



# SUSSEX CRICKET SOCIETY. NEWSLETTER

FOUNDED: 1965

CHAIR: DAVID BOWDEN MBE

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

[www.sussexcricketsociety.org](http://www.sussexcricketsociety.org)

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## Future Dates 2024/25

**February 19, speaker  
John Simpson, with  
Paul Farbrace**

**March 19 Vic Marks**

## 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

The next Society event comes on **19<sup>th</sup> February** (2pm) an afternoon tea in the Cow Corner Hospitality units, County Ground, Hove. **John Simpson** will be joined by **Paul Farbrace** as speakers which promises to be an interesting afternoon. Places are still available, to attend please contact Ivor Evans by 9<sup>th</sup> February. The cost is £22. Booking and Ivor's contact details are as per the March event – see below.

Then on **19<sup>th</sup> March, 2pm** comes an afternoon tea with **Vic Marks** the speaker. Venue Cow Corner, County Ground, Hove. Starting with the talk then tea ending with a Q&A session. This will be our final event of the 2024/5 season, and promises to end the season on a high note.

Vic Marks, an off-spinning all-rounder had a first class career spanning 1975 to 1989 He made his first class debut for Oxford University and was against Sussex. He went on to play a further 341 first class matches mainly for Somerset before retiring at the end of the 1989 English season. 12,419 runs with a top score of 134, 859 wickets. He also represented England between 1982 and 1984 in six test matches and 34 ODIs. Post retirement he entered journalism writing for the Guardian and Observer, he has also been a popular member of the BBC radio TMS team.

**Booking Details** Pre-booking with payment (**£22 per person**) is essential To apply please contact Ivor Evans - email [sussex.scs@btinternet.com](mailto:sussex.scs@btinternet.com) (note the full stop between sussex and scs), phone 07976 754411, post Beauchamps, Littleworth Lane, Partridge Green, RH13 8JF, by **9<sup>th</sup> March** at the latest. Early bookings are recommended.

When applying please provide Ivor with the following details: your name; names of anyone coming with you or who you would like to sit with (see note below); any dietary / food allergy requirements for each person; and finally your selected payment method.

Payment can be made by Bank Transfer to Sussex Cricket Society (Sort Code 60-13-09 Account No. 57843570) showing your NAME & MARTEA (for instance Smith MarTea) as the payment reference, or by cheque payable to Sussex Cricket Society sent to Ivor with your application. Transfer is our preferred payment option.

Even if you pay by transfer, it is essential that you let Ivor know that you have paid and are booking. Members who pay by bank transfer should make the transfer at the same time as they book. When booking for more than one person, members are asked to identify who of their party are, and who are not, members of the Society. Seating requests - every effort will be made to meet your requests but this cannot be guaranteed.

The cut-off date for booking is **9<sup>th</sup> March**. After this date there will be no refunds for any cancelled booking (Reason: the caterers require the final numbers by the cut-off date and charge the Society for that number.)

Car parking will be free within the Ground for the Tea subject to availability with the normal parking warden being stood down. Members or guests must not leave their cars at the Ground post event, especially overnight.

**Subscription rates 2025/6** – This year no changes to subscription rates, so £20 single, £25 family/joint plus the £23 supplement for those wanting the monthly newsletter to be sent by post (the supplement to cover printing, distribution and postage costs). As subs are due on 1st April for all bar those who joined or renewed via the website or are members via the Sussex Cricket Foundation, a renewal notice and information will be supplied with the next newsletter. For those who pay by **Bank Standing Order** please ensure that your bank remits the correct amount, last year there were still some paying old amounts.

**New Members** Welcome to Ian Umpleby, Haywards Heath, Anne Corris, Eastbourne

### **Taunton Sussex v Somerset**

As those present at the January afternoon tea would have been aware, the Society Committee was looking into the possibility of running a coach trip to Taunton for Sussex's Championship game in mid May for the first three days of the game, with two nights stay in the Castle Hotel. The Committee was also concerned at the potential financial situation. Given that there was little significant interest from those present, it has regrettably had to abandon the idea.

