

# SOMERSET CRICKETERS 1919-1939

Stephen Hill & Barry Phillips

*Somerset Cricketers 1919 – 1939* continues the authors' compelling odyssey through the early history of cricket in the county. Having previously introduced readers to the lives of the men who played for Somerset prior to the First World War, Stephen Hill and Barry Phillips now turn their attention to those who made their debut between the wars. A surprising number of them – 124 in total – were drafted into the side in those twenty-one seasons. Some of them may be familiar. Players such as Arthur Wellard and Harold Gimblett were once idolised by West Country schoolboys. A majority, though, were amateurs, often ill-equipped for the first-class game. Their cricketing exploits may not have been much to write home about but many of them lived extraordinary lives.

Leaving no stone unturned as they researched the exploits of these men, the authors have offered up an enjoyable journey through Somerset's cricketing past with fascinating detours as they reveal men who fell into the depths of despair or set about changing the world for the better. Businessmen and clergymen, war heroes and scoundrels, innovators and trouble-makers: we meet men from every walk of life and we find how Somerset cricket linked together the fortunes of these disparate characters.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

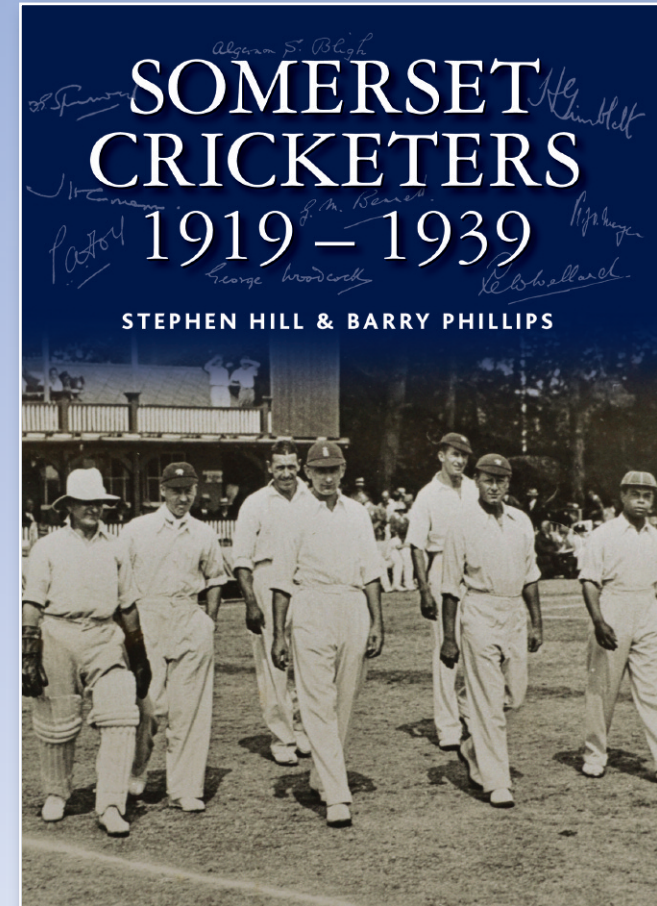
**Stephen Hill** was born and educated in Somerset but now lives in Nottinghamshire. He has been a Somerset CCC supporter since 1963. He loves to accumulate new information about the club's history and on the way has built up a small collection of cricket memorabilia.

**Barry Phillips** was also born and educated in Somerset but now lives in Oxfordshire. He has been a Somerset CCC supporter since 1956. He loves to accumulate Somerset cricket memorabilia and on the way has built up an impressive amount of knowledge.

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# SOMERSET CRICKETERS 1919-1939

Examples of double page spreads

## 1922

"Robson made the winning hit, a six over the pavilion off Hearne, on the stroke of time and to the accompaniment of wild enthusiasm."

*Taunton Courier*

Championship Position: 10 of 17

At their end-of-season dinner, Somerset celebrated securing a mid-table position despite fielding a largely amateur side and playing the game in a fine spirit. And yet most of the toasts were for the old pro, Ernie Robson, after his winning six at the eleventh hour against Middlesex at Weston-super-Mare. He had been immediately handed a cheque for £50 by an 'anonymous donor' who turned out to be Jeremiah Lyon, father of Somerset cricketer, M. D. Lyon. Jeremiah earned and lost money in prodigious amounts and with dizzying speed and was later declared a bankrupt. Perhaps he was too generous for his own good. Robson was later awarded a marble clock and presented with the match ball, mounted on a silver stand. While Somerset were reiving the glory of one heady winning shot, Yorkshire were celebrating winning the County Championship. The North was a foreign place: they did things differently there.

It was true that Somerset were a better side than their position suggested and that, as one report had it, 'several times the side was robbed of a win by bad weather or just an irritating insufficiency of time'. In six of their seven draws they had accumulated a first innings lead.

