

SOMERSET CRICKETERS 1946-1970

Stephen Hill & Barry Phillips

This is the third volume in a series outlining the lives of each man who has played first-class cricket for Somerset. The first two books, the award-winning *Somerset Cricketers 1882 – 1914* and *Somerset Cricketers 1919 – 1939*, were widely praised as hugely informative and very readable accounts of the history of cricket in the county, with engaging detours into social history. *Somerset Cricketers 1946 – 1970* continues in the same vein and is sure to delight anyone with an interest in this fascinating club.

This time the story begins in the aftermath of the Second World War, with the club still under the control of men who had been involved with Somerset CCC since the Victorian era and espoused what they regarded as the virtues of amateurism. Professionals were seen as a necessary evil and the winning of trophies as an irrelevance. Slowly and surely the voice of the supporters was heard as they called for change. And yet, Somerset still managed to call on their fair share of larger-than-life characters whose exploits off the pitch were at times as compelling as the flurries of excitement on match days. *Somerset Cricketers 1946 – 1970* offers insights into the lives and times of the 113 debutants in that era and in a number of instances we read within the pages the frank and entertaining accounts and fond memories of those men themselves. As one of the players – that grizzled veteran, the late Bill Alley – once wrote: 'While other teams fretted away worrying about the destination of the Championships, we were content to earn a reputation as the best social team in the country. My word, how we enjoyed ourselves!'

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Stephen Hill and Barry Phillips have been Somerset CCC supporters since boyhood. Both had enjoyed success as authors prior to their fateful meeting, when they agreed, in their words, 'in a moment of complete madness', to embark on their detailed account of each man who has played for the county. Now both retired, they live an inconvenient distance from Somerset – Stephen in Nottinghamshire and Barry in Oxfordshire – but still follow the fortunes of the club. After the publication of the first volume of the *Somerset Cricketers* in 2016 they were accorded the joint-accolade of Cricket Historians of the Year and awarded the Brooke-Lambert Trophy by the Association of Cricket Statisticians.

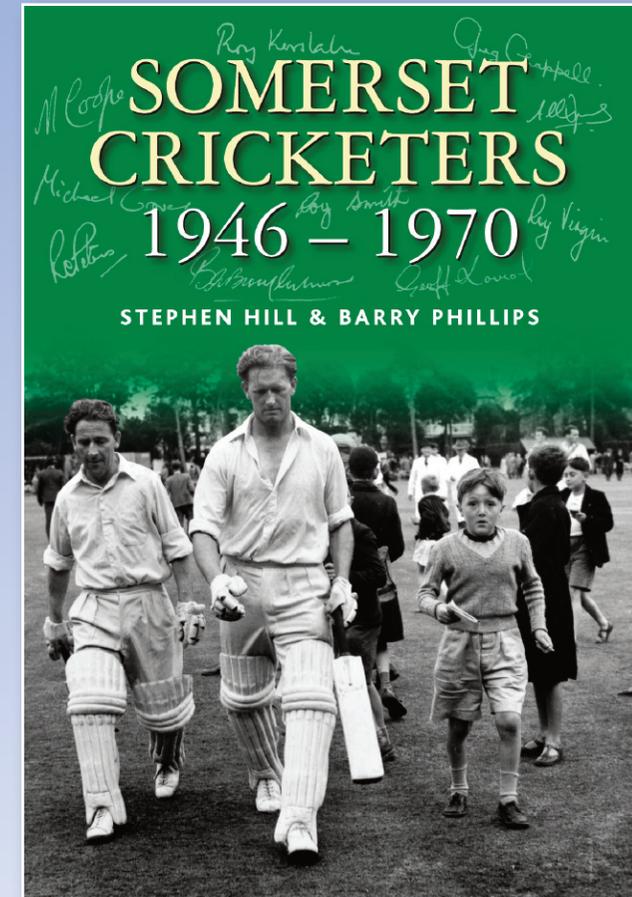
"I love it. I'm awestruck at the amount of research involved, hugely impressed by the presentation, and I relish the vein of dry humour running through it – absolutely perfect."