Much credit and thanks go to Richard Barrow who investigated on the Committee's behalf various hotels in the area along with a coach company to come up with potential costs. The financial drawback was that the hotels in question could only offer the number of rooms (and mostly doubles) required if the society reserved them and paid a deposit within a few days after the January meeting. Hence a financial risk if insufficient numbers taking up the offer did not materialise and so the deposit lost.

So, again, very many thanks to Richard for his work on this and sorry it has not come to a better conclusion.

The Committee is very keen to secure Richard's leadership in arranging a similar type of venture in 2026, but to plan for a game later in the season, which would give more time to undertake the planning and seek available numbers before a serious financial commitment. In this context, it is gratifying to learn that Sussex Cricket Chief Executive, Pete Fitzboyden, is also keen to be involved in the planning of such a visit.

The Committee would be pleased to receive members' view about this.

**Economical Test Bowling Jayden Seales** returned figures of 15.5 overs 10 maidens 5 runs and 4 wickets, for West Indies against Bangladesh at Sabina Park, Jamaica yet still finished on the losing side! Figures incredible not only for the four wickets but also the miserly economy, 0.31 runs per over. In terms of runs per over conceded this places Seales seventh on the men's all-time list for a low innings economy rate assuming a minimum of 60 deliveries bowled, though none of the top 6 matched Seales' 4 wickets. Top of that list is the Indian left arm spinner R G Nadkarni, 32 overs, 5 runs but zero wickets, January 1964 against an England team struck with illness (for instance Mickey Stewart did not bat until number 10 and Jim Parks also batted lower than expected).

Back to Seales, he has played three tests in recent months, 2 against Bangladesh at home and another in Pakistan taking in total thirteen wickets.

**Daniel Hughes** so far has had a frustrating Australian season, For New South Wales his only outing so far was on Sept 22, a 50 over cup game against Western Australia when he picked up an injury keeping him out until returning in the T20 Big Bash for Sydney Sixers against Melbourne Renegades on December 16 and again injured. This day the Sixers batting second chased 170 and required eight batters to win but Hughes was unable to bat. Interviewed on television live during the game he expressed frustration at missing much of the season adding that he would miss the remaining Big Bash fixtures, but was hoping to return for a couple of Sheffield Shield games in late February early March. Given his importance to the Sussex batting in 2024 (and being enjoyable to watch) Sussex will hope that he will be fit and available for the start of the 2025 season. Possibly we may hear more on this at the February Society event from either John Simpson or Paul Farbrace.

## Jonathan Agnew – January 2025 Afternoon Tea

Thanks to Ivor Evans for the following review of the January event and to Cedric Spiller for the photograph

Members seem to like the Society's 2024/25 programme of speakers. To date, we are averaging over one hundred persons at each event.



Our chair opened proceedings by welcoming Jonathan and gave a brief summary of his playing career. He played for Leicestershire between 1979 and 1990, taking six hundred and sixty six (666) wickets. He won three test caps for England along with playing three one day internationals. He was a Wisden Cricketer of the year in 1988. Since 1991, Jonathan has been the BBC's cricket correspondent along with being a commentator on Test Match Special (TMS). He stood down from the former role in November 2024 but continues on TMS

Jonathan opened by talking about playing Sussex at Hove in the 1980's watching with fear in the dressing room at Imran charged in from the Sea End at about 100MPH whilst Garth Le Roux did likewise from the Cromwell Road end. The pair were always quite happy to pepper the tail enders with fast balls as they were both fearless players who played the fast stuff very well.

Cricket began for Jonathan when his father took him to the 1971 Gillette Cup Final, Lancashire v Kent. They sat in the Grandstand and saw Peter Lever bowling side-on at tremendous speed and the ball thudding into Farokh Engineer's gloves. From that day on he wanted to be a fast bowler. He started in village cricket and aged sixteen his father took him to Alf Gover's cricket school in Wandsworth, London. He learnt a lot there. There followed a couple of unhappy years at Surrey before moving on to Leicestershire.