Jack White and Jack MacBryan led the way with bat and ball respectively. *The Cricketer* reports that J. C. W. MacBryan was the outstanding batsman... who besides getting runs with great consistency got them in beautiful style'. He scored two of the county's three centuries and was well supported by Ulick Considine who showed 'rare grit and not a little skill' in making just short of 1,000 runs. There was a welcome return from Ceylon (Sri Lanka) by Bill Gresswell. Although past his devastating best as a swing bowler, he still took 71 wickets to add to Jack White's 146 victims. Ernie Robson and Jim Bridges offered valuable support.

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Among the debutants, Guy Earle would, in the best Somerset tradition, win renown for the astonishing power of his hitting, if not for his skills as a builder of innings.

December 1922 marked the passing of the President, Henry Murray-Anderson, a hugely influential figure. Murray-Anderson's tireless work as an administrator and patron had been instrumental in the club's continued survival. Without his unflinching support, Somerset could well have opted to forgo their first-class status in the lean years prior to the First World War.



Ernie Robson – an astonishing Yorkshireman, he had saved Somerset just twice in 1895.

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G. S. Butler at Marlborough College.

Butler was a batsman who was also a 'useful medium-paced bowler', as the *Bath Chronicle* described him during his time with New Lansdown CC (whom he captained while a schoolmaster in the city). He played only one match for Somerset and, looking at his subsequent career, Somerset would be justified in ruling a missed opportunity as he developed into a punishing batsman at club and Minor Counties level, noted for his 'timing and powerful off-side play'. Perhaps Somerset made advances which were rejected in favour of the county of his birth. It may also have been the case that his career rendered it impracticable for him to make himself available for Somerset. He often played for Wiltshire between 1920 and 1930, captaining them on occasions, and also appeared in a number of combined Minor Counties XI matches against touring sides in fixtures deemed first-class. In 1929, *The Cricketer* describes him as 'one of the best all-round cricketers in Minor Counties'. Playing for the Minor Counties against Wales in 1930, he scored 121, his only first-class century. *Wisden* reports that he 'played most enterprising cricket'. His one match for Somerset, by contrast, had been against Oxford University in 1920 and he had made only 7 and 2 in a low-scoring match that was over inside two days.

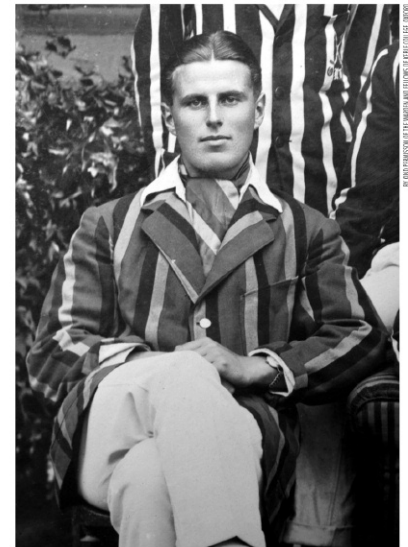
He was married in Purley in 1925 to Paula Wolfenden, after a two-year engagement. Her late father had owned a manufacturing business. George was still teaching in Bath at the time, but soon started up a preparatory school – Winchester Lodge in Torquay, Devon – of which he was the proprietor-headmaster. In advertisements he extolled the healthy schooling afforded pupils, noting its charmed position and the school's 'excellent feeding and health record'.

Despite his commitments, George captained the Torquay cricket club for a number of years, also playing for Devon on occasions and continuing to score big centuries throughout the



G. S. Butler played Minor Counties cricket while headmaster-proprietor of Winchester Lodge School.

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G. S. Butler in the Kettle College XI.

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**Richard Ashley**

1 June 1932 v. Leicestershire, Leicester

*Richard Ashley*



Born a twin (with a brother named George) on 27 October 1902 in Weston-super-Mare, Richard Ashley was the son of Martin Ashley (a surgeon who later became a Medical School inspector) and his wife, Edith. He was sent to Clifton College and on leaving school went up to Sandhurst before embarking on a career in the military. He joined the Wiltshire Regiment as a lieutenant in 1925 and between 1927 and 1929 acted as Aide de Camp to Sir C. A. Innes, the Governor of Burma.



Top: Richard Ashley at the time of his Somerset debut.

Above: Richard Ashley (in the foreground) with his Wiltshire Regiment cricket teammates.

On returning to England in 1930 he became an active member of the Wiltshire Regiment cricket team, often opening the batting and regularly among the wickets as a pace bowler. Invited to play for Somerset on two occasions in 1932, he averaged 12.50 with the bat and his all-rounder came as a bowler reads impressively as a wicket for 0 runs in two unblemished overs. He also played in two first-class fixtures in India, where again his performances with the ball were more impressive than his batting exploits. He was married in 1935 to Patricia Gedge, a medical practitioner's daughter from Pewsey, with whom he would have two children, Nigel Richard, born in 1937, and Jennifer Jane, born in 1940, in both cases in India. In 1936 he served for a brief period in Palestine and before during the Second World War was a staff captain in India, commanding the 7th Battalion of the Wiltshire Regiment. After the war he was made OC (Officer Commanding) of the Training Corps in Devises, Wiltshire. There followed staff appointments in Germany and the UK.

