Outside-edge

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Chris Dent 2010-25 (11,237 first-class runs, average 36.01, HS 268)

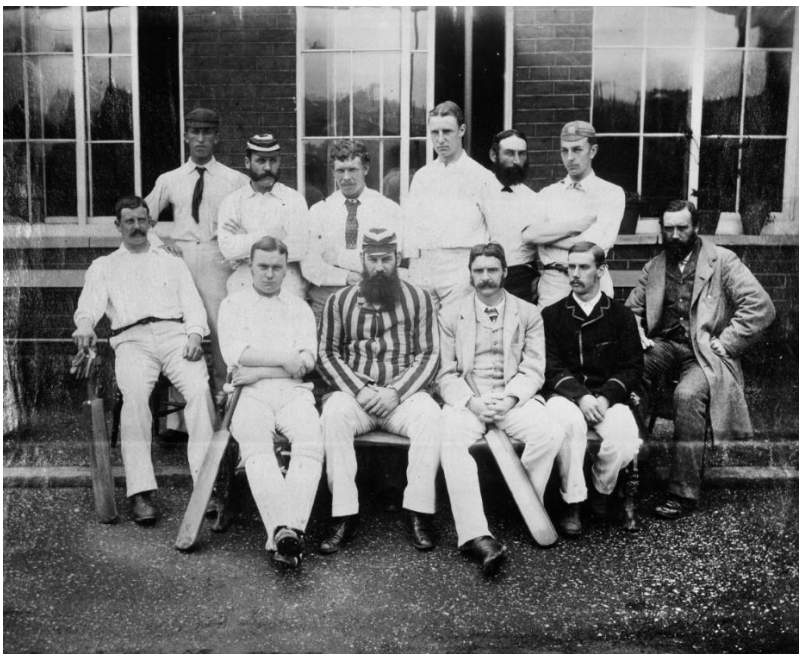
The Magazine of the Gloucestershire Exiles
News and views on and about Gloucestershire County Cricket Club

Editorial

After a fairly uneventful 2025, I had hoped to find some inspiration to welcome the 2026 season. Unfortunately, the England team's performance in the Ashes did little to lift the spirits or provide some positivity. However, I did find some solace in the webpages of www.gloscricket.co.uk . Apparently it is 100 years since Gloucestershire claimed their third Champion County title in four seasons, before retaining the title the following year. Halcyon days indeed!

It is difficult to understand the system by which the Champion County was decided as there was no table but the title was declared arbitrarily by the cricket press. Publications such as *Wisden*, *Lillywhite's Cricketer's Companion* and *Cricket: A Record of the Game* each applied their own methods, although these seemed quite simple: the county with the fewest defeats. Clearly this was a method open to some debate! However, Gloucestershire's superiority in 1876 was unanimously recognised. All agreed that Gloucestershire were the outstanding county side of the season. Only seven years after the club's formation, Gloucestershire had risen to the summit of the English game. Central to that rise was the Grace family (WG, EM and Fred). Of course, WG was in his pomp, setting remarkable records as he became cricket's first superstar. Already acclaimed as its first Champion Cricketer by Lillywhite's in 1871, the Doctor exceeded himself in 1876. Grace made 26 first-class appearances, scoring 2,622 runs at 62.42 with 7 centuries, 10 half-centuries and a highest score of 344*. He held 46 catches and took 130 wickets with a best analysis of 8–69. His bowling average was 19.05; he had 5 wickets in an innings 11 times and 10 wickets in a match twice.

Gloucestershire completed the 1876 season unbeaten. The achievement was widely acknowledged by the cricketing press, and the County were deservedly recognised as Champion County. The same core of players would go on to retain the title in 1877, making Gloucestershire only the second county to win undisputed back-to-back championships and cementing the Grace family's legacy as one of cricket's earliest dynasties.



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Chair's Message

Time is a funny thing, isn't it? The winter felt impossibly long but, as I wandered around the Bristol boundary last week in sunglasses against the glare of the sun, looking out at the bright green, blue and white of the scene, I had to pinch myself that it's really been six long months since the last season packed up its kit bag here.

As you will know, the Nevil Road ground does not fall silent once the last ball has been bowled. The Bristol Pavilion spaces welcome weddings, wakes and fairs, business meetings and community events. The Thatcher's café is open every weekday, buzzing with folk meeting over coffee or for a lunchtime snack.

The same people you might meet around the boundary during the season are here, minus the sunhats and folding chairs, for gatherings such as the Gloucestershire Cricket Lovers' Society or the weekly Walkers and Talkers, creating bright moments in those lonely months.

Of course, the Club and the organisations working with it have been busy, too. If you are attending the Club AGM on April 21st, you can tour the new changing rooms and facilities for officials. The Heritage Trust is hard at work, raising funds for beautiful library cases to be built to house the archive of the late Roger Gibbons in the Museum area at the Ashley Down Road end of the ground.

Here at Exiles' HQ, your committee have been busy on your behalf as well, in our collective aim to support the Club, raise the profile of Gloucestershire cricket and to raise funds to promote the careers of young cricketers.

As you will know, our support over the 2024/25 winter was crucial to keeping the Girls' Pathway running through a hiatus in their funding. This created a strong link with the Gloucestershire Women's team and we have been delighted to see many of you enthusiastically supporting the Women's game. This year, as you will read elsewhere in these pages, we are delighted to announce that, thanks to sponsorship from a generous Exile member, we will be presenting not one, but *two* Player of the Year awards, with an award – as voted for by you – for the Women's Player of the Year, going forward from this season.

As Fran Wilson announces her squad for the 2026 season, the Exiles' committee have decided to cement our relationship with the Women's team in another way – by sponsoring one of the young squad members, Emily Geach. With no player receiving a Benefit Year in 2026, to which we would normally contribute, it felt appropriate to show our support of a player in this way. So, all the more reason to watch the Women's team both home and away!

With a relatively new-look Men's squad beginning their outdoor training on the Bristol grass this week, we look forward to a fascinating season all round.

We know that many of you look forward to Cheltenham and are aware that, due to the shape of the domestic season for 2026, the Festival will take place later this year, through August. As Roger Gibbons might have told us, the Festival has always bobbed around the fixture list, with many matches of the pre-war 'glory days' of Hammond, Barnett and Goddard stretching into August. Today the later date might bring some added challenges, but the Club are committed to delivering a Festival experience with exciting cricket and have been working hard through the winter to make this happen.

We are delighted that we will be able to have our Exiles' Day once again and look forward to seeing many of you there on August 22nd.

Welcome

With the plethora of departures from the playing staff at the end of last season it is hardly surprising (and a relief!) that we have new players to welcome to Bristol, and the mix looks both interesting and promising.

The first signing to be announced was that of the experienced Will Williams from Lancashire on a three-year contract. Born in New Zealand, Will is England-qualified through his dual British-New Zealand citizenship. He is a right-arm medium-fast bowler and made his debut for Canterbury in 2012. After ten successful years with them he joined Lancashire, initially on a short-term contract but this was soon extended to the end of the 2025 season. He was offered an extension but opted to head south to Bristol. In his time with Lancashire he took 99 first-class wickets at 24.29 and in total has so far taken 216 first-class wickets at 23.65, with an economy rate of 2.45. He has also clocked up almost 100 white-ball matches.

A more familiar face arriving in Bristol is that of Craig Miles who returns to the Club after six years with Warwickshire who he joined, along with Liam Norwell, at the end of the 2018 season. Craig made his debut for Gloucestershire as a 16-year-old in 2011. His breakthrough season came two years later when he took 43 wickets. When he left the County he had taken 255 first-class wickets at 26.68, with 56 in his final season, and had featured in the Club's Royal London One-Day cup-winning side in 2015. With Warwickshire he played a key role in their 2021 County Championship and Bob Willis Trophy double but in more recent times has had limited game time with the club. He had at times struggled with injuries but was fit throughout the 2025 season yet found himself surplus to requirements for the championship games. Perhaps with an eye on the future, he joined Gloucestershire for the 2025 Metro Bank campaign. Now approaching 32, Swindon-born Craig still has much to give.

Joining Craig and Will in the seam bowling stable is 30-year-old Australian Gabe Bell. He has arrived in Bristol and will play in the first block of six championship matches, which includes the away match at Derbyshire and the home fixtures against Durham, Lancashire, Kent and Northamptonshire. The Club's Director of Cricket Jon Lewis had made it clear that he would be looking for a bowler who would thrive in early-season conditions and the Tasmanian Bell appears to fit that bill. The fact that four of his six matches will be played on the square at Bristol will also have been a contributory factor in his recruitment. Standing at 6' 4" he is a right-arm bowler, described as medium-paced and someone who brings reliable pace and steep bounce, and he comes with a good record. He made his debut for Tasmania in March 2017 and when the 2025/26 Sheffield Shield season drew to a close he had chalked up over 200 first-class wickets. In 2023/24 he took 42 wickets in the tournament, a further 31 in 2024/25 and this year added a further 32 at an average of 27.78 apiece, putting him eighth in the list of Shield wicket-takers. Showing his strength and resilience, he had bowled almost 300 overs in the season, which bodes well for the grind of the championship. As Jon Lewis himself commented, "We looked hard at what it takes to win in our own conditions in April and May and Gabe comes highly recommended from our network of contacts across Australia…. He is a hard-working individual which is exactly what we need at the start of the season." In February Gabe came up against Cameron Bancroft's Western Australia side and had match figures of 9-133. Bancroft will be hoping that he will be benefitting from Bell's prowess when they are both in Gloucestershire colours.

