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[E. Hawkins & Co., Brighton.

LORD HAWKE.

TWENTY years ago this article could not have been written. Till the middle of the seventies centuries were as rare as illustrated magazines. With the exception of W. G. Grace, the most famous batsmen could easily count on the fingers of one hand the number of times they had played an innings of a hundred, and there were plenty of first-class cricketers who had never scored a century at all. The smoothness of modern pitches and a succession of abnormally dry summers has altered all that. Nowadays the difficulty would be to find a dozen men in first-class cricket who have not scored a couple of centuries at some time or other. Still, even though the century-makers' glory has been dimmed by their numbers, there is always an interest attaching to the first century of a great batsman.

Unfortunately, the modesty of most of our batsmen prevents them from looking at the matter in this light. Nearly all the amateurs to whom I applied for the purpose of this article answered my first application by replying that they did not believe that the details of their first century could be of the slightest interest to anyone. As will be

“MY FIRST CENTURY.”

WITH CONTRIBUTIONS BY
W. G. GRACE, A. E. STODDART,
C. B. FRY, K. J. KEY,
G. L. JESSOP, J. R. MASON,
R. ABEL, P. F. WARNER,
J. T. BROWN, D. L. A. JEPHSON,
AND LORD HAWKE,

HERE CHRONICLED
BY
M. RANDAL ROBERTS.

seen from the letters below, I was luckily able to overcome this coyness. One amateur, by the way—a very famous Notts batsman—entered so heartily into my scheme at the beginning that I was led to expect great things from his pen. He even volunteered the opinion that the idea of the article was a capital one; but the delivery of this flattering criticism apparently induced a fit of absent-mindedness. Anyhow, though I jogged his memory with repeated reminders, I am still waiting for his account of his first century. The professionals are but scantily represented here. That, however, is owing to the professionals' shortness of memory, not to any lack of importunity on the part of the compiler of this article. I have a long journalistic acquaintance with most of the professional cricketers in England, but I could not persuade any of them to unbosom themselves to me about their first hundred. “It's so long ago, I really can't remember anything about it,” was the burden of most of the replies I received. Coming from such century-hardened veterans as Abel, Shrewsbury, or Gunn, who have been making scores of a hundred for twenty years, this excuse is valid enough; but in the case of batsmen whose appearance in county cricket dates back only a couple of years, it may be taken with a very liberal sprinkling of salt. After all, his first century is an epoch in the career of every cricketer.

The most interesting of all first centuries is, of course, W. G. Grace's. I confess I had some misgivings about being able to draw the great man on this subject. In the first place, “W. G.” hates confessions of all sorts;

in the second place, I knew that his first century was hidden in such remote antiquity that I doubted whether he would be able to recall the actual date or any particulars concerning it. As it turned out, "W. G." could not say from memory exactly where or when he scored his first hundred, but he very

an account of my first hundred in first-class cricket. I fancy it was my first hundred in any cricket, but am not sure, it was so long ago. Please return the *Guide* as soon as you have done with it.

"Yours truly,
"W. G. GRACE."

