

# SOMERSET CRICKETERS 1971–2000

Stephen Hill with additional research by Julian Wyatt

This is the fourth volume in the award-winning series outlining the life of each man who has played first-class cricket for Somerset. Appropriately enough for a club with a rich history, bursting at the seams with larger-than-life characters, the first person featured here is that great cricketing eccentric, the late Brian Close, who joined the club in 1971, after falling out with Yorkshire, and set about instilling a winning mentality. At the same time, Tom Cartwright, already at the club, having previously starred for Warwickshire, was charged with coaching an exciting crop of local youngsters: the likes of Ian Botham, Vic Marks and Peter Roebuck, were melded with two up-and-coming Caribbean stars – Viv Richards and Joel Garner – to form a team of all the talents. Between them, they brought glamour and trophies to a county who had languished in the cricketing doldrums for the best part of a century. The County Ground in Taunton was suddenly a place where one-day opponents were intimidated and where spectators from all walks of life wished to be and to be seen. But then the atmosphere soured as the club slid into civil war. Slowly, Somerset CCC then clawed their way back to a position where, by the end of the millennium, they were once again in serious contention for trophies.

The text is complemented throughout with quality images, many of them previously unpublished, and the authors have interviewed the vast majority of the 116 players who feature. The pen portraits are varied and colourful. The club's supporters and, indeed, anyone who has read the first three volumes in this series, would expect nothing less.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Stephen Hill** is a former businessman and now a full-time writer. The son of two schoolteachers, he was born in Bishops Lydeard and has supported Somerset CCC since boyhood. He now lives an inconveniently long distance away from Taunton, but continues to follow the fortunes of the county he still loves.

Born in Paulton, **Julian Wyatt**, a farmer's son, has also supported Somerset CCC from boyhood and fulfilled his early dreams by playing for them for seven seasons. He then went on to appear for Devon, the county in which he now lives. Since departing the first-class game, he has enjoyed a career as a coach, but has always been a keen writer.

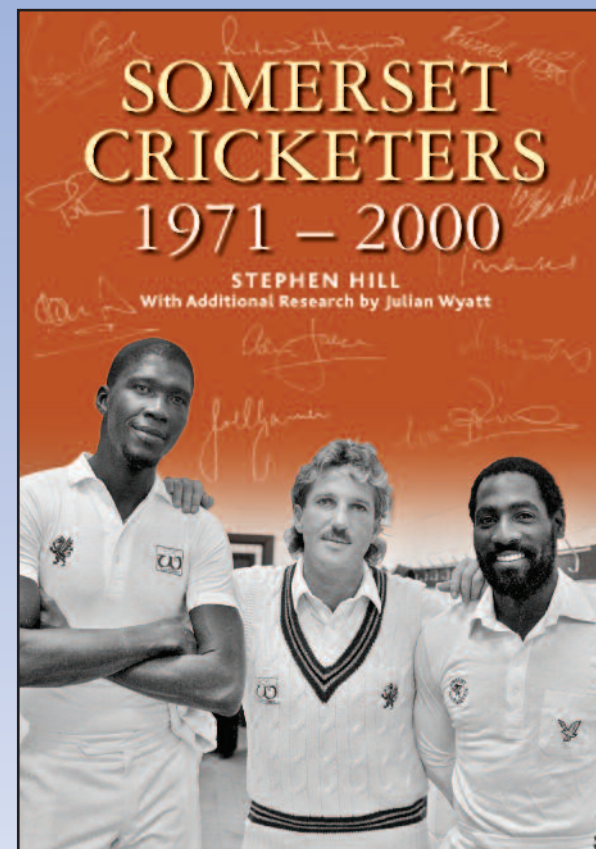
*"I'm seriously moved by these life stories – they're insightful and written with such warmth and down-to-earth humanity."*

John Hook (former Somerset cricketer)

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Right: Colin Dredge – would have run through brick walls for his beloved county



Left: Peter Trego – still the ebullient, open-hearted young man he always was



Right: Vic Marks – a good all-rounder and all-round good egg



Catching practice for the young guns (left to right): Vic Marks, John Hook, Ian Botham, Viv Richards and Peter Roebuck. COURTESY OF JOHN HOOK

1974

“One innings was sufficient for the Somerset players to realise that Len Creed had unearthed a genius. Brian Close delivered the immortal words, ‘You’ll do for me, lad.’ It was all too much for Len Creed, who was crying.”