Ivan Ponting

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Imprints: Halsgrove, Ryelands, Halstar, PiXZ Books & Halswood Journals. Halsgrove® is a registered trademark. Copyright © 2018

HALSGROVE TITLE INFORMATION



Format: *Hardback, 210x148mm, 384 pages, illustrated in black & white*

Price: *£16.99*

ISBN: *978 0 85704 325 2*

Imprint: *Halsgrove*

Published: *May 2018*



Halsgrove Publishing, Halsgrove House, Ryelands Business Park, Bagley Road,
Wellington, Somerset TA21 9PZ Tel: 01823 653777 Fax: 01823 216796

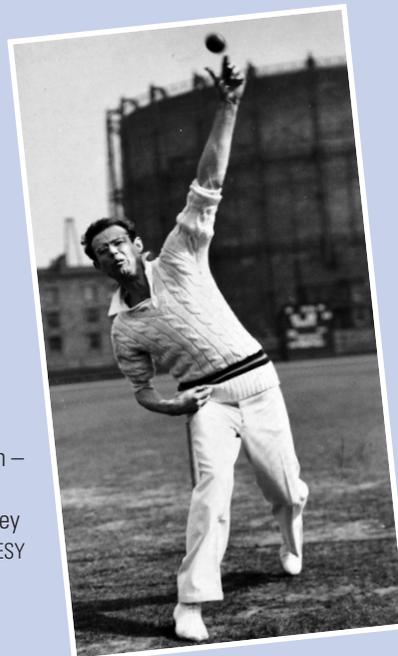
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Left: Geoff Clayton – a brilliant and independently-minded wicket-keeper.

SOMERSET CRICKET MUSEUM



Right: John McMahon – a successful left-arm spin bowler with Surrey and Somerset. COURTESY OF TRACEY McMAHON



Roy Smith in the throes of scoring 77 not out against Australia at Taunton in 1953. Yawar Saeed is at the non-striker's end. The bowler is Jack Hill and the wicket-keeper is Don Tallon. SOMERSET CRICKET MUSEUM

1947

"I am proud of my old school ties and what old school ties have done for Somerset Cricket"

John Daniell (President of Somerset CCC and Former Captain)

Championship Position: 11th of 17

As the *Somerset County Herald* observed, 'from the prominence of fourth place, Somerset sunk to the oblivion of sharing eleventh position'. Richard Palairet had stood down as President, to be replaced by former captain, John Daniell. The committee continued to be criticised by the Supporters Club in particular for being 'inefficient and unbusinesslike' with 'too much of the old school tie' about them. John Daniell remained implacably of the view that professionalism was a necessary evil that must be borne begrudgingly.



R. J. O. Meyer – the founder and headmaster of Millfield School who agreed to captain the team, despite suffering from debilitating back problems. COURTESY OF BARRY PHILLIPS

If those who ran the club proved resolutely consistent, then the same could hardly be said of the team's performances which ranged from the double triumph over eventual champions Middlesex to woeful totals of 25 against Gloucestershire and 28 versus Derbyshire (where they lost within a day). The captain for the season was Millfield School's maverick headmaster, Jack Meyer, whose decision-making was as wayward and unpredictable as the team's results. It seems strangely appropriate that a man beset with back problems should have been leading an ageing side embracing senescence. As for individuals, Maurice Tremlett's astonishing match-winning debut, a melding of natural talent and youthful fearlessness, had the national sports reporters hailing him – prematurely and mistake-



The Somerset team who played at Chatterfield in 1947. Bill Andrews was twelfth man and would later complain that he spent much of the season as the county's bag carrier. Back row: M. Coops, H. Gimblett, W. H. R. Andrews, M. F. Tremlett, H. L. Hazall, H. F. T. Buss, J. Lawrence. Front row: F. S. Lee, W. T. Lacks, R. J. O. Meyer, G. L. Courtenay, A. W. Willard. SOMERSET CRICKET MUSEUM

enly – as a future linchpin of English cricket. In addition, as reported in the local press, 'Walford, in one glorious month, became outstanding' with a string of fine performances including a highest score of 264. He ended the season with an average of 67.28. Harold Gimblett, too, enjoyed some success. Obligated to carry the weight of responsibility on his shoulders through the early part of the season and on some sticky wickets, he mustered a creditable 1,539 runs. Arthur Willard was the leading wicket-taker, though no bowler achieved the landmark of 100 wickets.