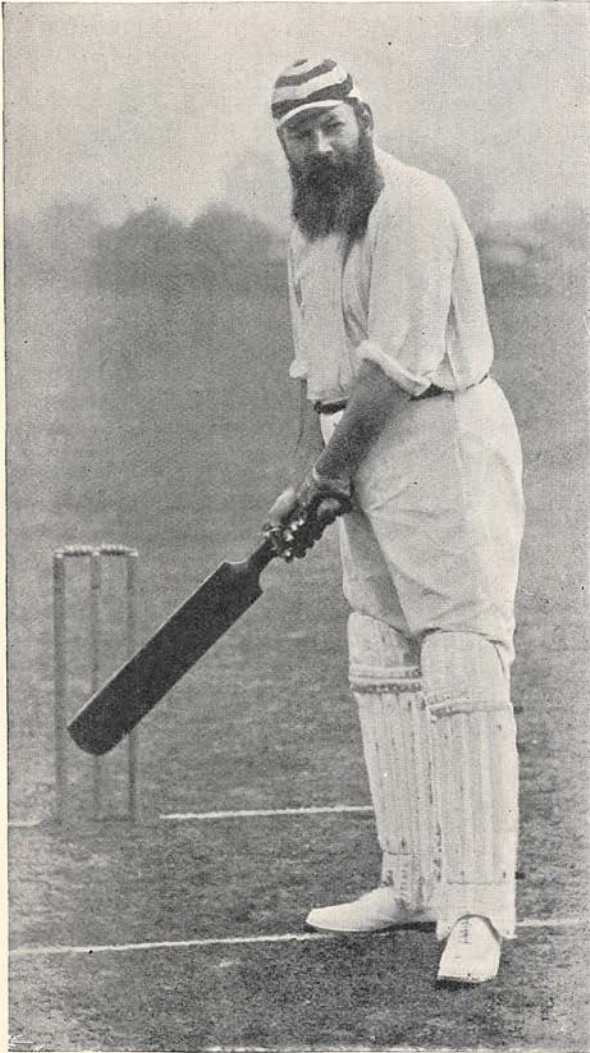


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[Hawkins, Brighton.

DR. W. G. GRACE.

kindly provided me with the material for finding what I wanted. Below I give his letter—

"London County Cricket Club,
"Crystal Palace,
"Sydenham, S.E.

"I am sending you an old *Lillywhite's Guide*. You will find at pages 92 and 93

with the best in first-class cricket.

In the same year that Grace played the first of his hundred odd centuries, the cricketer who possibly comes next to him in merit was born. As most cricketing careers go, A. E. Stoddart is almost a veteran, but he is positively an infant compared with W. G. Grace. Mr. Stoddart, as will be seen from

On turning to pages 92 and 93 I found the following account of a match played between the Gentlemen of Sussex and the South Wales Club, on July 14th, 15th, 16th, 1864. "The hitting was commenced by the South Wales Gentlemen, who lost a wicket for 19 runs. Then came the most extraordinary incident in this great hitting match. Mr. J. Lloyd was partnered by Mr. W. G. Grace, the younger brother of the celebrated cricketer, and they were not parted until the score stood at 207. Mr. Lloyd left for 82, a well played innings; but young Mr. Grace did not leave until he had scored 170 runs, pronounced to be the finest innings played last season on the Brighton ground. He did not give a single chance, and was at last out by playing the ball on to his wicket. He also carried out his bat for 56 in the second innings. When it is borne in mind that this young gentleman was not sixteen years of age until the 18th of July, two days after the match was played, there can be very little doubt that this 170 and 56 not out, of Mr. W. G. Grace's, was one of the greatest batting feats of the great batting season of 1864."

All superlatives have long since been exhausted in describing W. G. Grace's dazzling career, but if a succinct proof were wanted of his overpowering superiority to all players, past and present, it could be found in this—that he scored his first century in 1864, and that in 1900 he is still holding his own

his letter, like some other cricketers to whom I applied, took my question to refer to his first century in first-class cricket. As a matter of fact, he scored bushels of centuries for the Hampstead Club long before he appeared for Middlesex. At the time of writing it is not known whether Mr. Stoddart will take part in county cricket this season, but the mere recounting of a few of his great feats makes one feel what an irreparable loss to the game his permanent retirement will be. In reply to my request for some details about his first century, Mr. Stoddart wrote as follows—

"South Hampstead, N.W.

"Of course there is always pleasure to be got out of making a century, whether you win the match or lose it. But the pleasure is very naturally enhanced when the hundred one makes happens to win, or, at any rate, helps to win, the match. My first hundred in first-class cricket was made against Kent, at Gravesend, on August 13th, 1886, but the match was drawn and my innings was by no means a good one. What I consider *the* century of my career was made on the occasion of the visit of my first team to Australia on the 1st of January, 1895, at Melbourne, in the second of the test matches. We were 48 runs to the bad on the first innings; in the second innings I made 173 out of a total of 475, leaving the Australians



D. L. A. JEPHSON.

Photo by Hawkins, Brighton.

