

The Funniest *Cricket Match*



THE FUNNIEST CRICKET MATCH EVER!

*The wonderful game described by
A G Macdonell in England, their England*

With notes by Christopher Nicholson

In 1933 Archibald Gordon Macdonell (1895–1941) wrote a novel called *England, their England*. It was well received and was awarded the James Tait Black Prize in 1934. Apart from its other merits, the book became immensely popular because of its description of a cricket match. No other account of a cricket match, or indeed any sporting occasion, has been as amusingly described nor is as replete with historical, social and political allusions.

Confirmation of this comes from an impeccable source, if indeed that is necessary. In a Cricket Lore article, Mike Seabrook writes:

It's always risky to claim for anything the status of biggest, best, brightest or any other superlative – especially where matters of taste are concerned. All the same, there is a remarkable consensus among the vast readership of cricket literature about which is the funniest cricket story ever published: the account of the match between the Kentish village side and the visiting team of London literati in A G Macdonell's novel *England, Their England* takes the laurels by virtually unchallenged assent.ⁱ

So finely drawn are the characters in the game that many readers have surmised that they are based on real-life personalities of the day. Seabrook's article shows that he, too, was fascinated by the background to the story:

I had loved this story since boyhood; and somewhere along the way I had read that "Mr Hodge" and his team of bibulous literary gents were based on a real-life assembly of cricketing eccentrics gathered together by the poet, Sir John Squire, and christened by him *The Invalids*. I thought it would be a pleasant relief from my normal trade of writing novels if I could find out more about this legendary outfit. In particular, I thought it would be an interesting piece of detective work if I could discover the real-life identities of the whole of Macdonell's team – using this as the peg on which to hang the rest of the research. And maybe, I thought, there might be a book in it – probably slim, but certainly of interest to cricketers, and a pure joy to research.ⁱⁱ

However, Seabrook made no progress with his 'interesting piece of detective work' and he never got around to writing the 'slim book' – his two-page article is all that came of his immense enthusiasm. But other

authors and investigators have sought out, and in some cases presented their ideas of, the genuine persons behind the imagined characters with which Macdonell livens up his novel, a good example being William Amos's *The Originals: Who's Really Who in Fiction*.

Macdonell's novel is a roman à clef – a book with a key – in which reference is made to real people through the use of fictitious names. Originating in France in the seventeenth century,ⁱⁱⁱ and soon taken up by the English,^{iv} the genre was particularly popular in the nineteenth century. Benjamin Disraeli, an English prime minister, wrote a novel called *Venetia* in 1837, in which he refers to contemporary personalities. His work *Coningsby*, published seven years later, provoked such interest that he was compelled to reveal its characters' true identities.

Aldous Huxley explored this genre in his book *Point Counter Point*, which was published five years before Macdonell's novel. Huxley's fictional characters were not as well disguised as he had hoped, for after a tumultuous social witch-hunt the public accurately identified D H Lawrence, Oswald Mosley and Middleton Murray.

There has been one highly significant attempt at finding out the identity of Macdonell's cast. Certain details are given of the personalities that took part in his wonderful cricket game in *Sing Willow*, a book written by the English TV dramatist Jeremy Paul.^v Among Paul's achievements rank programmes and features on British television including *Upstairs Downstairs*, *Sherlock Holmes* and *Lovejoy*. The book contains evocative drawings by Tim Jaques as well as old photographs and various bits of eccentric memorabilia.

Sing Willow deals with the development of the Invalids' club. Participation in the games of that colourful team provided the backdrop for Macdonell's hilarious account. Various stage, cinema and sporting personalities have played for the Invalids, including Boris Karloff, Evelyn Waugh, Percy Fender, Godfrey Evans, Tony Hancock and Martin Clunes.

My own interest was stimulated by Paul's book, and I researched the cricket match personalities further. I am also intrigued by the central position the game of cricket has occupied in political and social morality since its origins. Thus I have appended some commentary on the cricket match characters and my thoughts on what the sport represents in society in general.

Chris Nicholson

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The Cricket Match

From *England, their England*

‘Don’t forget Saturday morning Charing Cross Underground Station,’ ran the telegram which arrived at Royal Avenue during the week, ‘at ten-fifteen sharp. Whatever you do don’t be late. Hodge.’

