

SOMERSET CRICKETERS 1882 – 1914

STEPHEN HILL with additional research by Barry Phillips

Foreword by Vic Marks

Somerset Cricketers 1882 – 1914 contains richly-illustrated and hugely informative biographies of each of the 227 cricketers who appeared for Somerset before the First World War. By introducing the men in order of their debut appearance and exploring their lives, the author has pieced together a compelling story and enabled us to gain an in-depth understanding of the development of the game in the county. There is a wealth of new information to satisfy the students of cricket and those interested in social history. Myths are exploded and countless new facts unearthed. Many of the life-stories are fascinating tales of hardship or privilege, portraits of men from all walks of life, tales of triumph and disaster. And all within the framework of the county cricket team's continued struggled for survival, spiced with glorious surprises.

Researched with forensic attention to detail but written with real warmth and an eye to readability, and accompanied by photographs of virtually all the team members mentioned, this book can be devoured from cover to cover as a gripping story of Somerset's changing fortunes or can be dipped into, with so many individual stories to delight the reader.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

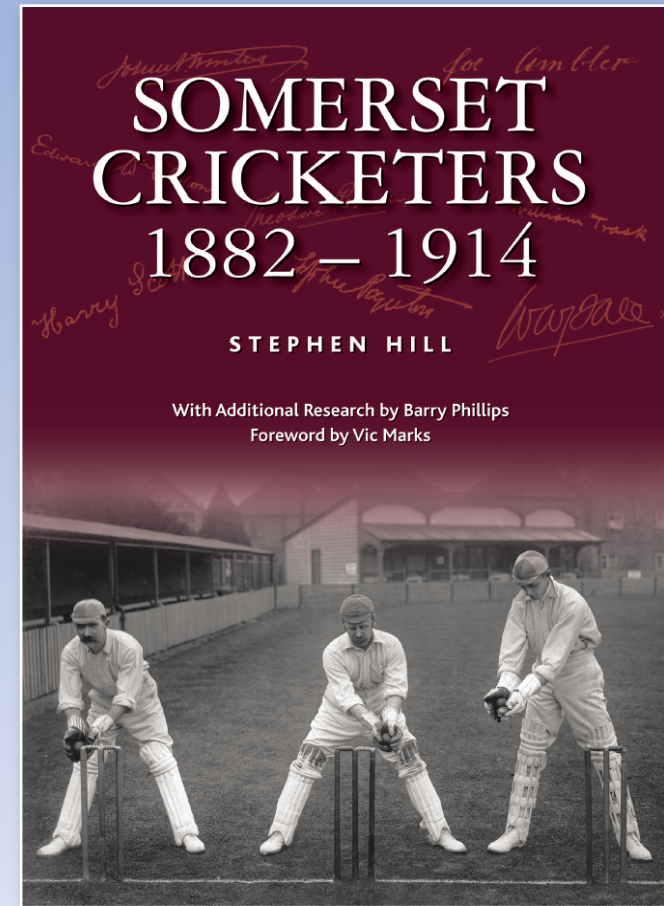
Stephen Hill was born in Bishops Lydeard and educated in Taunton but now lives in Nottinghamshire. He has supported Somerset CCC since 1963. A former businessman, he is the author of two novels (writing as Stephen Edden). This is his first work of non-fiction.

Barry Phillips was born and educated in Taunton. Now retired, he was an accountant by profession spending his working life in Oxford. He has been a lifelong supporter of Somerset CCC, having first watched them play the Australians in 1956. Forty years later he wrote *No Mere Slogger*, the acclaimed biography of Arthur Wellard.

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SOMERSET CRICKETERS 1882 – 1914

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Henry Fox
8 June 1882 v. Lancashire, Old Trafford

Henry Fox



Henry Fox was possessed of an unquenchable spirit of adventure

Few men have had both a rugby stand and a cricketer pavilion erected in their memory and even fewer have had a mountain named after them – in this case Mount Fox in the Dawson range in Canada. But Harry Fox was no ordinary man. The son of Dilworth Crewdon Fox and a member of the family who ran the world-renowned woollen manufacturing company, he was born and raised in Tonedale (now Tone Dale) House, Wellington. His date of birth was 30 September 1856. Educated at Sherborne, he was destined to become a partner in the family business.