428 runs to get—a score they fell short of by 94 runs. As I felt that I had contributed a small share to England's victory, nothing I have ever done in cricket gives me the same lasting pleasure to look back on as that innings.

"Yours truly,

"A. E. STODDART."

Mr. Stoddart must have been in tremendous form at the time he made his first century in county cricket, as it was within a few days of his hundred against Kent, at Gravesend, that he made his mammoth score of 485 for the Hampstead Club against the Stoics.

Did he not tell us so himself, we should never believe that it is twenty years ago since S. M. J. Woods scored his first century. According to *Wisden*, "Sammy" Woods was born in 1868, and, as he tells us that he was twelve years old when he made his first hundred, it must be twenty years ago since he accomplished that feat. But I am not sure that we should be surprised if we had heard that he had started making centuries thirty years ago. "Sammy" is the type of cricketer who looks as if he had been born with a bat in his hand. He made centuries as a boy, and as a man he is a whole side in himself. Here is his letter—



Photo by]

S. M. J. WOODS.

[Thiele.

"When I was twelve I scored 109 out of 148 for Juniors of Royston College, Sydney, New South Wales. I was in the first eleven at the time and played for them in the afternoon. I remember telling the captain that I had made a century in the morning, thinking he might put me in a little earlier. I generally went in last, as I was a bowler.



Photo by]

[R. W. Thomas, Cheapside.

ROBERT ABEL.

Much to my disgust, he said, 'Oh, then you need not go in soon, as you will be too tired; or, if you do, get out first ball.' Which I did without any trying to.

"S. M. J. Woods."

"Sammy" has not had to wait on a captain's instructions very often since those early days. From the time he entered Brighton College he has generally been captain of any team he has played for—and a right good captain, too.

Lord Hawke's account of his first hundred is, unfortunately, rather brief, but that is not

at all the fault of the Yorkshire captain. Lord Hawke originally wrote me a most interesting and graphic description of his first century. A very well known amateur whom I asked for a contribution to this article told me that he would be glad to write it if I would let him have a sample of the kind of thing I wanted. I sent him Lord Hawke's letter as a guide-post, but from that day to this I have neither seen the sample nor the contribution for which it was to serve as a model. At the last moment, just as this article was going to press, I applied again to Lord Hawke, and he very courteously consented to write me another account of his first hundred, but as the cricket season had just begun he had no time to look up records and had to write merely from memory. His second letter ran as follows—

"Wighill Park,

"Tadcaster.

"I really forget exactly what I wrote about my first century, but, as far as I recollect, it was that I made 171 out of 191, in Lower Boys Cup Tie, at Eton, in 1875. Ran six others out, bagging the bowling. First hundred in first-class cricket was 141 for Cambridge v. C. I. Thornton's XI., in 1883, against the bowling of Peate, Ulyett, and Barnes. Very busy—hope this will do.

"Yours very truly,

"HAWKE."

Here is what C. B. Fry has to say about his first century—

"Chelsea.

"I am sorry to say I can't recall the circumstances of the first century I ever made; but the first hundred I made in first-class cricket was at Ashley Down, Bristol—it was in 1894, I fancy. The wicket was of the sticky order, but a trifle too slow to be really difficult. I managed to make 109 in a partnership with Butt, our wicket-keeper, who made 75. We both made most of our runs by 'pulls' and 'hooks.' I certainly did not play well. I did not at the time know how to play back, and kept reaching forward at the breaking ball and nearly getting bowled. I ought to have been stumped at 99 off C. L. Townsend, whose bowling I found most difficult; in fact, he was my master all through, but luck was with me that day. The other bowlers, as far as I can remember, were J. J. Ferris, Roberts, and 'W. G.' Sussex won by an innings, I think. I missed four 'dolly' catches in close succession. But



J. T. BROWN.



G. L. JESSOP.



P. F. WARNER.



C. B. FRY.

Photographs by E. Hawkins & Co., Brighton.

the scoring on the Gloucestershire side was low. I fear my first century was not a great innings.