One of the best things being at Leicester was that he got to see David Gower playing for free. He was one of those rare sportsmen who had that extra something – they always had time. In the years they spent together at Leicestershire, they only batted together once. In the mid 1980's, Leicester v Hampshire, Jonathan came in as night watchman. Gower and Malcolm Marshall were both at their peaks. At the start of play Jonathan headed straight for the non-striker's end. For the next ten minutes he watched a gladiatorial conquest between batsman and bowler. Facing the bowling he didn't last long, but walking off he knew he must remember forever more those ten minutes of supreme cricket.

Jonathan openly admitted to being a coward facing fast bowling. Before the days of helmets, he was hit in the mouth which affected confidence for his entire career. When Gower was captaining Leicester, he was protected. However, when Peter Willey was standing in with Gower away on Test duty it was altogether different. Willey was a tough character in all senses who could beat Ian Botham at arm wrestling. Jonathan used to tease him with a bit of verbal jousting. Peter's revenge was to send him as night watchman. Again, against Hampshire and Malcolm Marshall, he went into bat, all the fielders were standing behind him. For fifteen minutes, Exocet speed balls arrived from Marshall. There then was then a muted appeal from somewhere. Jonathan thought that would do and walked. Both Marshall and Sam Cook the umpire were a bit surprised to see him walk by. The next morning Cook came up to and said well done for walking, I thought I heard something.

Jonathan started his radio cricket commentating career in 1991, commentating on tourist matches. It was superb training. He was by himself, no summariser or scorer. He had to do fifteen minutes commentating live. You had to get your pace right. Cricket must always be the main thread. You have to avoid being overly conversational, but also at the same time you have to verbally paint a picture for the listeners.

At Hove you could describe the flats, the hanging baskets, the deckchairs and the Stonegate eggs.

Radio is far more powerful than television you can watch and discharge. Whereas with radio your brain is working creating its own images from the commentary you are hearing.

No one brought cricket more to life than Henry Blofeld. An extraordinary commentator; an explosion of colour. The pigeons and the buses with every ball being bowled an event from the start of the bowlers run up to the shot played by the batsman. However, what Henry was describing wasn't necessarily what other watchers were doing at the same time.

Today so many former players are commentators. Players have a different relationship with cricket. Back in the day it was their job, it could make you more cynical. Compared with Christopher Martin-Jenkins, who never played professionally. He was always a fan and passionate about the game. It was something that he never lost. He wrote long pieces about issues that former players would perhaps think weren't that important – grass roots cricket, university cricket, minor league cricket, club cricket, schools cricket, all of which are the bedrock of the game.

Jonathan's biggest influence was Brian Johnson, who transformed radio cricket to be inclusive with the audience. Without whom he wouldn't have had the courage to be what he thought himself as being; a free spirit, welcoming, sense of humour, teasing a bit, and happy to throw things around a bit. Both he and Brian shared the same saucy seaside postcard sense of humour that is entirely innuendo based. Today, they probably wouldn't be allowed to get away with much of this. They worked together for three years, the first of which Jonathan was an expert summariser rather than commentator. Here he sat and learned the pace and rhythm of commentating.

The infamous 'Leg Over' commentary is now legendary. To any other commentator the two words would have flown over their heads, however to Brian and his sense of humour, he was gone. However afterwards, Johnson was quite cross because he had thought he had let the side down.

Today, Jonathan's key victim for a wind up is Phil Tufnell, It doesn't take much for him to lose it. The names Quinton de Kock, Fakhar Zaman and Peter Willey came up. Similar to the Mark Ramprakash event, if anyone wants more detail, they need to talk to someone who was at the event!