It was not long afterwards that it was announced that another Australian would be heading to Bristol, and once again it was a player little-known in English cricketing circles. South Australia's Liam Scott is a 25-year-old "bowling all-rounder" who bowls and bats right-handed. He will arrive in time for the Club's Vitality Blast campaign and will also be available for two Championship matches, away to both Worcestershire and Northamptonshire. Born and raised in Sydney, he plays for South Australia and the Adelaide Strikers where he is a team-mate of Gloucestershire's fellow Australian D'Arcy Short (Short is already confirmed to be returning to the County for this season's T20 campaign). Liam made his debut for South Australia in 2019 and has so far played 36 first-class matches for them, scoring 1500 runs at an average of 27. He notched up his maiden first-class century during the recent season and has also taken 71 wickets with his fast-medium bowling at 29.26 each. This included a 5-33 against high-flying Queensland in February as South Australia

headed to the final of the Shield. In the T20 format he has played 19 matches and scored 410 runs at 37.27 with a strike rate of 137. The highlight of his season for the Strikers was blasting 67 from 43 balls against the Perth Scorchers

Perhaps the biggest name to be heading to Bristol is Dawid Malan who has signed a two-year deal to play in the Vitality Blast. Born in London, Malan was raised in South Africa but came to England as a 20-year-old to play for Middlesex where he remained for 13 years before spending the last five with Yorkshire. Now 38, he concentrates on the shorter-form game and is playing white ball franchise cricket across the world. His departure from Yorkshire was a surprise to many as he was a key figure in their T20 set-up captaining their side last year and top-scoring for them in both the 2023 and 2024 Blast tournaments. He is also a regular in The Hundred tournaments, winning the competition with both the Trent Rockets and the Oval Invincibles. Described as a "bludgeoning" left-hander, there is more to his signing than just his batting. On announcing his arrival Jon Lewis said, "He is a good person, an excellent professional, and will be brilliant to have around the place." A veteran of 22 Test matches, 30 ODI's and 62 T20 internationals, he has also been the world's number-one ranked batter. Much as we look forward to his runs, he will also have much to give to the County's younger players.

Two young players who are little known to many County followers and who can only benefit from the experience of Dawid Malan are Tommy Boorman and Daz Ahmed, both of whom signed rookie contracts with the Club late last year having appeared and impressed in the Club's Metro Bank 50-over squad. They will be looking for places in the first XI.

Cheltenham-born, 20-year-old Tommy is a promising batsman who made his debut for Gloucestershire last season in the final Vitality Blast match of the campaign against Somerset, hitting a six for his first runs in senior cricket, but it was during the Metro Bank tournament that he made his mark, especially against Surrey at Guildford and then at Bristol where he guided the team to victory with 33 not out off 22 balls. Daz, now 25, figured more prominently in the Metro Bank tournament, playing six matches and was also selected to play in the final championship match of the season, against Middlesex at Lord's, but injured himself in the early stages and played little part in the game. Bristol-born and a seam bowler, he has been involved with the County's 2nd XI side since 2022 but has also more recently been part of the South Asia Cricket Academy (SACA) and the MCC Young Cricketers' programme.

We wish them all a happy and successful season.



Gloucestershire Exiles Shop

We have Exiles ties and pin badges available for purchase.
Ties are £15 and pin badges 2 for £10. Both include package and posting.
To buy yours contact matt.davies@bbc.co.uk.



Welcome Dawid Malan

Joining Gloucestershire for the Vitality Blast for the next two seasons is England's T20 World Cup winner Dawid Malan. This move sees Malan join the third county of his career, following thirteen years with Middlesex and five years at Yorkshire. During his time in Yorkshire, Malan became a central figure in their T20 setup, captaining the side in 2025 and finishing as the club's leading Blast run-scorer in both 2023 and 2024. Our own Matt Davies caught up with him while Dawid was working at the BBC and asked him about his move to Gloucestershire.



Q. Dawid, how big a factor were Jon Lewis and Mark Alleyne in you signing a two-year contract with Gloucestershire?

Massive! When I was looking around, I ended up speaking to Jon Lewis, who I have had a lot of time with around the England setup. I know him well. When I spoke to him he was extremely positive from the start. For me as a player, wanting to play white-ball cricket and playing at a team that really prioritizes white-ball cricket appealed. Jon Lewis said, "Leave it with me, I'll get back to you within a week". It was incredibly pleasing for me when he did. I am extremely happy that I'm able to join up with him and, and Mark as well, who I worked with around the England setup, too. So, two great fellas and hopefully I can make a difference to the team.

Q. How does it work when you're looking for a new club, do you ring them direct, do they ring you, or does it go through agents? Give us an insight into the process?

It's a bit of both. When I decided that it was time for me to look elsewhere, you identify a few clubs that you want to look at, ideally ones that suit you from a cricketing point of view. White-ball cricket is my focus now so I was looking at teams that are white-ball focused and, you know, if I have a relationship with someone, I'd speak to them. Otherwise, your agent would make the calls. If you don't have a relationship with someone, then you sort of get to the common ground, you get into who wants you, who needs you, who doesn't need a player? And it turned out that that Gloucestershire was the one. I'm incredibly happy with that.

Q. How many of the Gloucestershire players do you know? With franchise all around the world it seems you can have lots of teammates and you get to know more players than you would if you were just attached to one county.

Yes, and especially when you play North Group like I did for Yorkshire, so I haven't played against the Gloucestershire guys for a long time in T20 cricket. I didn't come across them as much as I did with Middlesex. My four-day cricket has probably gone downhill a little bit, and I haven't played that for the last 2 or 3 years. It makes it a bit harder to get to know the teams down south, but I played for Middlesex for a long time and a lot of those guys are still there, like James Bracey. Jack Taylor and Miles Hammond. Gloucestershire have been very good at keeping those guys together, so it's an exciting group to be part of.

Q. You'll know the importance of local derbies having played at Middlesex and Yorkshire. You do know that we love to beat Somerset, don't you?

I do. Tough place to play down at Taunton. A good wicket and high scoring. Look, it's always fantastic when you play in these big derbies. The crowd's always fantastic. The atmosphere is always pretty good. It's something that I've not experienced before. I've experienced the Middlesex-Surrey and the Yorkshire-Lancashire matches and I'm keen to see how that compares to the Gloucestershire-Somerset game.

Q. We're talking now in February. The Blast starts in May. What are you up to between now and then?

I'm doing a little bit of this [broadcasting]. I was down at Ampleforth School yesterday, having a look there to see if I could help a little bit with some coaching in the off time. A couple of days a week here and there when my schedule allows it. There are a few auctions coming up for different tournaments, so it's a little bit up in the air right now. Adil Rashid's academy down in Bradford helps me a lot now that I am between clubs. It means I don't have to travel down to Bristol as much. So it's just sort of doing that and spending a lot of time with the family. I haven't been able to spend a lot of time with the kids who are two and four so being able to do that more regularly helps a lot.

Q. How does it work on a white ball contract? If Gloucestershire had injury worries when you were around in May, would you ever play in a championship game? How does that work?

I'd never say no. My contract is primarily just for T20 cricket with no option for four-day cricket currently. But if Jon Lewis was to ring me and say, look, we need you to play for two games, of course I would if the schedule allows. If it stopped me from playing a white-ball tournament somewhere I might say no. White-ball cricket is predominantly my focus. The four-day schedule does take up a lot of your time. It was 4, 5 or 6 days a week with training and travel and time being away, and it's always over a weekend so that made my decision to focus on T20 stuff easy with a young family. I wanted to spend time at home and something had to give, especially when you are away in the winter so much. So, I'd be happy to play the odd game here or there if it if it worked out, but I just can't commit to a full season now, considering I want to play in white-ball cricket around the world as well.

Q. You won the Blast with Middlesex in 2008 You're coming to a side that won it the season before last. Gloucestershire go into the Blast now expecting they should at least reach Finals Day.

Yes, and they've got a fantastic white-ball team. They have David Payne who has led their attack for a long time and been fantastic for them for years. The ethos of the club has always been white-ball ever since Mark Alleyne was captain back in the day as well, so it's something that I'm looking forward to being part of, seeing how they want to go about it because it's exciting for me to go to a new place and see how different teams and different environments work. That is exciting for me.

We will look forward to seeing you in Bristol in May. So, see you then. Thanks for the chat.