"Yours,
"C. B. FRY."

Though Mr. Fry cannot remember the date of his very first century, some of his school-fellows have a more retentive memory. An old Repton boy told me the other day that he distinctly remembers C. B. Fry playing an innings of over a hundred in a house match at Repton, some ten years ago. The writer, besides, has a well defined recollection of a certain young man with the same name and initials as Mr. Fry, who had been previously known as an excellent Association back and a marvellous long-jumper, making a hundred in the "Freshers" match at Oxford in 1892. Talking of Repton, it is worth remarking how completely C. B. Fry has distanced in the last couple of seasons his old school-fellow and rival, L. C. H. Palairet, in the

race for cricket honours. At Repton, and at Oxford, L. C. H. Palairet was always regarded as a batsman of a much higher class than C. B. Fry, but continued ill-health has materially affected the former's renown as a cricketer. Undoubtedly C. B. Fry's fine constitution has been an important factor in his athletic success.

The bowler who, C. B. Fry tells us, proved his master when he was making his first century has something to say about his own first hundred in first-class cricket. In 1894, as all the world knows, C. L. Townsend was the most promising bowler in England, but was no great shakes as a batsman. It was in 1897 that his great batting abilities first showed themselves. For some reason or other, nine out of ten cricketers will tell you that they would rather score a hundred against Yorkshire than any other county. C. L. Townsend, as will be seen from his letter below, shares this feeling—

"Clifton Club,
"Clifton, Bristol.

"We were playing Yorkshire, at Harrogate, on July 20th, 21st, 22nd, 1897. It was in this match that Gilbert Jessop, who went in just before me, scored his historic 101 in forty minutes. I had to go in immediately after this astonishing bit of hitting, and never felt less like making runs. However, I suppose I must have been in good form at the time, for after the first few overs everything seemed easy to me. I was as slow as a snail at first, but after my first fifty I began to score quite fast and made my last fifty in about forty-five minutes, an exceedingly fast rate for me in those days. It was a most exciting moment for me when I saw the handkerchief go and knew that I had gained my ambition and scored a hundred against Yorkshire. Whatever hundreds I have made since, none have given me the same pleasure as that particular century against Yorkshire.

"Yours truly,
"C. L. TOWNSEND."

Mr. Townsend's letter is a well deserved tribute to the irritating excellence of the Yorkshire bowling.

With an increased experience of first-class cricket many cricketers change their original methods. J. Darling, the Australian, started life as a great hitter, though in important matches he is now a "stick" of the most pronounced order. George Brann, too, and even C. B. Fry, played a vastly freer game in their early days of county cricket than they do at present. Perhaps the most won-



Photo by]

K. J. KEY.

[Hawkins, Brighton.

derful thing about Gilbert Jessop's batting is that he has never changed his style a jot. Time cannot temper his ferocious hitting. As will be seen from his confession below, his first hundred, in a local match in Essex, was made by exactly the same methods as he employs to-day against the most skilful bowling in the world. Once let him get his eye in, and he can carve a century out of the best balls of Lockwood, Richardson, and J. T. Hearne, as easily as from the half volleys of the merest agriculturalists in a Saturday afternoon match on the village green. Mr. Jessop thus describes his first hundred—

"My first appearance as a centurion in any match was in Essex, for South Woodford v. Woodford United, in 1893, when I scored 112. I can remember that it was a distinctly lucky innings, remarkable chiefly for the number of opportunities I presented to the wicket-keeper. I stood a foot and a half outside my crease during most of the innings, and eventually fell a victim to my rashness, by being stumped through the ball rebounding from the wicket-keeper's pads. This habit of mine, by the way, of standing outside the crease, greatly displeased the journalistic critics when first I played county cricket. The comments of a Manchester evening paper on my *début* as a first-class cricketer were certainly not very encouraging to a nervous player. They read as follows: 'If Mr. Jessop cannot bat better than he can bowl or field, he will certainly not be an acquisition to the western shire.' My running out to Mold was condemned in those days as 'rustic cricket' by a good few of the people who nowadays talk of the same method as good forcing tactics. *Mores mutantur.*

"Sincerely yours,
"GILBERT L. JESSOP."