At the end of the season, Frank Lee (whose Testimonial Year this had been) left to pursue a distinguished career as an umpire (a trail that a surprising number of Somerset players would follow). Among the debutants, only Maurice Tremlett would have any notable impact as a player, although opening batsman Eric Hill later became a familiar figure at the County Ground as captain of the Second XI and for many years as a local journalist.

Examples of double-page spreads.

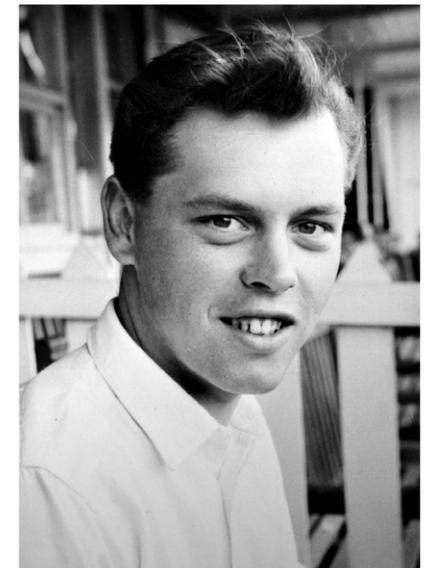
414
Roy Thomas Virgin
29 May 1957 v. Worcestershire, Taunton

Roy Virgin

Born in Taunton on 26 August 1939, Roy was the second of five children of Sidney Lawrence Virgin and his wife Gertrude Violet (née Ousley). Sidney worked for British Rail on track maintenance, in charge of a small group of men, and ran the British Rail Taunton cricket team for many years, occasionally roping in a young Roy and his brother. Educated at Huid's Grammar School, Roy confirms that he received no formal coaching until he was approached by Somerset, having shown early promise as a wicket-keeper batsman. Although he would become a slip fielder, his experiences behind the stumps proved beneficial when he reprised the role on a number of occasions in limited-overs cricket.

He was highly rated by Somerset but at this stage of his career, he was 'a prodler', rather than the attacking opening batsman he would become. Once he had reached the Under 15s, he was taken under the wing of Somerset pro David Kison, who expressed horror at the bat Roy was using. It was 'heavy as hell, saturated in oil, and borrowed from the Railways', in Roy's words. It was immediately replaced. Progress through the ranks continued as he absorbed lessons from more experienced pros such as Colin McCool, who would write that 'he will be a good player, make no mistake about it, and with [Graham] Atkinson he forms a combination that will be the backbone of Somerset'. They were indeed a fine pair of openers who complemented one another - Roy strong on the off-side and Graham predominantly a leg-side player – but while Graham appeared in the latter stages of his career suddenly to become constrained and consumed by doubt, Roy's batting traced the opposing trajectory. Roy is convinced that the changes in fortune were primarily attributable to confidence. He cites an innings against Northants at Kettering in 1970 in the John Player League as the catalyst. He had made 77 not out and it was as if a switch had been flicked and thereafter he carried with him a new-found belief.

After a promising start to his first-class career and then having been given an extended and successful run after an injury to Geoff Lomax, he left for National Service with the Somerset & Cornwall Light Infantry, including time in Gibraltar, Germany and, perhaps less excitingly, in Bodmin. Having returned to civilian life he was consistently among the runs, regularly topping 1,000 each season until in 1970 there was a sudden full flowering of his talent with over 2,000 runs, seven first-class centuries and an average approaching 50.00. As *Wisden* noted, he was now scoring 'fifty percent



Roy Virgin – 'he will be a good player, make no mistake about it'. SOMERSET CRICKET MUSEUM