Saturday morning was bright and sunny, and at ten minutes past ten Donald arrived at the Embankment entrance of Charing Cross Underground Station, carrying a small suitcase full of clothes suitable for outdoor sports and pastimes. He was glad that he had arrived too early, for it would have been a dreadful thing for a stranger and a foreigner to have kept such a distinguished man and his presumably distinguished colleagues even for an instant from their national game. Laying his bag down on the pavement and putting one foot upon it carefully, for Donald had heard stories of the surpassing dexterity of metropolitan thieves, he waited eagerly for the hands of a neighbouring clock to mark the quarter past.

At twenty minutes to eleven an effeminate looking young man, carrying a cricketing bag and wearing a pale blue silk jumper up to his ears, sauntered up, remarked casually, ‘You playing?’ and, on receiving an answer in the affirmative, dumped his bag at Donald’s feet and said, ‘Keep an eye on that like a good fellow. I’m going to get a shave,’ and sauntered off round the corner.

At five minutes to eleven there was a respectable muster, six of the ten having assembled. But at five minutes past a disintegrating element was introduced by the arrival of Mr Harcourt with the news, which he announced with the air of a shipwrecked mariner who has, after twenty-five years of vigilance, seen a sail, that in the neighbourhood of Charing Cross the pubs opened at eleven o'clock. So that when Mr Hodge himself turned up at twenty-five minutes past eleven, resplendent in flannels, a red and white football shirt with a lace-up collar, and a blazer of purple and yellow stripes, each stripe being at least two inches across, and surmounted by a purple and yellow cap that made him somehow reminiscent of one of the Michelin twins, if not both, he was justly indignant at the slackness of his team.

'They've no sense of time,' he told Donald repeatedly. 'We're late as it is. The match is due to begin at half-past eleven, and it's fifty miles from here. I should have been here myself two hours ago, but I had my Sunday article to do. It really is too bad.'

When the team, now numbering nine men, had been extricated from the tavern and had been marshalled on the pavement, counted, recounted, and the missing pair identified, it was pointed out by the casual youth who had returned, shining and pomaded from the barber, that the char-a-banc had not yet arrived.

Mr Hodge's indignation became positively alarming and he covered the twenty yards to the public telephone almost as quickly as Mr Harcourt covered the forty yards back to the pub. Donald remained on the pavement to guard the heap of suitcases, cricket bags and stray equipment – one player had arrived with a pair of flannels rolled in a tight ball under his

arm and a left hand batting glove, while another had contributed a cardboard box which he had bought at Hamley's on the way down, and which contained six composite cricket balls, boys' size, and a pair of bails.

It was just as well that Donald did remain on guard, partly because no one else seemed to care whether the luggage was stolen or not, partly because Mr Hodge emerged in a perfect frenzy a minute or two later from the telephone box to borrow two pennies to put in the slot, and partly because by the time the telephone call was at last in full swing and Mr Hodge's command over the byways of British invective was enjoying complete freedom of action, the char-à-banc rolled up beside the kerb.

At twelve-thirty it was decided not to wait for the missing pair, and the nine cricketers started off. At two-thirty, after halts at Catford, the White Hart at Sevenoaks, the Angel at Tunbridge Wells, and three smaller inns at tiny villages, the char-à-banc drew up triumphantly beside the cricket ground of the Kentish village of Fordenden.

Donald was enchanted at the first sight of rural England. And rural England is the real England, unspoilt by factories and financiers and tourists and hustle. He sprang out of the char-à-banc, in which he had been tightly wedged between a very stout publisher who had laughed all the way down and had quivered at each laugh like the needle of a seismograph during one of Japan's larger earthquakes, and a youngish and extremely learned professor of ballistics, and gazed eagerly round.

The sight was worth an eager gaze or two. It was a hot summer's afternoon. There was no wind, and the

smoke from the red-roofed cottages curled slowly up into the golden haze. The clock on the flint tower of the church struck the half-hour, and the vibrations spread slowly across the shimmering hedge rows, spangled with white blossom of the convolvulus, and lost themselves tremulously among the orchards. Bees lazily drifted. White butterflies flapped their aimless way among the gardens. Delphiniums, larkspur, tiger-lilies, evening primrose, monk's hood, sweet peas, swaggered brilliantly above the box hedges, the wooden palings and the rickety gates. The cricket field itself was a mass of daisies and buttercups and dandelions, tall grasses and purple vetches and thistledown, and great clumps of dark red sorrel, except, of course for the oblong patch in the centre – mown, rolled, watered – a smooth, shining emerald of grass, the Pride of Fordenden, the Wicket.