Gloucestershire Exiles' Player of the Year 2025

Congratulations to James Bracey who you voted for as your Player of the Year for 2025. James topped the poll ahead of Ben Charlesworth in second place with Graeme van Buuren coming third.



James Bracey batting against Leicestershire, September 2025. Picture: Ruth Sharville

James is the third player after Mark Alleyne (1998/1999) and Ryan Higgins (2018/2019) to win the award in consecutive seasons.

Among those who voted for James was Ian Herdman who said, "My nomination is the same as in 2024, namely James Bracey. As well as scoring over 1,000 runs in the first-class game at an average of over 50, he kept wicket magnificently throughout. He was also a major contributor in other formats of the game."

JAMES BRACEY 2025 STAT BOX

Championship: 1010 runs (average 50.50), 3 centuries, 43 catches and 5 stumpings
T20 Blast: 39 runs (average 9.75) and 4 catches
Metro Bank One-Day Cup: 521 runs (average 63.55), 2 centuries, 13 catches and 4 stumpings

In praise of Graeme Van Buuren, Nigel Dean commented**, "**My choice for Exiles Player of the Year is Graeme Van Buuren. In a year when candidates weren't plentiful, my belief is Graeme played an important role as a reliable all-rounder. With the weight of captaincy no longer on his shoulders, Graeme contributed vital runs down the order as well as crucial wickets with his off-spin."

Congratulations to James who will be presented with his award later in the season and thank you to everyone who voted.

Exiles' Women's Player of the Year Trophy 2026

The Gloucestershire Exiles are pleased to announce that it will, from this season, be awarding annually a Women's Player of the Year trophy to the leading player from the Gloucestershire CCC Women's team. In line with our existing award for the Men's team, it will be voted for by our members. "Gloucestershire has been at the heart of the growth of the women's game for several years now," said Exiles' Chair Sarah Blowen, "and following our recent sponsorship of the Girls' Pathway this award is an extension of the Exiles' commitment to both Gloucestershire and the growth of the women's game. This is a big year for the club with the six Women's World Cup matches at the Seat Unique Stadium as well as the Women's ODI against India at the end of May, but it is also big for the Women's team as they look to build on their fine start from last season."

In early March Head Coach Fran Wilson selected a 19-player squad for this season, one which blends experience and emerging talent yet with competition across all departments. The team will once more be captained by Liv Daniels and the squad includes five new faces with Abi Bryan, Lucy Bull, Bella Herring, Sophie Smith-Graham and Maddie White all promoted from the Pathway system. One name missing from this year's squad is Bea Willis who secured her first professional contract late last year when she joined Somerset.



Skipper Liv Daniels



Top scoring Prarthana Reddy

Last season's top run scorer and "Batter of the Year", Prarthana Reddy will be buoyed following her call-up over the winter to train with the England Under 19 squad. In the T20 Blast she scored 176 runs and notched up an unbeaten 91 against Leicestershire in the Metro Bank 50-over tournament. Also among the runs in the Blast were Melissa Story and Georgina Start (who will be known by her married name having changed her surname from Cant in the off-season). Last season's leading wicket-taker Caitlin Belcher, a right-arm fast-medium bowler, will once more be a key member of the attack, while experienced skipper Daniels will be looking to add to her career tally with her off-breaks.

It is still early days for county women's teams but the progress is fast and the standard is high and rising. Many of the names in the squad are new to us – for now. If you have the chance to see them in action your backing would be greatly appreciated. Outside-edge will continue to cover the growth of the Club's Women's team and we look forward to your support in the poll at the end of the season.

And Welcome Fran Wilson

It is more a case of “Welcome back” than “Welcome”, but a key appointment made by the Club over the winter was that of Fran Wilson to the position of Women’s Head Coach. A World Cup winner with England at a packed Lord’s in that famous final against India in 2017, Fran retired from playing at the end of last season to concentrate on coaching, an area that she has been working on for the past five years.

Fran, 34, made 64 international appearances for England across all formats between 2010 and 2021, including eight of England's matches at the 2017 World Cup. She also featured in the 2020 T20 World Cup in Australia and made the last of her international appearances on England's tour of New Zealand in February 2021. She scored 468 ODI runs with a top score of 85 not out and 356 in T20 internationals with a best of 43 not out. Domestically, she made her Somerset debut in 2006, before joining the Bristol-based Western Storm in 2016 and also represented Gloucestershire in the 2022 and 2023 Vitality Women's County T20 competitions while developing her coaching skills through the County's Girls Emerging Players’ Programme. Now she will be taking full-time charge of Gloucestershire in Tier 2 of the new Women's county structure, having worked with the 1st XI on a consultancy basis during the 2025 season.

In 2024 and following the undoubted success of the women’s game in The Hundred competition, the ECB announced the creation of the new structure, splitting teams across three tiers. It was launched last season. Eight teams (Durham, Essex, Hampshire, Lancashire, Nottinghamshire, Somerset, Surrey and Warwickshire) were given Tier 1 status, each with a grant from the ECB of circa £1.3 million. Spreading the geographic coverage, it was subsequently announced that Yorkshire will move to Tier 1 status this season with Glamorgan joining next year. The top flight remains ring-fenced with no promotion or relegation but the ECB intend to add two further teams in 2029. Gloucestershire did bid for Tier 1 status but were unsuccessful, perhaps not helped by the Club’s financial difficulties at the time, but it remains a key part of the Club’s strategy to attain Tier 1 status in 2029. With this in mind and at the time of her appointment, Fran said, “We all want results, but the real goal is to build sustainable success and to put the foundations in place that allow us to compete and thrive as a Tier 1 Club. A huge part of my role is about building those foundations from the first team right through to the age groups, having a genuine influence across that pathway. By developing the resources we already have in the county and creating a strong network and structure around the players, I believe we can achieve long-term success."

Jon Lewis, who as Director of Cricket is responsible for both the Men’s and Women’s sides, added, “We went through a thorough recruitment process and Fran was the standout candidate throughout. With strong roots in cricket across the South West, a deep passion for Bristol and Gloucestershire, and a long-standing connection with the Club, her understanding of the region was an important factor for us. Fran demonstrated an exceptional range of qualities during the process and this marks a hugely significant appointment in an area where we have serious ambition. An outstanding playing career, a history of success at both club and international level and a deep understanding of elite performance make this an appointment we are extremely proud of. The environment Fran will build will be welcoming, driven and true to the 'Gloucestershire way'.” The Tier 2 teams this season will be Gloucestershire, Derbyshire, Glamorgan, Kent, Leicestershire, Middlesex, Northamptonshire, Sussex and Worcestershire and all matches will be in the white-ball format. There will be eight matches in both the T20 Vitality Blast League and the 50-over Metro Bank tournament, and the Club will also be competing in the Vitality T20 knockout cup tournament, a competition which includes teams from all three tiers. There will be two matches played this year during the Cheltenham Festival.

Despite minimal central funding from the ECB for Tier 2 teams, Gloucestershire, for many years now a strong supporter of the women’s game, has shown its commitment to it once again, recently with such things as the construction of extra changing rooms in the Bristol Pavilion. The Gloucestershire Exiles share this support and has for the past two years made donations to help finance the Girls’ Pathway. Fran Wilson’s appointment is another sign of the County’s commitment. We welcome her and wish her well in her new role.

The Exiles Sponsor Emily Geach



Emily Geach in action

We are delighted to announce that as part of the support for Gloucestershire's Girls' and Women's cricket the Exiles are this season sponsoring Emily Geach, a key member of the Club's Women's team. Emily is Cornish-born and has been with Gloucestershire for four years. She is 22 years old, a right-arm medium-pace bowler and a left-hand middle-order batter. She developed her cricketing talents in the Cornwall Pathway, making her debut for Cornwall Women in 2018 at the age of just 14. Three years later her performances led to her joining the Western Storm Academy squad, making her debut for the senior side later in the 2022 season. During that season she made the move to Gloucestershire CCC since when she has played for the Women's team. In 2025, she was one of five Gloucestershire players selected for the Glamorgan Academy for the 2026 season—a key hub for developing professional talent in Wales and the Southwest.

As a left-handed middle-order batter, she provides useful variety. In 2025 she had a batting average of 20.00 with a highest score of 29, made against Middlesex. Her right-arm medium pace is often used to maintain pressure and she is known for being an economical option in the middle overs. Emily has been officially named in Gloucestershire's 19-player squad for the 2026 season and is expected to be a primary all-rounder in the team's Vitality Blast and Metro Bank campaigns.

Her connection with cricket is not only on the playing side. In July 2023, Edgbaston made history during the Women's Ashes by assembling the first-ever all-female grounds team to prepare a pitch for an international cricket match. This initiative was a landmark moment for visibility in a profession where women make up only about 2% of the workforce. The project was led by Meg Lay (a sports turf operative for Gloucestershire and Western Storm) and featured a team of eight women from across the country including Emily.

Listen out for a mention of the Exiles on the Club's PA system and also in the scorecards and club communications whenever Emily plays. We wish her every success this season. Keep an eye out for how she gets on and if you have the chance to see her playing do let her know that you are an Exile. While the team and the women's game are developing your support is so valuable.