It would have been surprising if Geoffrey Boycott had not been mentioned in Jonathan's talk. He painted both an affectionate and humorous portrait. Boycott was recovering well, from throat cancer. He was definitely a marmite character. Players weren't his greatest fans, generally former team-mates due to the way that he played and batted. Jonathan however thought Boycott was the best analyst he had worked with, being able to identify players strengths and weaknesses very quickly. Some people viewed the latter as criticising a player, whereas others view his observations as identifying technical issues to be worked on.

Geoffrey has moved across the border from Yorkshire to Cheshire, House prices in Audley Edge are now plummeting! He lives in his own bubble. People who Jonathan interviewed in the View from The Boundary on TMS – Boycott didn't know any of them. On one occasion the singer Alice Cooper was the guest. Jonathan's own response was, why? Anyway, the singer and his wife arrived and whilst on air Jonathan introduced Boycott to Alice Cooper. Boycott swung round and to the singer's wife said, 'Nice to meet you Alice. love.'

In 2017, all summer long in the commentary box, Boycott had been going on and on about his 100<sup>th</sup> 100. The other commentators were starting to get bored by it. They decided to do something and set up which perhaps produced one of the best ever 'Gotya's.' A phoney press release was drafted saying that his 100<sup>th</sup> 100 was in fact his 99<sup>th</sup>. The great thing though was that Jonathan, and the other commentators were able to stretch it out for ten minutes Boycott swallowed it hook line and sinker. Boycott has since grown to love it and to this day still plays it.

## **Q & A Session**

### **David Gower**

What was David Gower was like as a captain. Jonathan enjoyed playing under Gower. He let you think for yourself, what ball to bowl and what field to set.

Jonathan's favourite Gower story. If he'd been away on Test duty, you always had to drop a word into his ear to let him know how well you had been playing. Anyway, in one game out they all went. Gower told Jonathan he was opening (which he invariably did) and set his own field. This he duly did only to discover that there were twelve men on the field as a twelfth man hadn't been selected. Gower looked around and way down at fine leg was Les Taylor who being as deaf as a post, Gower yelled at him – 'you're dropped,' and poor Taylor had to trudge around the field and back to the dressing room.

Gower wasn't overly keen on physical training. The same applied to Jonathan. He bowled himself fit. In his career he bowled 35,000 balls Fred Trueman most likely bowled double that figure. Conversely someone like Stuart Broad, would probably only have bowled half of Jonathan's total. Also, some bowlers are picking up injuries too frequently. Jofra Archer and Mark Wood being examples. Back in Jonathan's day there wasn't so much pumping iron and high intensity training, but they bowled more. He felt then there was perhaps a better balance was required between playing and training.

Gower wasn't a tinkerer with the field, he let you get on and do your job, however, if over five or six overs, nothing much was happening, he'd come up you and suggest that you might want to try something different. This compares with modern day captains who are forever changing their field settings. An honourable exception being Ben Stokes who Jonathan thinks is a superb captain. Jonathan likes what Stokes does and would have loved to play under him. He has created a wonderful atmosphere and as captain is always on the game.

Jonathan went to talk about Richie Benaud who he worked with during the 1999 World Cup. It was the year the BBC lost the television right and the only person who in Jonathan's view cannily stayed was Benaud. A week before proceedings, Jonathan despite his protestations became the BBC television's face of cricket. What people may not know but a lot of TMS and radio news bites are done to time. Precision can be achieved with a stopwatch in hand. However, with television it is the producer talking and counting down into your earpiece. On television you have to hit zero and not overrun. In his first broadcast with Benaud, he missed zero by a second, he was embarrassed and crest fallen. Richie asked him how long Jonathan needed to say goodbye. – seven seconds, right he said I'll stop talking when the count is at eight. The next day, they put it into action and hit zero as they did every time for the next six weeks. For this, Jonathan was forever grateful to Richie Benaud.

It had been hope that Steve Finn would be joining John Simpson at the Society's February event. However, Finn was off to Pakistan with Jonathan Agnew for the Champions trophy. Jonathan was very complementary about Finn. He thought he was fantastic, Jonathan enjoys working with him, he has come on really well, he thinks about things, he has a good vocabulary, and he writes all his own pieces for the BBC website.