In truth, Harry was a decent but not a great cricketer. Deployed as a middle-order batsman by Somerset, his one moment in the sun came in a non-first-class match against Kent in 1881, when he scored 42. In three first-class games for the county, he began with a pair against Lancashire and would average only 2.50 in three matches. He offered greater service to the team with his financial support and his role as a vice president, a position he held until his death. He performed more successfully at rugby, being instrumental in setting up both the Wellington rugby club in 1874 and the county side in 1877. In 1874 he had called a meeting of a number of able-bodied Wellingtonians in his house, where he explained the rules of rugby to them with the aid of a blackboard and chalk. He became treasurer, coach and captain of the club, as well as its founder. One account describes him as 'a fine three-quarter and tremendously speedy, so much so that when he received the ball and started running, the rest of the team have been known to actually stand still and clap, so useless was it to try and back him up.' He was also the benefactor, captain and leading light of the Somerset rugby team until obliged to cease playing as a result of a knee injury. Thereafter, he became a referee (or umpire as it was then known) in club and county matches.

His spirit of adventure remained undaunted by injury and in the mid-1880s he took up mountaineering with great enthusiasm. After having conquered the most challenging peaks in Europe, including the Eiger and the Matterhorn, he set out with two colleagues – W. F. Donkin and C. Dent – to become the first men to take Koolhan-Tau in the

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Caucasus mountains. Dent was soon obliged to give up the attempt but Fox and Donkin pressed on with their Swiss guides. They were never seen again and although subsequent search parties found their base camp supplies and, higher up, their bivouac, none of the bodies was ever recovered. It is assumed that they were victims of an avalanche. His death at the age of thirty-one is given as 'on or since 30th August 1888, at some place unknown'. Harry had never been married. A stand was built at the ground of the Wellington rugby club he had formed and a pavilion at the local cricketer ground where he had been an enthusiastic participant. Tributes flowed to a popular and generous-hearted man. A glowing obituary in the *Bristol Mercury* states that 'the bright, eager face and the cheery ring of his voice were warmly welcomed in the cricket or [rugby] football field, whether he appeared as player, umpire or keen onlooker'.

A brilliant organiser and a fearless adventurer, Harry had pushed himself to his limits until, ultimately, he fell short, both on the first-class cricket field and, more tragically, in the Caucasus mountains.

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William Trask
8 June 1882 v. Lancashire, Old Trafford

William Trask



William Trask – prolific at club level

The Trask family made their fortune from the mellow hamstone in South Somerset. Charles Trask had started up a business combining the mining and carving of stone with a highly-regarded workshop in Norton-sub-Hamdon. His sons joined the business but not before William, born in the village on 15 July 1859, had been educated in Crewkerne and then at Sherborne School, in Dorset. For a while William assisted in the business but his younger brother would take over the day-to-day management. In 1891 William was married to Margaret Stancomb (née Le Gros) in a lavish society wedding in Frome. He was appointed chairman of the Ham Hill and Douling Stone Quarries, though he lived for much of the time in London and Eastbourne, eventually settling in Frome, just down the road from the Douling quarry.

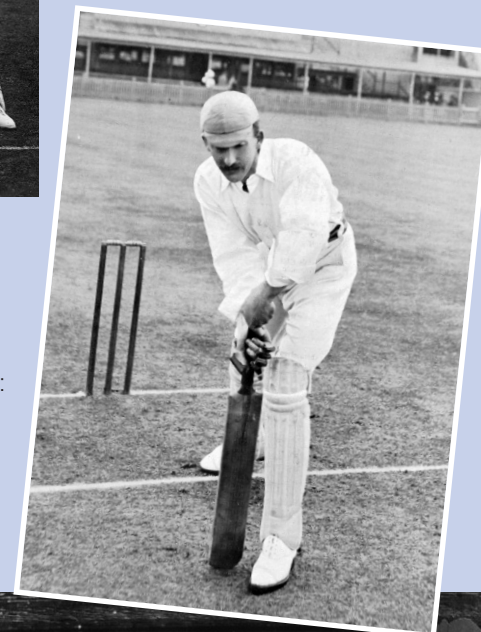
What of his efforts at cricket? A prolific accumulator of runs for Lansdown CC, he is described as a steady batsman who was hard to remove once he had established himself at the crease. He played forty-seven times for Somerset, but at the first-class