The Women's World Cup Comes to Bristol

Mark Brunt casts his mind back to the early days of Women's cricket

My first experience of women's cricket was playing in a 20-over match for Woodchester Cricket Club against the Somerset Ladies side in Stroud, back in the seventies and way before it was called T20. At times struggling to find opponents in those days, the Ladies' team were delighted to venture northwards across the county border for a match. They were under the watchful eye of Peter Wight, the former Somerset player who had long moved into coaching and first-class umpiring. How prophetic that such a player was involved with the early days of women's cricket.



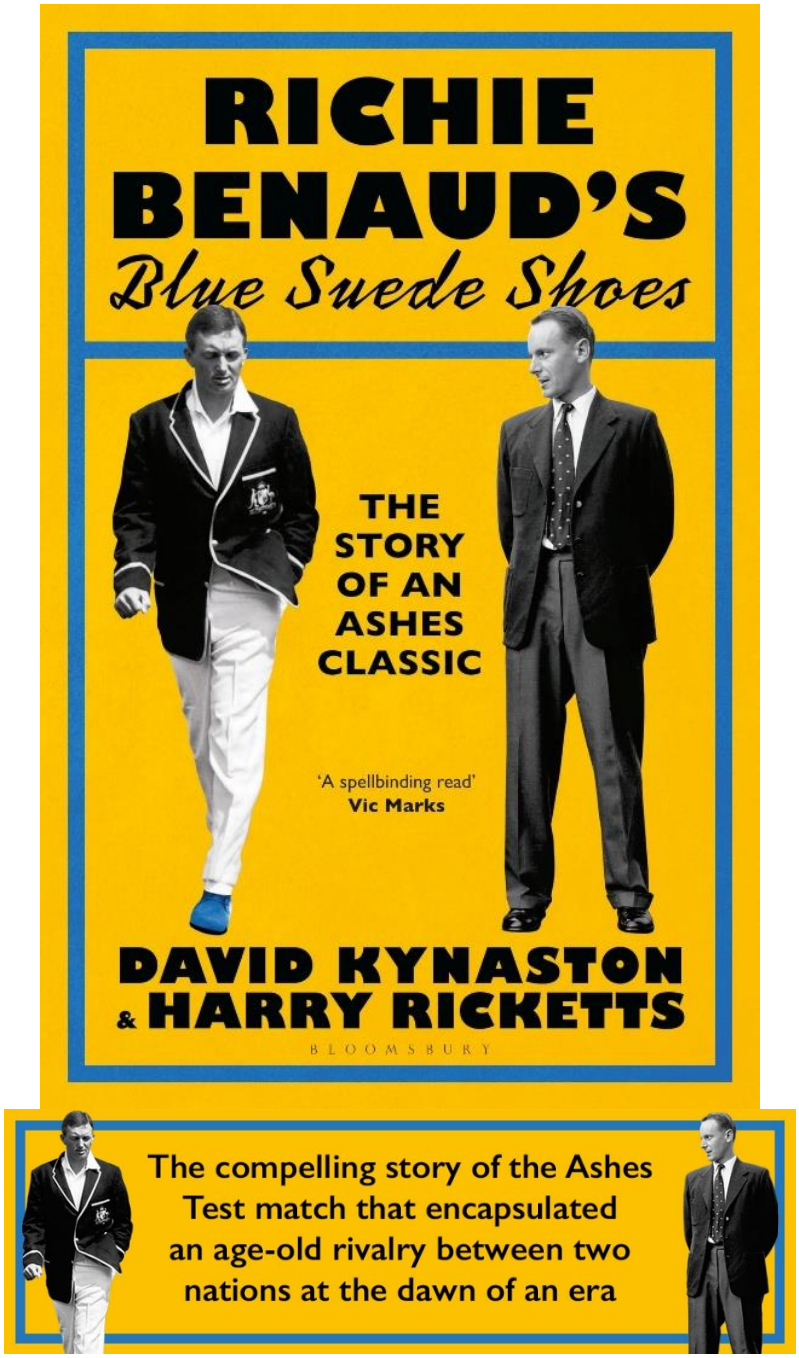
Fast forward almost forty years and I was attending one of the best cricket matches that I have ever witnessed, the 50-over Women's World Cup final between England and India at Lord's in 2017, played in front of 25,000 spectators. What a contrast between the two and what a match it was. The standard was so high with tension throughout, played in a terrific atmosphere and with many families packing the stands. There was a Brunt in that one, too, but no relation, with England's Kathryn hitting a belligerent 34 before bowling six tidy overs, and of course it all culminated in that tense final over from Western Storm's Anya Shrubsole to win the match and secure the trophy for England. That match has been described as "iconic", perhaps doing more than any other to boost the women's game.

Now, nearly ten years later and with the women's game having grown even more, it is time for the next generation to dream and inspire, and for us to experience it. For Gloucestershire fans there will be ample opportunity to do so. Continuing its close connection with international women's cricket, the Seat Unique stadium will be playing host in late June to six matches in this summer's tournament, four of which will be part of double-header days. The matches are to be played as follows:

Sunday June 21st: West Indies vs Sri Lanka
Tuesday 23rd June: New Zealand vs Scotland followed by Sri Lanka vs Ireland
Thursday 25th June: South Africa vs Netherlands
Saturday 27th June: Pakistan vs Netherlands followed by West Indies vs Ireland

Women's sport is making such big strides forward. You only have to look at the impact that the Lionesses and Red Roses have made in football and rugby following World Cup and European campaigns. At a local level, Gloucester-Hartpury and the Bristol Bears are now well-established leading rugby clubs, inspiring more youngsters to take up the game. Now it is cricket's turn to attract the next generation. Whether it be at Bristol or at other matches elsewhere in the country this will be a great tournament to follow. Tickets are still available for all of the above matches via the Club's ticket office. As Fred Pontin used to say, "Book early." You will not be disappointed.

Book Review by Simon Ireland



Being a lover of both Cricket and Music, the title of David Kynaston and Harry Ricketts' recent offering immediately drew my attention, as did its striking cover with the contrasting figures of Benaud and Peter May set against a vivid mustard background.

Depicting as it does the pivotal Ashes Test at Old Trafford in 1961, this insightful book will be of obvious interest to fans of a golden age of our great game. From a Shire perspective, however, it holds a particular fascination because of the key role played by David Allen and his questionable use by his captain. Geoff Pullar, then of Lancs, of course, also features in the contest, scoring 63 in England's first innings.

Far from being a predictable session by session analysis of a nail-biting tussle, though, this volume presents an enthralling case study of the two captains who had completely different approaches and characters. While Benaud was depicted by the press of the time as a brash but intuitive colonial upstart, May was every inch the privately educated and buttoned up Englishman. As was the case in Simon Wilde's 'Chasing Jessop', the social and historical context proves fascinating, and we are again in a period when there were many

evening papers eager to pore over every aspect of the match and every personal trait of the captains. Ironically, Benaud had already trained in the newspaper industry in Sydney, insisting on learning the trade from the bottom up.

Both men were well turned out off the field, May adopting the traditional sports jacket and tie while Benaud cut a more relaxed pose which was rounded off by the titular footwear, a homage to his NSW skipper, Arthur Morris. Even Benaud was tense, however, going into this decisive contest as a shoulder injury had prevented his attacking leg-spin from having its usual effect in the first three games, while May had missed the opening rain-affected draw completely. The Shire's David Smith was in the squad for the second Lord's match but missed out on final selection while David Allen was also ignored. The tourists won by five wickets after careless England batting but the series was kept alive at Headingley on a much-criticised wicket.

Benaud was again unable to bowl his googly and Trueman ran riot in the Australian second innings. In the first David Allen was not called upon until the 110th over with Benaud's side on 208-9 and immediately took a wicket. England only needed 59 to level the series and duly won.

So to Old Trafford and a rejuvenated Benaud had warmed up by taking match figures of 9-70 v Middlesex. John Woodcock highlighted the psychological threat the wily spinner posed but despite winning the toss his side were dismissed for 190 by England's seamers, with Allen not turning his arm over at all. May then came into his own with a stylish 95 before Allen chipped in with a useful 42 and England seemed in the box seat. Cue the Australian fight back thanks to Lawry and Davidson despite Allen's impressive spell of 4-58 from 38 overs no less.

256 to win and England reached 150-1. Cue Benaud, depicted in the press as possessing snake charming qualities. May was bowled for a duck and his team subsided to barely reach 200. A mere twenty minutes more at the crease and the Ashes could still have been within reach but as Benaud himself was to say, 'Cricket is the greatest leveller I know' for after going wicketless in England's first knock he then took 6-70 to clinch the game.