Jonathan touched on the call of some politicians saying England should refuse to play Afghanistan in the Champions Trophy due to that country banning women's cricket. He thought it absurd. If you want to bring politics into sport it has to be done properly. it was not England's job, neither was it that of a few cricketers, it was the role of politicians and the ICC's who incidentally he thought were complete cowards when these two worlds met.

### **Questions from the audience.**

The standard **Sussex** one:

**Imran:** Jonathan recollected Imran bowling a beamer at him. He didn't apologise, He probably meant it, It certainly gave Philip de Freitas, standing at the opposite end palpitations at the prospect of facing him. He hopes Imran is all right in prison. To get released from prison it had been suggested to Jonathan that like a number of ousted politicians in Pakistan in the past that the best thing for Imran would be to leave the country for a couple of years.

**Javid:** A cheeky chap but what a player. (a very similar answer to the one that Jeff Thomson gave).

**Tony Greig:** Was Jonathan's absolute hero. Back then, he never thought he meet him. Greig was outspoken, He was in a difficult position with Kerry Packer and being captain of England. He thought though that he was doing the right thing. It definitely changed the game very positively and also enabled players to be paid proper wages. Traditionalists didn't like it. Jonathan himself is always careful not run running to judgments on changes.

A lot of stories but just one. The Agnew's and Greig's were friends and one evening they went to see the Abba show in the West End. What a sight it would have been to see Tony and Jonathan in the aisle dancing to Dancing Queen.

### **The Future of the game:**

Jonathan was asked for his views about a recent piece in The Times by Michael Atherton about the recent sale of Hampshire CCC. In summary, Atherton said that soon there will be two forces in operation, one with profit at its heart and the other tradition. He reflected on his own County, Leicestershire. It had to compete against both Premiership football and top-flight rugby. It has no real sponsorship as it is in Division Two and is likely to remain there. The only towns and cities where it might be possible to try and attract sponsors were Leicester, Market Harborough and Melton Mowbray – the latter two not being overly large. The real risk is that any promising players will not want to play for a Division Two club. For his own County he reflected on Stuart Broad moving to Notts and James Taylor also to Nottinghamshire

Jonathan thought that in future and not too far away, there would be an increase in The Hundred franchises from eight to ten. In time the ten franchises would form the structure of the domestic game. There would be a bidding process for players. The counties who weren't part of a franchise would struggle and will be dependent on handouts.

The Sussex CEO has publicly stated that Sussex wouldn't get a franchise but to continue it would most likely require 'franchise' money within five or six years.

Possibly, the IPL will become a global annual event, with different staging posts through the year. With a sparse domestic calendar in August, what an opportunity for the IPL to stage a competition; come and buy our teams and do what you want – this last piece was said in irony.

### **Women's Cricket**

The progress in women's cricket has been astonishing due in no small part to The Hundred. Pre covid it was planned for the men and women to play on separate grounds. Covid protocols forced them to play on the same grounds on the same day. By fate, what an opportunity to promote women's cricket and what a rip roaring success it has been.

Jonathan reflected on the 1993 World Cup final. It was a dull game with hardly a shot being played. Today, look at the training and athleticism. He thought it very brave of Alex Hartley to say what she said. They are professionals, they weren't fit enough, they need to improve their training further. (*n.b. 21<sup>st</sup>. January BBC reported that several women players were refusing to talk to Hartley following her comments – do the Ashes results lie?*).

In the early days, broadcasting Women's cricket, TMS and women's cricket commentary suffered a lot of criticism. Not least because being on Radio 4 but it's timetabling ate into some of Women's Hour airtime. However, by the end of the summer there has been a volte face with critics becoming supporters.

The Chair thanked Jonathan for both an entertaining and enlightening talk. It was much appreciated.

Finally, Head and Tails raised in excess of £400. This is a valuable source of funds to enable the Society to attract speakers like Jonathan Agnew to Hove.

Until next time.....