*Vic Marks on Viv Richards*

Championship Position: 5 of 17

If the preceding years had been characterised by the influx of experienced old hands, then that was about to change with a vengeance. Roy Kerslake had recommended the adoption of a youth policy, with the county being scoured for young talent – players who would be coached by Tom Cartwright et al and toughened up by Brian Close. Three of the new recruits made their first-class debut in 1974. Viv Richards, Ian Botham and Peter Roebuck all arrived on the scene. Other noteworthy additions would follow. Some vintage, this was. Viv knocked Brian Close off his pedestal as the most prolific batsman and Iddiam Moseley came into his own as a bowler with eighty-one first-class wickets, ably assisted by the mercurial Allan Jones. The rise to first place in the Championship would have been excellent news in itself for a team about to undergo a transition, but it was the limited-overs games that truly lit the spirits of the faithful. Viv Richards’s debut – against Glamorgan in the First Round of the Benson & Hedges Cup – started out to be a Man of the Match Award-winning demonstration of the brave bravery that would become his trademark as a batsman. It was breathtaking and elicited a guard of honour arranged by the skipper. Nor to be outdone, a young Ian Botham refused, later in the same competition, to be cowed either by a painful blow to the mouth from a vicious Andy Roberts bounce or by what everyone else in Taunton regarded as the inevitability of defeat. He picked himself up off the floor, led his team to an improbable victory and garnered another Man of the Match Award for the young guns. It was brave, it was brilliant and, nor for the last time, it had the national sports pages slaving about an exceptional all-rounder from Yeovil. And yet, in the context of one-day cricket, the season arguably belonged to Bob Clapp, a quiet, humorous, self-deprecating chap who bagged a record number of wickets for his side. Those wickets helped Somerset to second place in the John Player Special League.

Nothing had been won. Of course it hadn’t. Somerset never won anything, did they? But the future appeared bright.

I know who managed to convince his captain that he needed a nightwatchman (on a flyer at Old Trafford), Dennis was in fact a competent batsman, often required to sacrifice his wicket in the interests of pushing the score along. His professional career with Somerset would span nine seasons from 1975 until 1981 (although he was called up as emergency cover in each of the two succeeding seasons) and he came away with 281 wickets at 33.22 apiece and a batting average of 21.21. Among his triumphs were two Lord’s final appearances, but perhaps his proudest moment was with the bat, when he surprised the home supporters with an unbeaten century against the New Zealand tourists in 1978. The event he might perhaps most wish to erase from his memory occurred during the match against Gloucestershire at Taunton when he became the second man to be hit for six sixes off consecutive deliveries in a first-class fixture. After the final deliveries of one over were despatched over the boundary ropes by Mike Procter, the first four balls bowled in Dennis’s net over met the same fate. Somerset captain Brian Rose spared him any further misery by taking him out of the attack.

In his early days as a professional cricketer, he had supplemented his wages during the winter months by working as a painter and decorator. First married in 1971 to Rosemary (née Padmore), a clerical assistant who lived in Market Deeping, he was later divorced and in 1977 was married to Susan (née Mangnall), with whom he had a son and daughter. Taunton has remained Dennis’s adoptive home and, after his playing days were over, he was invited to join the coaching staff, applying his enthusiasm and accumulated wisdom by liaising with schools and helping to develop the skills of local schoolboys. His abilities were recognised by King’s College (in Taunton), who offered him the post of coach and head groundsman in 1991. He would remain in that role until 2014, when he stood down and continued to work on a part-time basis, in particular continuing to oversee the summer festivals at King’s that he had orchestrated successfully for a number of years. He has described the school as ‘my home and my family for twenty-five years’ and among his charges at the school were Jos Buttler and Alex Barrow, who both went on to join the Somerset side, the pair leaving on one memorable occasion delighted their coach with a record-breaking stand of 340 in a fifty-over school match in 2008. Jos refers to Dennis as ‘a fantastic man’, noting that it was not just the cricketering fraternity who appreciated his contribution to school life at King’s, and stating that, ‘He was loved by all the pupils and teachers, with that consistently bubbly character and sense of humour.’

