped Gard, bowled Marks.

**Best Batsman and Bowler** – Batsman, without question, Viv Richards. Bowler, like so many other bowlers of the 1980's. Malcolm Marshall, who could as well as bowling fast could make the ball in swing, and bowl out swingers and cutters.

## Sussex Memories (2)

**Javid** – an amazing batsman. A rarity amongst batsman in that he liked fielders around the bat to enable him to smash the ball through the gaps.



**Imran** – Vic's first season at Oxford was Imran's last. Imran didn't play much cricket that season as amazingly he has his head down studying for his exams. Vic could never work out whether Imran was shy or haughty, as he generally kept himself to himself. He would give a bit to people he viewed as a serious cricketer but tended to ignore the less committed.

Vic's first Test wicket was a controversial dismissal against Pakistan at Leeds, It triggered a decade of ill feeling between the two countries. Imran was way ahead of others by advocated neutral umpires. He was absolutely right.

Comparing Imran and Botham's International career. Even though he continued to take wickets the last eight years of Botham's bowling career was a slow decline whereas Imran a bit like Richard Hadlee and Jimmy Anderson continued to get better and better.

**Joel Garner (Big Bird)** – What a player. Today in the IPL, we would probably be worth \$2m. Somerset won four Lords finals. Garner probably should have been Man of the Match (MoM) of each occasion but never was. He bowled what today is not a popular delivery, the yorker (brilliantly), or at the shoulder of the bat, very accurately with no width. He was like Tom Cartwright on stilts but only 15mph quicker. Garner was the perfect one day bowler who wreaked terror. Barclay against Garner was always fun to watch.

**The Future Of Domestic Cricket** – At the moment no one knows how the amazing amount of money coming to cricket should be used. It is a great time to be a young professional who is good at the white ball game. Vic never had an agent but today, young players need one to work out the opportunities to play in the various franchises around the World.

There is now a weird set up in dressing rooms. On one side you have players contracted to franchises earning £500,000 or more and on the other side those who are equally important on a standard county salary. Today it can be very difficult to manage a dressing room.

There are a lot of parallels between Somerset and Sussex. There is a real risk that players brought through could be seduced by counties hosting The 100 and the bigger salaries on offer. It should never be forgotten that smaller counties have a great role to play not least in their community and social roles.

Counties who are not The 100 hosts are all very fretful. Both Somerset and Sussex are Division One counties – they will have to work out how to stay at the top table. August is now a dead month for county cricket. It's ridiculous as it's the best month to play cricket – this has to be changed.

**Transition From Player to Journalist** – Recently retired from playing, Vic had his eyes opened on his first tour as a journalist to the West Indies in 1980/81. In the Antigua, Test, Viv Richards came into the press box as he had taken exception to something that a journalist had written. Vic was conflicted about what to write about, the cricket or the argument. The dilemma was further exacerbated by his friendship with Richards. He took Scyld Berry's advice and wrote about the events in the press box. As time moved on he didn't worry worried what he said about players or what they thought.

Today you will not find ex-players going into written journalism because a) there are no jobs and b) the pay wouldn't be good enough.

You always find with ex-professional players coming towards the end of their career they always become very amenable towards the press. A job with the BBC or Sky perhaps (other outlets are also available)?

The spat that arose between Alex Harley and the England's Women's team and the team's performance and fitness left Vic somewhat bemused. Because the story became not about the cricket, but that Alex Hartley was upset because Sophie Ecclestone was upset, and the England Women's Team was upset. In Vic's view it all became a bit \*\*\*\* about face.

**Festival Cricket** – Bath was always interesting; it was only used once a season. Bath Cricket Club didn't play on it. It was a ground where the square was religiously roped off. roped off and every season the Somerset groundsman went to Bath to try and conjure up a pitch and wicket.

The one ground Vic never played at but where we would have liked to was Cheltenham. Gloucester v Somerset always took place in Bristol as being neighbouring counties could attract large crowds.

Vic always liked playing in Sussex. He enjoyed Sussex grounds having played at Pagham (!), Eastbourne and Hastings.

It was good to see in recent times that there had been a resurgence in Counties playing fifty over cup at out-grounds whilst The 100 was taking place at main (Test) grounds.

**What would you do Post England's performance in Champions Trophy?** – England are only slowly beginning to realise that fifty over cricket is different to T20. Vic thought fifty over cricket is closer to Test cricket than T20. The sides who did well in the Champions Trophy essentially played their Test team, especially their test bowlers.

Vic thought it a privilege to play in the top four for England. If you were good and you started well you can go on and get a hundred. Batsman such as Phil Salt and Liam Livingston were excellent T20 players but didn't seem to have the capacity to play the longer game and do what you had to do. There was also a lack of variety in the bowling department as it was all T20 based. Basically, for batting. you need more Root's and fewer Salt's.

Today unfortunately with the fifty over domestic game in England, players are selected because are they either a 'has been or never will be' as there is no such thing as fifty over contracts and they don't have a Central, or Franchise contract.

## **Heads & Tails**

Once again, Head and Tails raised in excess of £350. When we reconvene in the autumn, please consider joining in. It is a valuable source of funds to enable the Society to attract speakers like Graham Gooch, Jonathan Agnew and Vic Marks.

## **The End**

We started with Frank, so we'll end with Arnie; '(I) or rather we will be back.' – in the autumn.

Hasta la vista baby(ies).

(photographs – Ivor Evans and Cedric Spiller)