After leaving the Army in 1956 with the rank of lieutenant colonel, he retired initially to Milford-on-Sea in Hampshire, although any plans for a long and happy stay there were disrupted when his wife, Patricia, died in 1957. He resided for a while

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at Selsey, Sussex, in all probability to be near his daughter, but died at the age of seventy-one at the Nye Croft Nursing Home in Bognor Regis following a coronary thrombosis on 7 August 1974.

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**Alastair MacDonald Watson**

18 June 1932 v. Surrey, Taunton

*Alastair MacDonald Watson*



Alastair MacDonald Watson – a fast left-arm bowler who starred for Bristol University and Kemble.

The name is sometimes hyphenated but not in any official documentation or in his correspondence with Somerset, where his surname is given as Watson. Born on 29 January 1909 in Wallington, Surrey (and not nearby Croydon as sometimes stated), he was the son of a dentist, Alexander MacDonald Watson, and his wife, Louisa. Soon after Alastair's birth, the family moved to Bristol, where his father ran a dental practice from their home on Redcliffe Parade West. Alexander was a Quaker and often undertook work on a pro bono basis for those struggling financially.

After attending Sidcot School in Bath, where he was the senior prefect, Alastair went to Bristol University to study Medicine, specialising in Dentistry. While there, he gained a reputation as a very fast left-arm bowler whose efforts led Bristol to the University Cup, beating Nottingham University in the final.

He played his club cricket for Knowle and made his first appearance for Somerset in a non-first-class fixture for Gentlemen of Somerset against the touring South Americans in June 1932, impressing with a five-wicket haul in the first innings. He would play in four first-class matches for the county over the 1933 and 1934 seasons, taking 8 wickets at 27.37 apiece, including a best bowling performance of 5 for 27 against Derbyshire at Ilkeston. His batting was less impressive: he mustered an average of 0.40, only ever scoring 2 runs.

On graduating he elected to join the Royal Navy where he deployed his dentistry skills, becoming a surgeon captain and finding time to represent the Royal Navy at cricket, with appearances in the annual fixtures against the RAF and the Army, at Lord's. He also made appearances for Incogniti and I Zingari, among others.

Known to his colleagues as 'Toothy', the 1939 census confirms him as working on

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## 1927

"Mr White has not a long list of players to select from like some county captains."

A. E. Newton (Committee Member and Former Player)

Championship Position: 14 of 17

Reverend Archie Wickham was appointed President for the year. An eccentric wicket-keeper from the Victorian age, perhaps he had been charged with praying for divine intervention. If so, his prayers were ignored. The takings were severely affected by the wet summer and the county made a loss of £1,513, despite having secured a further increase in membership. Jack White was appointed captain. John Daniell having made it clear he felt too old and careworn to continue. Whereas Daniell had exhorted his troops loudly, White was regarded as a cold fish, buttressed-up and unprepared to praise his men. In the new, more dour environment it seems appropriate that Box Case should have stepped up to the plate and ground out two centuries. It was left to Tom Young to add sparkle to the batting. Bill Gresswell was back and among the wickets but it was of course Jack White who again claimed most victims.

In a changing world, there were fewer and fewer amateurs to call on. 1927 marked the retirement of the combative John Daniell and the elegant Randall Johnson. Recognising the need to build up a stronger core of professionals, the committee offered full-time contracts to Jack Lee and Wally Luckes. Among the new recruits the stand-out performer was Arthur Wellard, a pro who had forsaken his native Kent to give his all for Somerset, delighting the supporters over the years with his heroics. Dicky Burroughs, an amateur who practised as a solicitor in Bath, made the occasional more sedate contribution to the cause.



The Somerset XI also played Wiltshire at Andover in 1927. Somerset won at a canter, with Bill Gresswell at his devastating best, taking a combined total of 10 wickets for 43 runs. STANDING: W. T. Lucas, A. Young, G. E. Huns, J. W. Lee, F. G. Lee, A. E. S. Rippon. SEATED: C. C. C. Can, G. F. Earle, J. C. White, W. T. Gresswell, R. A. Ingle.

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**Horace Thomas Perry**

11 May 1927 v. Lancashire, Old Trafford

*Horace Thomas Perry*

Horace Perry was born in Bedminster on 29 November 1905, the son of Horace Frank, a railway clerk, and his wife Lillie Sophia (née Noble). Although he joined the Knowle CC Second XI as a fourteen-year-old, he failed to grab the headlines in the local press

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