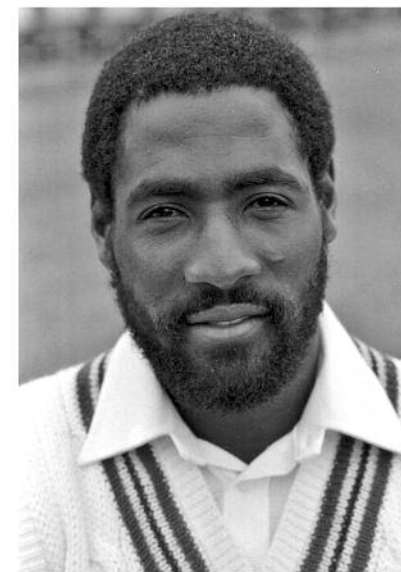
By way of relaxation, Dennis has enjoyed hobbies as varied as fishing and skittles, with one fellow skittler observing, ‘I’ve played against Dennis and I swear he can land a skittle accurately and turn it like a cricket ball.’ Widely acknowledged as a fine raconteur of Somerset crickering, tales of a mildly scurrilous nature, Dennis’s infectious enthusiasm for life in general and cricket in particular remain undiminished.

Examples of double-page spreads.

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Isaac Vivian Alexander Richards  
1 May 1974 v. India, Taunton

Vivian Richards was a magnificent cricketer. A fine physical specimen, he was regarded by many as the greatest batsman of his generation. Adored in his homeland – the tiny island of Antigua, with a population not much greater than the town of Taunton – he was also revered in Somerset and feared around the world. His adoptive county was blessed by his commanding presence for thirteen seasons before his departure near the club asunder.

Viv browbeat opponents into submission by sustained, controlled aggression. When the mood took him, he could happily batter a fielding side to the point that they were utterly dispirited (as he did, for example, with his 322 against Warwickshire). Seemingly nerveless, he would crouch while awaiting his turn to bat. He would then delay his entrance into the playing area at the fall of a wicket and once he came down the steps would own the field through the sheer force of his personality. He would walk to the wicket with an imperious expression and real swagger that had many opponents already on the back foot as they saw those impressive shoulders – all this at odds with his quiet and understated self-assurance in everyday life. Viv would take guard before tapping his bat handle and then pulling away to ensure that the bowler had to wait for him to be ready. He asserted his dominance in the gladiatorial confrontation. When opponents tried to sledge Viv, they only deepened his resolve. His belief was that the bowler must by definition be the one to relax, as he is obliged at some point to make his way back to his mark. It helps if you have the skill and strength to humiliate the bowler. On one occasion, as reported in his autobiography, *Sir Vivian*, he had played and missed the ball with a couple of airy shors at the start of his innings at Cardiff, when Glamorgan’s Greg Thomas made the cardinal error of eyeballing him and telling him, ‘For your information, it’s red, it’s round and it weighs five and a half ounces.’ Viv smote the next ball out of the ground and into the River Taff, informing Thomas, without sparing the expetives, that since he knew what it looked like, he could now go and fetch it. Hugh Morris, fielding at first slip, was heard to say to his bowler, ‘What have you done, my son?’ Viv went on to score a brutal 136 in seventy minutes before being run out, arguably the only means of dismissal open to the opposition in such circumstances. It was a pity, from a Somerset



Vivian Richards – one of the all-time greats of the game