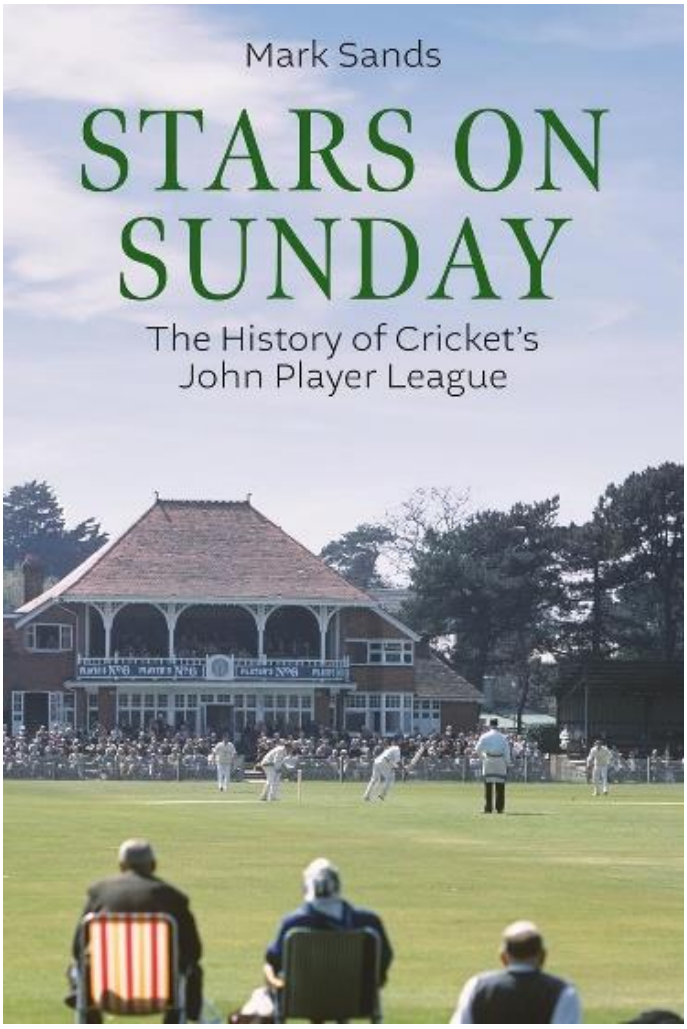
The authors reflect the quite staggering levels of press abuse that followed with words like 'pusillanimous …. spineless …. chicken-hearted' filling the back pages. May was criticised for his handling of Allen and perhaps never recovered his poise and self-confidence as within a season and a half he had retired while only in his mid-30s. Blue Suede Shoes 1, Well polished Brogues 0, one might say!

Nice One, Son

Mark Alleyne has always been good at developing talent, whether it be for Gloucestershire, the MCC Young Cricketers, England age groups or Marlborough College, but perhaps the biggest talent that he has produced was at home. Max Alleyne, Mark's 20-year-old son, is a professional footballer, described as a "cultured and ball-playing centre back". Having spent his formative years in the Southampton academy he was signed by Manchester City for £1.5m in 2021. In 2024 he made his debut for England's Under-20 team, going on to play for the Under-21's a year later. Last August, and soon after signing a contact with Manchester City which will keep him at the club until 2030, he joined Championship side Watford on a season-long loan to further his development and immediately made his club debut. Early this year, after 16 games for Watford, he was recalled by Manchester City whose squad had injury issues and on January 7th made his Premier League debut against Brighton. Three days later he scored his first goal for the club in the FA Cup win against Exeter, and soon afterwards made his Champions' League debut against Bodo Glint.

During an interview last summer when asked why he did not choose to play cricket, Max replied that he "enjoyed football growing up" and his dad was "never pushy" in what he wanted his son to do. Mark may not have been pushy but you can bet he is a very proud father.

Stars on Sunday: The History of Cricket's John Player League 1969 – 1986



A new book by Mark Sands is a rich and colourful account of the ground-breaking domestic limited-overs competition. From the pioneering matches of the International Cavaliers to the formation of the league under the sponsorship of tobacco brand John Player, the book relives every season from 1969 to 1986, capturing the key matches, star performers and the exciting race for the title.

Players and fans recall a time when sport on Sunday afternoons meant county cricket, whether attending a fixture in person or as part of the huge TV audience guided by the comforting tones of John Arlott and Jim Laker. The John Player League hooked a generation of fans into the county game, with TV coverage that allowed new fans to quickly get to know the players and adopt new favourites. Its author spoke to Exiles member Matt Davies.

MD. For Outside-edge readers this book will be a nostalgic trip down Memory Lane. Was it the same for you writing it?
Yes, it was. It was the competition I remember first watching and when I started researching the book there was quite a large demographic out there who felt the same, those who first got into county cricket through the John Player League. There have been plenty of articles written about matches or seasons but nothing really to pull together the whole story of the League so it is unapologetically nostalgic with plenty of memories. And its story is still relevant today with The Hundred trying to do what 40-over cricket did back then by introducing a new audience to the game.

MD: That was the thing with the number of out-grounds used for the John Player League - it took the game to new parts of the country. The first ever cricket match I went to was in Gloucester, ten minutes on the bus away. It was years before I ever went to Bristol.

100%. Through writing the book and people being in touch, I learnt that there are so many who remember matches away from the county headquarters. It got the game around the counties. I could never understand the Hundred claiming to grow the game but only basing it in seven cities. In my view the JPL took cricket to new audiences. I understand it is expensive to do and not the modern way but a good number of people said that they used to go with their parents or a group of friends just by hopping on a bus. And many counties would have 4 or 5 matches a season like that.

MD: Sundays were a bit different back then, weren't they. No Sunday trading. Three channels on the TV and for many the Sunday League was the soundtrack to their afternoons on the BBC with Peter Walker and John Arlott.

And don't forget pubs being closed in the afternoons as well! So, if you did a fancy a beer you could get one at the ground. But yes, there was little else to compete with it. The family aspect of the JPL really worked. My dad, like lots of dads, liked cricket but had it not been for the JPL would not have gone to a county game because of work or school commitments in the week. The format felt right and it filled a gap in the market at just the right time.

MD: Many people will have fond memories of watching a game on BBC2 every week but will also say that it was not the same when the cricket had to be shared with other sports when Sunday Grandstand came along.

That was the attraction for new fans coming long. You could sit down five minutes before the start and watch the whole game. Kids would often score the match off the television for the whole four hours. There wasn't much other sport to compete with when the league started but as time went on that changed. In the later years you would have to go away to golf or showjumping and when the cricket was back you had missed three wickets…. It didn't feel the same.

MD: I don't remember Gloucestershire ever really challenging for the John Player title. In all the years their best position was only sixth.

Yes, it didn't go well for Gloucestershire. They finished sixth in the first year and equalled that a couple of times but that was it. The appeal of Gloucestershire back then was Mike Procter and Zaheer Abbas. I did a poll on Facebook of an all-time JPL XI and they both featured. Every position except Stuart Turner of Essex was an overseas player. It had the absolute best from around the world playing all over the country.

MD: I don't remember Gloucestershire featuring on BBC2 very much, but your statistics say otherwise.

Coverage was broadly spread out. I was a little surprised as I used to feel like it was Essex every week. But there were star players everywhere so whichever game was picked you could not really go wrong, and the TV cameras got out to some of the outgrounds which would not be the case now. Glamorgan supporters got the best deal with every game shown on BBC Wales.

(MD note: Gloucestershire featured as a BBC televised match on 38 occasions with a record of 14 wins 18 losses and 6 no-results. The first occasion was 3rd August 1969 away to Kent at Folkestone. John Arlott, Jim Laker and Richie Benaud with the commentators. Frank Bough presented).

MD: Were there any stories or statistics that you came across while writing the book that stand out for you?

A couple stand out. In 1985 Damien D 'Olivera scored a century against Surrey which mirrored the one scored by his father against the same opposition twelve years earlier. Surrey's Pat Pocock played in both matches and was hit for a six in both innings, first by Basil and then Damien. And in 1977 Dilip Doshi recorded figures of 8-7-1-1 for Nottinghamshire against Northamptonshire. For the next fixture at Canterbury Doshi was informed over lunch that he was to be left out of the starting side in favour of Peter Hacker as captain Mike Smedley thought the pitch would favour seam over spin. Fellow spinner Derek Underwood leaned across the lunch table and gently chided Doshi for being "too expensive" a fortnight earlier. Hacker went wicketless.

MD: With the league format the JPL did produce some memorable final Sundays towards the end of the season. Would you say 1976 was the most dramatic?
Certainly. In 1976 five teams went into the final day of the season with a chance of winning the title with Kent prevailing in the end. The helicopter story is a funny one because there was only one trophy and the BBC had to decide where it should be. They gambled on taking it to Maidstone which turned out to be correct, but only just. Somerset lost to Glamorgan in Cardiff with a run-out off the final ball. 1976 is nice really as it was the half-way point in the John Player sponsorship. It was the high point in the competition's history. It was the first chapter I wrote for the book.



Picture: Peter Walker in the BBC helicopter arrives at Maidstone in 1976 with the trophy. Picture credit: BBC Sport

MD: Well at least Gloucestershire played their part in the day as they were beaten at Maidstone.