Mr. J. R. Mason's account of his first century is short and concise—

"In reply to your letter of the 27th, I scored my first century for Mr. Smith's House v. Mr. Du Boulay's House, on July 14th, 1891. I made 169 not out, and know that I was missed three or four times at least, but can't remember any further details.

"Yours truly,
"J. R. MASON."

I wonder how many schoolboys have made a century without being missed at least half a dozen times.



Photo by [Hawkins, Brighton.]
J. R. MASON.

Abel had forgotten all about his first century, but he solaced my feelings with the following pleasant little note—

"Sorry I can't give you any assistance in your article on 'My First Century,' but I have quite forgotten when and where I made my first hundred, and have not kept a record. Otherwise I should have been very pleased to have obliged you.

"Yours truly,
"ROBERT ABEL."

Robert Abel's late captain was more communicative. Mr. Key, luckily, keeps cricket records, and was good enough to put himself to considerable trouble in looking up some of these records for the benefit of the readers of the WINDSOR.

"22, Summer Place, S.W.

"I am sorry I have not answered your letter sooner, but I have been trying to look up particulars. My first hundred was made for Clifton College against the Old Cliftonians, at Commemoration, in 1882. My score was 181 not out; I went in first wicket down; I rather think the innings was unfinished. I

remember being missed at third man when I had made about fourteen, but that was about my only chance. The bowling cannot have been formidable. T. W. Lang was one bowler, and at the end of the innings J. A. Bush bowled fast underhand sneaks, when he succeeded in running out a boy who was backing up too much.

"Yours truly,
"K. J. KEY."

Since the days of C. F. H. Leslie, Rugby has not been particularly rich in cricketers. But a batsman of the calibre of P. F. Warner, "commonly known as 'Plum,' who takes teams to America, and goes in first for Middlesex," amply compensates for many failures. Mr. Warner took to making centuries at an early age and has continued the practice ever since. He was only sixteen when the event related below took place. This is how he describes it—

"The first time I ever made a century was at Rugby, against the Free Foresters. The match was played on June 16th and 17th, 1890, and my score was 177 not out. The Free Foresters scored 311, and the School 303. I went in first wicket down, when only a few runs had been scored, and was 20 not out overnight, and 99 not out at lunch on the second day. The wicket was a very good one, just the right pace, not too fast, and my last forty runs were made after a shower of rain, the ball cutting through and the wicket being very easy. I was missed twice, when about 84, and again at 132. This 177 is the highest score I have ever made.

"Yours truly,
"P. F. WARNER."

There is a curious similarity, by the way, between the first centuries of K. J. Key, J. R. Mason, and P. F. Warner. Each made approximately the same number of runs, each was not out, and the three were all school-boys at the time.

There is nothing new under the sun. I had flattered myself that in this article I had perpetrated an entirely novel idea, till J. T. Brown's letter dispelled the notion. Some other cricket enthusiast had evidently got hold of the idea before. Luckily for me, he failed in his attempt to carry it out.

"I am sorry I cannot oblige you by writing an account of my first century; but as I have been asked to do so before, and refused, I think it would not look well of me to do so now.

"Yours truly,
"J. T. BROWN."

Mr. D. L. A. Jephson had to thank the fieldsmen for his first century. The new Surrey captain frankly tells us that he was missed more than a dozen times—

"Surrey County Cricket Club,
"Kennington Oval, S.E.

"I hope this note is not too late for your purpose. The first century I ever made was for the Clapham Wanderers (now the Wanderers), at Penshurst, in Kent, fourteen years ago. I got 148, and was missed fifteen times. The only way I can account for my making such a score was that the ground was so exceedingly small that all the bad strokes counted four—as they went clean out of the ground—and the good ones only one or two.

"Yours sincerely,
"D. L. A. JEPHSON."

