DAVID POTTER

THE TROUBLED TOUR

South Africa in England 1960

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Contents

CHAPTER ONE

CRICKET IN 1960

'BASICALLY HEALTHY but in need of a tonic' is possibly the way that a doctor might have described cricket in England as the 1950s yielded to the new decade. One could argue when exactly football took over as the country's national game – some say England's World Cup triumph of 1966, some say earlier than that – but the truth of the matter was that the two sports were not really in competition in 1960. You could even play in both. 'Would Denis and Leslie Compton play for Arsenal or Middlesex?' was an argument for only the brief few weeks when the seasons overlapped. Normally cricket started at the end of April and stopped at the beginning of September; football

had the FA Cup Final in early May and began again in late August. The two seasons yielded gracefully to each other, complemented each other and were both all the stronger for it.

There was no distinction between red-ball and white-ball cricket, simply because there was no white-ball cricket. The white ball was many decades in the future, and even the idea of limited-overs cricket, although not unknown, indeed flourishing in some areas at local level, was a distant concept for the future as far as the professional game was concerned, possibly something to do with the 'brighter cricket' that everyone kept talking about.

There were other differences as well. No player at any level would ever dream of wearing 'pyjamas'. Everything was white. Batsmen wore pads, gloves and the 'abdominal protector', but any thigh guards, elbow protector, etc. would be looked upon as the height of pretentiousness or even cowardice. On the head, a cap was worn. Even sunhats were still in the future, and it would be another 20 years before helmets began to make their appearance. All this meant that the task of a scorer and a spectator

was a lot easier, for one could very quickly identify which batsman was which. It is not so easy today.

Test matches were the thing that brightened up the season, but the basic diet was the County Championship, won repeatedly throughout the 1950s by Surrey but won back by Yorkshire in 1959, and they would win it this year as well. All games were of three days' duration, beginning rigidly on a Saturday and a Wednesday with no play at all on Sunday, even though that Sabbatarian edifice had begun to crack at local level and many clubs played happily on a Sunday without any real apparent disapproval from God or that even more terrifying and influential character called the Archbishop of Canterbury. He was still able to decide who the Royal Family could marry but seemed less and less able to tell anyone else what to do. He was singularly failing to stop alcohol, sex and cricket on a Sunday, although professional cricket was slow to spot the opportunities.

Everyone seemed to moan about the County Championship. There were 17 counties, so if every county played every other county twice, that would be 32 games which was manageable and sensible. But now, if a county

wanted to, it need only play 28 games, which meant 16 teams once and 12 of them twice. This seemed strange and unfair, and it meant that if you had a good match secretary you could end up avoiding Surrey and Yorkshire at least once!

There was a terrible predictability about the three-day game. County A would bat for all the first day, then declare about 6pm and hope to at least split the openers of the opposition before 6.30 when stumps were drawn. County B would then hope to bat until tea time on day two. County A would then bat again, and declare sometime on the last day, setting County B a target of something like 250 runs in 200 minutes. Overs did not come into it. Time-wasting was common.

There was never enough money – a *cri de cœur* which failed to resonate too loudly in the ears of the spectators who would have been very happy to play cricket for a living and a few days in a hotel on away fixtures. There was an awful lot of travelling. That was possibly true sometimes, and, certainly, in 1960 neither cars nor roads were as good as they are now, but half the games were at home and many of the away fixtures were not really all

that far away – Worcestershire travelling to Warwickshire, or Lancashire travelling to Derbyshire were journeys that were by no means impossible or even all that difficult, but there were several crazy Tuesday or Friday nights when a county finished at Taunton at 5.30pm and had to be at Scarborough, all bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, for 11am the following morning.

There does seem to be a clear dichotomy of opinion about Sundays away from home. There were those who described it as a 'wonderful' day with a lovely hotel, golf tournaments, a big Sunday lunch, a visit to the bar on the Sunday afternoon followed by a walk around town, visiting beaches, castles, museums, etc. – whatever that town had to offer. Then at night a phone call home to the beautiful, dutiful and adoring wife and happy lisping children with details about losing a tooth and winning a prize at school.