MD: Thank you for providing the Gloucestershire stats for this article
It was nice to have a look at the Gloucestershire stats. John Shepherd was a favourite of mine. As a Lancashire supporter I remember watching him play for Kent and Gloucestershire against us. I didn't really remember him as a Test player for the West Indies but in the John Player League he always seemed to perform well. He was one of those players who had an impact on me without being a real superstar. A good county player and popular with supporters. You do get drawn to players like that.

MD: There are many things about the competition that the younger generation would be surprised at. Sponsored by a cigarette company for one. And played in whites with a red ball.
The players used to do all right for free cigarettes! It was a clever touch by the sponsors. They were banned from explicit TV advertising, but they could stick it all round the ground and effectively get a four-hour advert instead. There were limits on how often it could be shown but still. I have three teenage lads and cannot believe that sport was so linked to tobacco back then. As for coloured clothing, it was still a few years away in England. The only real gimmick was the limit on the run-ups. It was just a time thing really, to get the game completed on a Sunday afternoon.

MD: Well, I can remember David Lawrence either running on the spot or running diagonally to get up more speed.
Players would find ways around it. You see Archer run up now and can bowl that speed from less than you were allowed in the Sunday League. It never felt for me that it was something that spoilt the game.

MD: It was common in the early years for a Championship match to start on a Saturday and then on the Sunday you would go off and play a different team at a different ground.

You are right. Some people I spoke to thought it was always the same team, but it wasn't. You would have a drive on a Saturday night, check into a hotel, play on Sunday, and then drive back to where you started, ready for the Championship game to resume on the Monday. It could be a 600-mile round trip in the extreme cases. It wasn't safe. Players would miss matches not through cricket injuries but just from the long drives. As a kid turning up on a Sunday afternoon you did not know all this. Because of the cricket, the star players and the outgrounds it was a fantastic competition, but it was of its time. Some great memories though.

MD: How do you think about the competition now? You say that it was of its time. Do you mourn its end and wish it were played today?

The heart says yes, it would be great to bring it back. I think people would like it and enjoy it, but in the modern world and schedule it could not be done. It would have to be the only one-day competition. With the Blast and the Hundred you could not have players playing seven days a week so in a practical sense it just would not happen. Yes, I still love the format, but it wouldn't work today.

Stars on Sunday: The History of Cricket's John Player League by Mark Sands is available now in all good book shops and the usual online retailers. If you have memories of the competition do get in touch and we will publish them in the next edition of Outside-edge.



Back (l–r): H. Avery (scorer), Zaheer Abbas, M.S.T. Dunstan, J.H. Shackleton, R.D.V. Knight, D.A. Graveney, J. Davey, D.R. Shepherd, Sadiq Mohammad. *Front*: R.B. Nicholls, M.J. Procter, A.S. Brown (capt), J.B. Mortimore, R. Swetman.

GLOUCESTERSHIRE IN THE JOHN PLAYER LEAGUE 1969-1986

BEST PERFORMANCE:
6th (1969 – the first season of the competition, 1973, 1977, 1985)

RESULTS 1969-86:

	PLAYED	WON	LOST	TIED	NO RESULT/ABAND.
HOME	**144**	**53**	**69**	**2**	**20**
AWAY	**144**	**41**	**87**	**0**	**16**
TOTAL	**288**	**94**	**156**	**2**	**36**

OPENING JPL FIXTURE: April 27, 1969, Bristol
Lost to Warwickshire by 59 runs, after having their opponents in trouble at 46/4 at the 20 over halfway stage. Slight recovery to post 149, with 3 wickets each for Tony Brown and John Mortimore. Chasing 150 for victory, Gloucestershire made a sound start to 27/0, but then lost 6 wickets for 35 runs, Billy Ibadulla capturing 4 wickets as Gloucestershire subsided to 90 all out.
Gloucestershire finished the first season with 8 wins and 8 defeats. The format had attracted excellent crowds: 5,500 at Lydney to witness a five-wicket win over Sussex, and 8,000 at Gloucester for the 12-run victory over Yorkshire.

HIGHEST TOTAL: 272/4 (39.2 overs) v Middlesex, Lord's 1983
High scoring game, where Middlesex recovered from 12/2 to post an imposing 270/5 at the end of their 40 overs, Roland Butcher making 100. The Gloucestershire openers, Andy Stovold and Paul Romaines, both made thirties to lay a solid platform before a partnership of 113 between Alistair Hignell (47) and Zaheer Abbas (106 not out) moved Gloucestershire close to victory, which John Shepherd secured with an unbeaten 34, the winning runs coming with 4 balls of the innings to spare.

LOWEST TOTAL: 49 v MIDDX, Bristol 1978
Middlesex were also the opponents when Gloucestershire posted their lowest score in the John Player League and there was nowhere to hide as the match was the chosen fixture that week for the BBC2 cameras. A combination a damp, early season pitch and the late movement extracted by Mike Selvey (4-15) proved too much for Gloucestershire who slumped to 15-4, before limping to 49 all out, with only Alan Tait (11) and John Shepherd (19) reaching double figures. Gloucestershire briefly raised hopes of the impossible, with a wicket from the first ball of the Middlesex innings, but an unbeaten 21 from Clive Radley steered his side home in the 22nd over for the loss of 3 wickets.

BATTING: MOST RUNS:
4,663 (average 40.54) Zaheer Abbas (1972-84)
Most productive season: 693 runs (average 69.30) in 1980, including 3 centuries.
Zaheer Abbas scored 7 centuries in the John Player League. Only Ken McEwan, Barry Richards (both 9) and Gordon Greenidge (10) scored more.



HIGHEST PARTNERSHIPS FOR EACH WICKET

1ST: 186	Paul Romaines / Bill Athey v Worcestershire, Moreton-in-March 1985
2ND: 168*	Sadiq Mohammad / Zaheer Abbas v Hampshire, Bristol 1976
3RD: 158*	Zaheer Abbas / Mike Procter v Sussex, Bristol 1978
4TH: 107	Andy Stovold / Ed Cunningham v Yorkshire, Scarborough 1984
5TH: 114	Kevin Curran / Keith Tomlins v Nottinghamshire, Trent Bridge 1986
6TH: 95	Jim Foat / John Mortimore v Middlesex, Lord's 1974
7TH: 101	Steve Windaybank / David Graveney v Nottinghamshire 1981
8TH: 56*	Wycliffe Phillips / David Allen v Yorkshire, Gloucester 1969
9TH: 44	Tony Brown / David Graveney v Derbyshire, Chesterfield 1973
10TH: 57	David Graveney / John Mortimore v Lancashire Tewkesbury 1973

BOWLING: MOST WICKETS:

173 (average 20.47) Mike Procter (1969-81)

Most economical figures 8-5-6-3 Mike Procter v Yorkshire, Cheltenham 1979

Procter is one of only 7 players to score 400 runs and take 20 wickets in a season (1977). He took 4 or more wickets in an innings 3 times, including his Sunday best figures of 5-8, taken at Gloucester against Middlesex.

BEST BOWLING:

6-52 John Shepherd v Kent (his former county) 1983

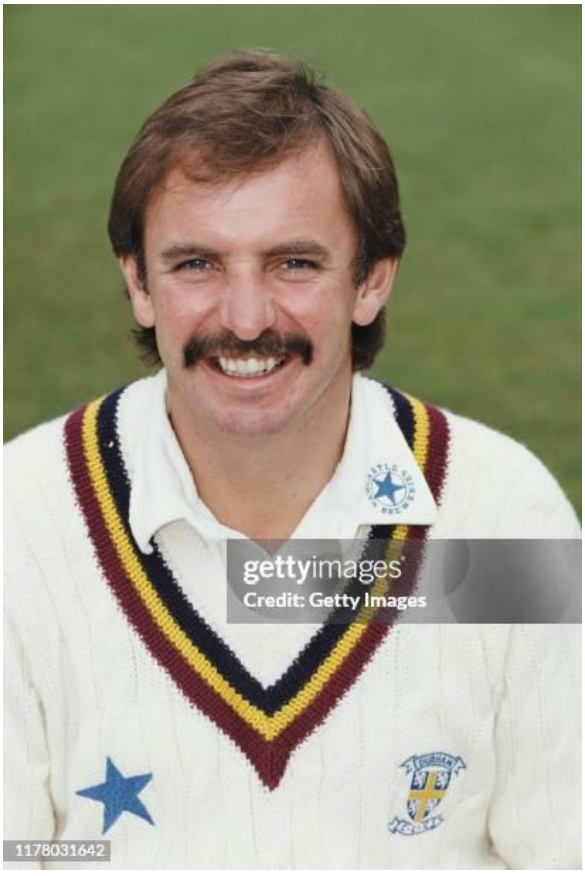
1983 also saw the best debut bowling performance, 4-41, by David Lawrence at Bath where he dismissed Somerset's top three, including Viv Richards for just two runs.