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Left: Somerset's fine amateur keepers – Newton, Wickham and Martyn – all played in 1903, though less frequently than the county would have hoped

Below: Lionel Palairet – regarded by many as the greatest stylist in the Golden Age of cricket



Left: Somerset were blessed with some fine amateurs as they re-established their first-class status. Clockwise from top left: L. C. H. Palairet, J. B. Challen, S. M. J. Woods, A. E. Newton and H. T. Hewett



1891

"The promotion of Somerset to a place among the first class counties has been abundantly justified by results, the eleven having gone through an ambitious programme with great credit."

Bath Chronicle

Championship Position: 5th of 9

Somerset had been invited back to the top table but they suffered a shaky start, including a humiliating defeat at the hands of Surrey, where the weather and injuries blunted their chances. Many thought that the team would once again fail to cling to their first-class status but there were some glorious victories once the under-graduates became available in the summer vacation. They enjoyed the sweet taste of revenge against Surrey and the joys of bowling out local rivals Gloucestershire for 25 at Cheltenham. Somerset managed a creditable fifth place in the table. Herbert Hewett had led a well-drilled side. Although overly reliant on flashes of brilliance from fast bowler Sam Woods, the elegant batting of Lionel Palairet and the skills on a sticky wicket of slow left-arm bowler Teddy Tyler, they were an exceptional fielding side. Gate receipts increased fourfold from the previous year and subscriptions rose by a third to more than 500. Recognising that bowling resources were spread thin, the club sent out a request to the eighteen affiliated club sides to seek out the services of a promising bowler as their pro. Their efforts failed to bear any immediate fruit.

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Gerald Fowler
18 May 1891 v. Middlesex, Lord's

Gerald Fowler



Gerald Fowler – a Quaker and philanthropist but not a punishing batter

Gerald Fowler was born in Leytonstone on 27 July 1866 but his father, William, a successful barrister and for a while MP for Gambridge, soon moved the family to Moor Hall near Harlow. Gerald was brought up in some splendour along with his elder brother, Herbert, who played for Somerset in the 'pre-Championship' days. The two of them were similarly built and smote the ball powerfully, in Gerald's case more often than not through the covers. Another brother, Howard, played cricket and rugby for Oxford University and was a rugby international with three England caps. Gerald's connections with Somerset began when he was educated at Clifton College (renowned as a breeding ground for young sportsmen) before he went up to Oxford. As a schoolboy he had enjoyed success as a bowler, not as a batsman. He had been invited to represent both Essex and Oxford, where he had continued to be used primarily as a fast bowler and lower order batsman. By the age of twenty-three he had become an occasional bowler, although he did twice manage five-wicket hauls in Championship matches, both in 1898. The high point of his batting career was his one and only first-class century when he shared an opening partnership of 205 with Lionel Palairet against Gloucestershire in 1895. He was one of W. G. Grace's five victims before Grace went on to rack up a score of 288, achieving his hundredth century in first-class cricket, all of which rather took the limelight away from Gerald in his moment of glory.

He was for many years captain of the Taunton cricket team at a time when most amateurs favoured the joys and variety of club cricket over net practice. A wealthy man, he made his living in the world of banking. Older brother Herbert had become a partner in the Fox & Co. bank in 1878. Within a year, the company's name had been changed to Fox, Fowler & Co. They have a unique claim to fame. The Bank Charter Act of 1844 had allowed provincial banks already in existence to continue issuing their own banknotes alongside the Bank of England. Banks formed after this date did not share the same entitlement. As the provincial banks were swallowed up, Fox, Fowler & Co (originally formed back in 1787 by the Fox family) was the last old bank

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Right: In a strong King's Bruton side of 1909, Somerset players Vasey, Hippisley and Sutton are seated in the centre, while fellow Somerset cricketer, the school coach and groundsman, C. J. 'Tommy' Bowring, stands in his suit on the left