That was a rosy, almost idyllic picture of a cricketer on an away Sunday. The reality was possibly different. It was more about team-mates getting on one's nerves, a hangover, the consequences of a foolish sexual misadventure the night before perhaps, rain and fretting about form and

losing one's place in the team, not to mention the problems involved in having to share a room with a man who broke wind or moaned about himself when you were wanting to go to sleep. Or indeed having to share a meal with the man who had run you out the day before, or the captain who had dropped you from the side last week. And the mood of the company usually depended on how well the team were doing!

These trips did not happen every weekend, however, in fact possibly only about two or three times per season, and most spectators would have gladly put up with that occasional discomfort in return for the life of a professional cricketer. Ah, but there was the rub. Not everyone in 1960 was a professional cricketer. There were a few who were amateurs, men with their own private income who could play for nothing, even though it was hardly the world's best-kept secret that some 'amateurs' earned more than most professionals.

It was sometimes a murky business and owed its origins to nothing other than sheer snobbery. Grounds still had separate dressing rooms for amateurs and professionals (which meant four dressing rooms in each pavilion,

presumably!); there were even, at some grounds, separate gates. There was an annual fixture between the Gentlemen (the amateurs) and the Players (the professionals) at Lord's and often repeated at Scarborough or some other festival in September. On away trips, professionals and amateurs usually stayed in separate hotels and there were no prizes awarded for guessing which group lived in the swankier hotel.

To modern eyes this is absolutely appalling, beyond comprehension even. It was much mocked and ridiculed in Australia, for example, and even the Labour Party in Great Britain was belatedly beginning to ask questions about it. And perhaps it is even valid to see the apartheid system which obtained in South Africa in this context. The class divide in Britain was possibly less rigid and certainly not imposed by violence or repression, but it was just as real in the minds of some people, with journalists like EW Swanton finding it hard to conceal his admiration for the gentleman amateur or 'chap', and who once tried to defend the infamous Lord Hawke who prayed to God that 'no professional would ever captain England'! The distinction was eventually done away with, to the chagrin of some at

Lord's, in 1963 when 'gentlemen' and 'players' all became 'cricketers'. The edifice had been cracking for some time, however, for Len Hutton had several years previously defied Lord Hawke's prayers by captaining England as a professional!

For professionals, there was something called a 'benefit' – more so than now. This too was much moaned about in books and magazines, for it involved a lot of turning up at events, and running raffles – again something that did not seem to some people to be absolutely out of the question. In return for this, a few youngsters and volunteers would go round the crowds asking spectators to contribute a few coins in a bucket. Some claimed that it was 'demeaning', but no player seemed reluctant to take the money! It was one of the traditions of the game, and to be fair, the life of a professional cricketer did not always seem to be a smart career option with two major disadvantages. How, for example, did one keep body and soul together in the winter? And what did one do when one got too old to play cricket?

So, to what extent was Britain a class-ridden society in 1960? Did cricket merely mirror society? Certainly,

there had been a distinct air of patrician exclusivity about the Conservative Prime Ministers of that time. Winston Churchill 1951–1955, Anthony Eden 1955–1957 and Harold Macmillan 1957–1963 were no one's idea of a 'working man making good'! And yet they were benign aristocrats, or at least Churchill and Macmillan were, in that they had made no attempts to dismantle Labour's National Health Service and Welfare State. No one really knew about Eden for he decided to blow it all in 1956 on a mad military venture which history calls the Suez Crisis, but generally speaking, the Conservatives seemed to realise that the way to keep the lower orders in check was to treat them reasonably well. They deserve a great deal of credit for that.

Incidentally, in 1963, a few years after the events we are talking about, Lord Home became Sir Alec Douglas-Home in order to become Prime Minister and take a seat in the House of Commons. And he was the first Prime Minister who had ever played first-class cricket. He had played for Middlesex in the 1920s.

But perhaps as illuminating as anything in 1960 was the famous, thrilling, exciting, titillating but ultimately

disappointing court case about DH Lawrence and a novel called *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. It seemed to be all about sex, but in fact it was as much about social class as anything else. The book had first been published privately in 1928, but had led a distinctly low-profile existence in this country until Penguin published it in 1960 and it soon sold three million copies when word got around that it had been banned in other countries. Very soon, it got another undeserved boost when someone tried to get it banned in Great Britain as well!