MOST DISMISSALS BY A WICKETKEEPER:

71 (58ct/13st) Andy Stovold (1973-86). His best season was 1980 with 16 dismissals (11ct / 5 st).

He played in the JPL fixture with his brother, Martin, on the latter's debut in 1978, but it was otherwise not a day to remember, with Andy making 10 and Martin 1 as Essex prevailed by 6 wickets.

Jack Russell is one of only 7 wicketkeepers to score a JPL ton, making 108 opening the innings v Worcestershire at Hereford in 1986.



Remarkably, David Graveney features three times in record partnerships!

A Forgotten Man?

Simon Ireland remembers an underrated player.

This year marks the centenary of George Dennett's final appearances for Gloucestershire and he remains one of the most prolific wicket takers in the county game never to have achieved international recognition. While Shire supporters will be justly proud of the lineage of great spin bowlers produced by the County, the name Dennett is not the first that comes to mind, the likes of Parker and Goddard, Cook and Wells, Mortimore and Allen, for example, perhaps being more likely to figure in record books and reminiscences. And yet what a career this unassuming man was to enjoy having been initially spotted by Gilbert Jessop in a club game in Bristol.



Dennett was to take over two thousand wickets with his accurate left arm spin and idiosyncratic action which featured a tilt of his head to watch, or so it appeared, the ball leaves his hand at the very moment of delivery. He made his debut in 1903 alongside the great character that was Charlie Parker and at this stage Parker was bowling seam, supposedly because another left arm spinner was deemed surplus to requirements. The fact that Dennett went on to take more wickets for GCCC than any other bowler bar Parker and Goddard speaks volumes for his talent, especially when one factors in his wartime service and that he did not resume his career until 1920. Having first served in the Boer War, Dennett joined the Somerset Light Infantry and was commissioned from the ranks in the 1914-18 conflict. He was to survive, of course, unlike fourteen others who had represented the County, and in 1919 was still serving in India.

Some of Dennett's feats take the breath away. He remains best known, perhaps, for the Northants game of 1907 when a first innings analysis of 6-1-9-8 included a hat trick and reduced the opposition to 12 all out. He followed this up with seven wickets in the second innings and yet the match at Gloucester did not end in victory due to rain on the third day. That season saw him take 201 wickets in all, including 14 against Kent at Cheltenham and 12 in three other games. Then in 1912, at Dover, he dismissed the last six Kent batsmen in twenty balls without conceding a run!

Prior to these prodigious feats he had taken all ten Essex wickets at Bristol in 1906 and later, in 1913, he was to take 9-36 against Surrey at Bristol including a hat trick. Unsurprisingly, it was the pre-war years that saw the best of George Dennett and his career came to a gradual end with only a few appearances in 1926, his final season during which he was to take over as Cheltenham College coach from Billy Woof. A mere decade later he was to pass away at the age of 57 in Cheltenham and it remains puzzling to this day that rather like the great Don Shepherd of Glamorgan, no matter how many victims were dispatched, the national selectors remained seemingly unmoved.

George Dennett was also a talented all-round sportsman like several Shire stars from Jessop to Milton to Windows. He kept goal for the Services and excelled at Fives, Billiards and Shooting. Although he made a century in Bristol Club Cricket and a top score of 71 against Somerset his career batting average was a modest 10. Not that this should count against him, however, for it is his prowess with the ball that marks him out as a true Gloucestershire great, one that may have flown under the radar for some and I for one will be raising a glass in his honour on Exiles Day for the lovely College ground was, appropriately , the scene of many of his triumphs.

Gloucestershire Exiles' Hall of Fame 2025: Chris Dent



Simon Ireland has applied his literary talents to providing an acrostic tribute to Chris Dent:

C - Captaincy, Consistency and Coffee
H - Humility, Hundreds and Honesty
R - Rationalising Responsibilities before Retirement
I - International U19 recognition, Ignored thereafter
S - Skippering the Shire to 2019 promotion

D - A Decade and more of Dedication after a teenage Debut
E - Endurance replacing Enjoyment over time
N - Nemesis in the Nightmare form of Darren Stevens
T - Two hundred and sixty eight, a Top score Testament to Talent

My late wife and I so enjoyed talking to Chris at the Lord's Dinner a few years ago. He was honest and approachable and so generous with his time. An understated and perhaps underappreciated man.

Outside-edge's roving reporter, Gareth Fielding, caught up with Chris at his coffee shop.

I met up with Chris for a coffee at the Bike Shed Cafe. A gem of a coffee shop just up the road from Clifton College Chellaram playing fields, in Abbots Leigh BS8 and where you may often find him working at the family business – Jack's Coffee Shack.

GF: Let's start right at the beginning. How did you get into Cricket?
CD: I started at Cleeve Cricket Club, so not far from here. I think I played under-9's to about under-14's and then my schoolteacher at Backwell School (he was a batter at Thornbury) convinced me to go there because they were really good. They're obviously good now but it was a very good standard then. Maybe because I was younger and you're playing against older players, it felt like it was an even stronger standard back then. The youth section was really good when I went there, we had some really good players. I just felt like there was a lot more of those older pros that played in them. I remember playing against Frocester and Ben Gannon, who was a fast bowler, or Carl Greenidge at Bristol West Indies. They had a lot of fast bowlers then. I was 14 or 15 when I faced some of those players and just got all bumpers and remember it being quite traumatic, but it probably served me well in the long run. It was good fun.

GF: Were your parents supportive?
CD: My dad played cricket. He was more of a footballer, but he played cricket as well. He played at Stoke Gifford back in the day with his brother and then he moved to Cleeve. That's why I played for that team and then he actually moved to Thornbury once I moved because he said he was done with all the travelling. He was a bowler. We just played a lot in the garden. That's how I got into it, in the garden. You know, just picking up a bat. I see with my boys now, they're young but they're decent players. I think it's just because they picked up a bat earlier than other people. Most people play football or rugby and then eventually will play cricket. My dad used to bowl at me in the Cleeve nets and then in the school nets and he still talks about hitting me a few times and me crying. Character building stuff.

GF: I'm sure you get asked this all the time: your best memories of playing for Gloucestershire, of captaining the side?
CD: I think anyone who was involved would say the one-day final in 2015, because it was just so unexpected. The whole run just felt unexpected - we weren't a world-beating side and didn't have world-beating players. We had Michael Klinger, who made a big difference, of course. But we just started snowballing and were suddenly in the final against Surrey, which you think, "Goodness, that could be tricky." Especially staring down the barrel of heavy defeat when they were, whatever they were, with Sangakkara and Burns batting, chasing our total. Then, suddenly, an hour later we've won. It was just so much emotion. And obviously, you get to celebrate after. Then the next week I got my highest ever first-class score. So that was a very big week. Getting promoted in 2019, I think, was very big as well. It's obviously not the same sort of high because it's not a big crowd on the day but it's an accumulation. I think the work we put in the year before, even the year before that, felt like it all paid off. There's a photo up in the county ground of us after the game, by the changing room. My son's in it because he was there and I still look back at that and think, 'That was a great time.' You know, that was when I was probably feeling my best as a player and a leader because my captaincy seemed to be working. That's probably when I was feeling at my best. If I could go back to then, I would.

GF: Do you have that photograph at home? That would be good.
CD: No, I don't, unfortunately. It's at the ground. Great memories, that photo of being really at peace and happy.

GF: When you became skipper, how did that happen? Did someone have a little chat with you? Did they text you? Was it formal?
CD: Not really, no. Richard Dawson, who was the coach at the time, asked me and I said 'no'. I wasn't really interested and I'd never captained any cricket team leading up to that. Not age group, not even club cricket, I never captained the second team, never. That was never me. I liked a bit of a space. I just used to like being

in the field, perhaps staring at clouds, having a look around. All I concentrated on was my own batting. That was it. I was like, 'I just want to bat and bat.' I didn't want to worry about anything else. Just batting. But then I discussed it with my partner and I was trying to work out whether I felt I could offer value. I didn't think initially I could tactically because I'd never really done it before. So that was something I was going to need to learn on the job. But I felt my approach and calmness, and being quite relaxed, would be quite a good way of leading the team we had because we were all quite young. I had a few meetings with the senior players and we agreed it could be a good way of leading the team. So I thought, right, I'm just going to go for it, and that was pretty much how I tried to lead - always being quite calm and positive. I could let Daws have a bit of a shout and then I would try and be the positive, calm person. I felt like it actually worked quite well. I really wanted to try and create a positive environment. Even in the second team, that was something I was quite big on. I wanted the second team to be a positive place; because it isn't always. You've got people who have been dropped, you've got people who are trying to get into the first team, you have youngsters who are trying their hardest. When I was in the second team, when I was younger, it was very different to what it is now. It was quite brutal. You know, you had a lot of older guys that were quite sour because they weren't on the team and the youngsters coming in who were quite threatening to them, so it wasn't a very nice place. I wanted it to be a good place so when people came into the first team, they felt like they knew everyone already, they're already relaxed, they can come in and perform and not feel like they're under pressure and nervous. They can transition easily. That was something I was very big on.