The court case happened in autumn 1960, not long after the South Africans had gone home, but it was indicative of several traits of British society. In the first place, it revealed the perennial love of prurient, voyeuristic sexuality, but that is hardly surprising. Indeed, it is a necessary part of the human condition. Another was the British love of litigation, and yet another was the British obsession with social class. Lady Chatterley's husband had been wounded and disabled in the Great War and unable to perform the basic and obvious function for his wife. Still loving, but increasingly frustrated, the good Lady formed a relationship, not with another man of

her own class (which would have been bad enough but understandable and even forgivable), but (shock! horror!) with her gamekeeper who did the necessary in his hut in the woods with a relentless ferocity to the delight of both parties – and to all those who read the book, the sales of which naturally rose as quickly and as regularly as the gamekeeper's member.

By modern standards, perhaps, the descriptions of the coupling were tame and often wrapped in metaphorical and figurative language, even though the 'f' word made an appearance now and again. But what really upset a few people was the class aspect of all this. A gamekeeper! Had he played cricket, he would have been a professional. He should have known his place, which was certainly not between the thighs of his employer's wife. And there was the notorious comment of the prosecuting counsel who asked the question (apparently genuinely and without any tongue in cheek or sarcasm) if this was a book which you would want your wife or your servants [sic] to read!

It was astonishing. Even in 1960, having servants was not common. Most of the working classes now worked in factories and offices, but here we had a Colonel Blimp

(or whatever the legal equivalent was) asking a fatuous question like that! In any case, the jury decided that Lady C (as she was called) was not obscene. So perhaps social class was still there, but possibly decreasing in its importance. Or was it?

In general terms, one would have to say that things in Great Britain were prospering. The country had recovered remarkably well from the Second World War which was now a receding memory. Unemployment had virtually gone, prosperity was in the air, new houses had been built and were continuing to be built, working-class families now were beginning to aspire to owning televisions, cars and even taking foreign holidays. The Conservatives, having ditched Eden for his absurd and dangerous Suez adventure of 1956, had fought back to win the General Election of October 1959 under Harold Macmillan, who loved being quoted as saying, 'We've never had it so good.' And he was right. It was as if the penny had at last dropped that the best way to keep the rebellious lower orders in check was not by poverty, unemployment, repressive religion and bogus guilt-ridden patriotism, but by jobs, good houses, a national health service and by entertainment and sport.

'*Panem et circenses*' (bread and circuses) said Juvenal in Ancient Rome in the context of keeping the urban mob happy. Macmillan seemed to agree.

In cricket, at international level, England had, with one painful exception, defeated everyone in recent years. At home Jim Laker had spun out the Australians in 1956, the West Indians had been beaten in 1957 in a series much remembered for the 411-stand of May and Cowdrey at Edgbaston, a partnership which combined resolute defiance with astonishing tedium, and the series of 1958 against New Zealand and of 1959 against India had been embarrassing mismatches. South Africa had last been in England in 1955 and England had won 3-2.

Abroad, England had drawn 2-2 with South Africa in 1956/57 and recently they had come home from the West Indies with a narrow and not always exciting 1-0 win. But there was one hurtful fly in the ointment and that had been in 1958/59 when they had lost the Ashes comprehensively to Australia, 4-1. This had hurt, and more printers' ink had been spilled on that one unhappy tour than on all the series they had won. And there was

one particular aspect of that tour which would very much be alive when South Africa came calling in 1960.

England did not usually boast. They were usually good winners and that was when we tended to hear patronising words like 'sportsmanship' and phrases like 'the best man won' and 'gallant losers' to cheer up the colonials who had been less successful. England winning was more or less what one would expect, and it was almost as if that was what was meant to happen. It was like the Conservatives winning a General Election, everyone reading about it in the *Daily Telegraph* and then going to the Church of England to sing 'Now Thank We All Our God'. The novelist RF Delderfield wrote a series of books called *God Is an Englishman*. The title was obviously sarcastic, but one wonders whether there were some people who actually believed that!

It was a different matter when England lost. They whinged. The Ashes defeats of 1946/47 and of 1950/51 could be explained away, somehow or other, by the difficult problems of recovering from a world war when a Labour Government was in power, but 1954/55 had seen Len Hutton and Frank Tyson bring the Ashes home, and

hopes had been high in 1958 as the team sailed away with the accompaniment of the normal 'best team ever to leave these shores'. But from the moment that Jack Fingleton began his report on the radio on that cold morning of 5 December 1958 with the words: 'Hello England, I have bad news for you, which of course is good news for us…' before telling us that England were all out for a miserable 134 in Brisbane, it was clear that England were struggling.

There are usually many excuses that one can put forward for an Ashes defeat – injuries, illnesses, homesickness, umpires, dropped catches, pitches being 'doctored' by the Australians and bad luck with the toss spring to mind. But on this occasion there was another one and that was the bowling action of Ian Meckiff and, to a lesser extent, Gordon Rorke, who were accused of throwing. Spearheaded by the redoubtable EW Swanton, who was pompous and opinionated but never really a hard-hitting, money-driven, investigative journalist, the press handed the English public back home a reason for England's defeat. The throwing was 'blatant', according to EWS. But the rest of the world wondered if it would have

been quite so blatant had the perpetrator been a Home Counties Englishman.

Such a simplistic assessment of 'chucking' ignored at least three other factors. One was that Meckiff was born that way. He simply could not straighten his left bowling arm. Another was the excellence of other Australians like Richie Benaud, Norman O'Neill and Alan Davidson, and yet another was the incompetence and fatalistic attitude of so many of the England players who seemed to have decided as early as the first day of the first Test that the world was against them and that they were not going to win. 'Fighting back' was absent from the mindset of so many England players, and the somewhat aristocratic and out of touch leadership of PBH May was not able to jog them out of it. It was, simply, an awful tour. And it hurt.

What did not help was that May's fiancée appeared on the tour as well. This was the extremely well-connected Virginia Gilligan, daughter of previous captain Harold Gilligan. The rest of the party were not allowed to bring wives or girlfriends, so it was hardly a boost to morale for them to see the captain being allowed preferential treatment while everyone else was deprived of such basic

needs! Trying to paper over the cracks of this rift, the England party could talk about the 'throwing' of the Australians to divert attention from internal divisions.

More relevantly to the 1960 South African tour, it meant that the spectre of 'chucking' would hang over English cricket for some time. Had England lost to the West Indies in the Caribbean in early 1960, one suspects that more might have been made of the bowling actions of some of the West Indies fast men, and the South African series of 1960 certainly took place in an atmosphere of cricketing paranoia about fast bowlers throwing the ball, rather than bowling it. When it became known that the South African party was to contain a fellow called Geoff Griffin who had been called twice for throwing in season 1958/59 (funnily enough, not 1959/60), you could almost smell the trouble that was coming.

The Australians were due back in England in 1961. It is possibly not entirely fanciful to suggest that 1960 was all about making sure that Meckiff was not chosen for 1961, and there was little doubt that 'chucking', fuelled by a malign combination of the MCC and the popular press, would feature largely in 1960. It was almost as if

it was expected to happen – and funnily enough, it did. It is sometimes called 'fate' and 'destiny' but it is more likely to be the combination of so many wills, conscious and subconscious, which cause such things, and so many people simply get swept along in it all. There are fashions in cricket as there are in everything else. 'Chucking' was definitely 'in' in 1960.

In his basically and uncharacteristically gloomy prognosis of the 1960 season, John Arlott in *Cricket on Trial* identified four problems that cricket must address:

a. The impact of politics on the South African tour

b. The loss of public interest in the changing world of the affluent 1960s

c. The 'popular' press with all its 'revelations'

d. Chucking

The last one was highlighted even before the end of April in two separate and unrelated incidents, although one wonders whether there was already some subliminal influence on the umpires. On Wednesday, 27 April in

the Surrey v Cambridge University game, spinner Tony Lock (who had also been called in the West Indies as early as 1953/54 and several times since) was called by umpire Arthur Fagg for throwing, and on Saturday, 30 April, on the very day that the South Africans played their first game at Arundel, John Aldridge of Worcestershire was called by Jack Crapp for the same offence in a game against Glamorgan at Pontypridd. Oddly enough, no one seemed to make any jokes along the lines of 'that was Crap(p)'.