I felt like, over those years, we created a good culture and the team was in a good place. The reason we were successful was because we got a good bunch of players together who worked hard for each other and trusted each other. We did well. That's the thing about Gloucestershire, we don't have a huge budget but you can create an environment where people enjoy being there and want to come. We had players from other clubs that liked the look of our environment. It felt like we could get people in from overseas, who loved it, and they would pass that on to other players. I felt like that was our way of getting players and keeping a squad together. I think it worked quite well. Obviously, things have changed a little bit because a lot of guys have now left and it's a bit of a different place.

The captaincy stuff was really good for me. My communication skills improved a lot. We used to have meetings where we talked about what we were going to do and I'd have to run them. That was something I'd never wanted to do but I learnt a lot of skills by doing it which I think have helped me moving forward and especially after cricket so I'm pleased with it. My time as captain became tough because you take it home with you. You're getting phone calls constantly about players who are injured. Who can we get in? What are we doing next week? It just feels like you never really get a break and it just got to a point where I was like, 'It's just too much now.'

GF: Are you still involved with the club at all now?
CD: I do some technical coaching with a few of the players just personally, but no, I'm not involved with the club at all. Initially I wanted to help but I think in hindsight it's worked best for me to step away. I've started my own coaching business. I've had the chance to I do a little bit with the Somerset Pathway. I'm actually going tomorrow and next week to do some work with Dawson at Glamorgan and I'm doing a bit of coaching with some girls at the Collegiate school. I think if I had just merged into a bit of a coaching role with the club, I would have spent my winter with the same players that I know and not had all this variety. At the time, I was a little bit disappointed because I did want to get involved, and I've obviously got a very good relationship with the current players. I really would like to have helped them be the best they can be and I felt like I could offer value in that space but I think for me, personally, it has worked out better just to step away and try lots of different things.

I've been doing lots of coaching to be fair - which has been good. I've enjoyed the challenge of it all. Different standards, from older players like 50+ years, down to young kids. It's been good to learn in that way. When you're coaching professional players you just focus on tiny little tweaks, mindset stuff, just trying to get them

ready to perform. With the club players, or the youth, it can be major things - it's just very different. I've actually enjoyed the challenge of it. It's been good learning.

GF: Did I read somewhere that you've joined a club in Cornwall?
CD: I wasn't intending to play club cricket. But they asked me to come and play and I thought about it, and I don't know if it's 100% confirmed yet, but I'm playing a few one-day games for Cornwall as well so that was sort of like merging together Saturday and Sunday. So, yes, I've ended up going down and playing for Callington. I think it's just nice to get away and have a bit of a change, a fresh start. I'm going down there on Friday to coach a bit with some of their young batters and I stay over and then play. I'm sure I'll take the family down. Something a bit different. It's funny, they look at your stats, they go, "That means nothing, Cornwall League is way harder". They seem to be recruiting quite hard. I think they struggled a little bit last year so they're trying to compete. It sounds like they've beefed it up a bit. I think Penzance is the big side there and I think there's a good rivalry.

GF: Future of County Cricket?
CD: I think county cricket has changed from when I started, which was only, what, 15, 16 years ago. Four-day cricket was the pinnacle of cricket, that was it. Everyone wanted to play four-day cricket, everyone wanted to do well in that. Getting your 1,000 runs, getting your 60 wickets, that was the important thing. Things like T20, 50-over, yeah, you wanted to get some runs and wickets but that wasn't really how you judged yourself. Whereas now it seems all about what auctions you can get into, how much money you can get here or there. It almost feels like sometimes the four-day stuff is just a little bit in the way. Some players might think, "Oh, I might get injured during that and then I can't play in the Hundred or whatever". I feel like it's just slowly losing its importance a bit. Which I don't think is the players' fault because at the end of the day, if you can pick up 200 grand as a Hundred player anyone would. Can I work less for more? It's just how county cricket can compete with that. How you can make it worthwhile playing four-day cricket when, realistically, four-day cricket, for the bowlers at least, will shorten your career because you've got to bowl so many overs. The number of injuries, or strains on the body playing four-day cricket will mean you'll probably earn less money in the long run. So, how do you make it worthwhile for players? That's the question. I guess if it gives you a chance of getting into the England side then that's important, but that seems to have changed a little bit now. Now it's not so much how many runs you get in county cricket, it's the way you get your runs. When I started, it felt like you had to score a thousand runs for four or five seasons to get an opportunity, whereas now, it's as if you don't even have to score a first-class hundred and you get a chance. That dynamic has changed and, you know, I think the County game has to find a way of competing with that, competing with the money that players can earn. How do you tell someone who's 17 and challenging, knocking on the door of the team that you should play for four days versus half a day for the same amount?

GF: How's the coffee stuff? Are you an expert on coffee? Can you recognize different beans, for example?
CD: No, I'm not really an expert on the beans. I know how to make a nice coffee and I know about the different machines but I've not done any tasting. My dad actually has. A cupping session, they call it, but I didn't do that but, yes, the coffee business is going really well. Actually, it's probably got to the point where it's teetering on the edge of being a little bit too big for just the family to run but, yes, it's been good. We do a lot of work at Clifton College. And obviously once the cricket season starts, we're back at the County Ground. We're pretty busy and it's good fun. My dad's the one that mainly runs it, does all the admin and setting up. The trailer lives on my mum and dad's driveway. And then me and my partner work in it. The kids work in it a bit - when they want to buy new trainers or whatever, they do a shift. But, yes, it is going really well. I think it helped my transition out of cricket, having dipped my toe into something completely different, which is nice, and also I think it's great still getting to see the players and staff during the season through the coffee shack.

GF: How would you like to be remembered by the fans of the Shire?
CD: Quite calm, I hope. I always felt, which I think was to my detriment in the long run, that I never wanted to be perceived as arrogant. I think, having left the game now, that little bit of arrogance is what makes

people go from being maybe very decent players to very good players. I think that was always how I wanted to be perceived - as a good person. Looking back, that probably meant I didn't quite go to where I could have maybe gone. You need that, I think. So, for example, in the nets, I would never want to hit for too long because I'd always been conscious of other people having their turn, or the person throwing at me. I always worry about them. I think the people that just don't care about that, they have a more selfish mindset. You know, it's just little things. I wanted to be a good person not just a good player. I would love to be remembered for helping the club to succeed. Really. I know we didn't win loads of stuff but, I think, for the team and the budget we had for those years, we punched above our weight quite a lot of the time. Of course, I would have loved to have won the County Championships but I feel that we achieved more than we probably should have. I've literally been going to that club since I was 12. It's odd now not going there so much but when I do go, I have many great memories of being there. I feel very lucky to have those.

GF: What was a good thing about being the captain of Gloucestershire that not many people would know?
CD: First go in the biscuit tin at tea? Not really. You got your own room on away trips. But now mostly everyone just negotiates that in their contracts. Seriously, looking back on it, it feels like a great achievement to have captained the club I grew up at. I'm proud that I was able to captain the side and for us to have been relatively successful as a team during that period. I think that's probably the main positive. I learned a lot from it. It's not easy being captain of a smaller club where you don't have huge resources. I always think, if you're captain of Surrey, you're trying to decide which of the five international bowlers you're going to bowl and that can't be too hard. Do I bowl the guy that's got 400 international wickets or the guy that's got 300? Whereas when you are captain of Gloucestershire, sometimes you're trying to work out which academy lads are ready to play. I remember we played a game against Somerset, when we had loads of injuries, and I'm basically trying to work out whether to play Benny Howell as our third bowler and bat deep or play Dom Goodman, who's in the academy and played a few second team games. Eventually we chose Don Goodman and it was great for him because he then progressed really well. That's the sort of problem you have when your resources are quite limited. Also with overseas players, you're choosing from the good players that you can afford, which a lot of times isn't what you exactly need. But you learn a lot from those situations. You learn a lot of things because it's not easy.

As we said our goodbyes, Chris grabbed both our cups and returned them to the serving area. I thought that little gesture gave an insight into his character, and what made him such a good captain. Thoughtful, considerate and undoubtedly – a good man.

Gloucestershire has such a rich history of notable players that we have an infinite source of suggestions but please contact me at jontiramsen1986@gmail.com if you feel you have a particular favourite player who deserves inclusion.

Spring 2013	**Mike Procter**
Spring 2014	**Walter Hammond**
Spring 2015	**W.G. Grace**
Spring 2016	**Mark Alleyne & Tom Graveney**
Spring 2017	**Arthur Milton**
Spring 2018	**Zaheer Abbas**
Spring 2019	**'Jack' Russell**
Spring 2020	**Michael Klinger**
Spring 2021	**Courtney Walsh**
Spring 2022	**'Charlie' Parker**
Spring 2023	**Jon Lewis**
Spring 2024	**John Mortimore**
Spring 2025	**Chris Dent**



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Ollie Price clearing the ropes