The entire scene was perfect to the last detail. It was as if Mr Cochran had, with his spectacular genius, brought Ye Olde Englyshe Village straight down by special train from the London Pavilion, complete with synthetic cobwebs (from the Wigan factory), hand-made smocks for ye gaffers (called in the cabaret scenes and the North West Mounted Police scenes the Gentlemen of the Singing Ensemble), and aluminium EeziMilk stools for the dairymaids (or Ladies of the Dancing Ensemble). For there stood the vicar, beaming absent-mindedly at everyone. There was the forge, with the blacksmith, his hammer discarded, tightening his snake-buckled belt for the fray and loosening his braces to enable his terrific bowling arm to swing freely in its socket.

There on the long bench outside the Three Horseshoes sat a row of elderly men, facing a row of pint tankards, and wearing either long beards or

clean-shaven chins and long whiskers. Near them, holding pint tankards in their hands, was another group of men, clustered together and talking with intense animation. Donald thought that one or two of them seemed familiar, but it was not until he turned back to the char-à-banc to ask if he could help with the luggage that he realised that they were Mr Hodge and his team already sampling the proprietor's wares. (A notice above the door of the inn stated that the proprietor's name was A. Bason and that he was licensed to sell wines, spirits, beers and tobacco.)

All round the cricket field small parties of villagers were patiently waiting for the great match to begin; a match against gentlemen from London is an event in a village and some of them looked as if they had been waiting for a good long time. But they were not impatient. Village folk are very seldom impatient. Those whose lives are occupied in combating the eccentricities of God regard as very small beer the eccentricities of man.

Blue and green dragonflies played at hide and seek among the thistledown, and a pair of swans flew overhead. An ancient man leaned upon a scythe, his sharpening stone sticking out of a pocket in his velveteen waistcoat.



A magpie flapped lazily across the meadows. The parson shook hands with the squire. Doves cooed. The haze flickered. The world stood still.

At twenty minutes to three Mr Hodge had completed his rather tricky negotiations with the Fordenden captain and had arranged that two substitutes should be lent by Fordenden in order that the visitors should field eleven men, and that nine men on each side

should bat. But just as the two men on the Fordenden side, who had been detailed for the unpleasant duty of fielding for both sides and batting for neither, had gone off home in high dudgeon, a motor car arrived containing not only Mr Hodge's two defaulters but a third gentleman in flannels as well, who swore stoutly that he had been invited by Mr Hodge to play and affirmed that he was jolly well going to play. Whoever stood down, it wasn't going to be him. Negotiations therefore had to be reopened, the pair of local Achilles had to be recalled, and at ten minutes to three the match began upon a twelve-a-side basis.

Mr Hodge, having won the toss by a system of his own founded upon the differential calculus and Copernican theory, sent in his opening pair to bat. One was James Livingstone, a very sound club cricketer, and the other one was called, simply, Boone. Boone was a huge, awe-inspiring colossus of a man, weighing at least eighteen stone and wearing all the majestic trappings of a Cambridge Blue. Donald felt that it was hardly fair to loose such cracks upon a humble English village until he fortunately remembered that he, of all people, a foreigner, admitted by courtesy to the National Game, ought not to set himself up to be a judge of what is, and what is not, cricket.

The Fordenden team ranged themselves at the bidding of their captain, the Fordenden baker, in various spots of vantage amid the daisies, buttercups, dandelions, vetches, thistledown and clumps of dark red sorrel; and the blacksmith, having taken in, just for luck as it were, yet another reef of his snake buckle belt, prepared to open the attack. It so happened that at the end at which he was to bowl the ground behind the wicket was level for a few yards

and then sloped away rather abruptly, so that it was only during the last three or four intensive, galvanic yards of his run that the blacksmith, who took a long run, was visible to the batsman or indeed to anyone on the field of play except the man stationed in the deep field behind him. This man saw nothing of the game except the blacksmith walking back dourly and the blacksmith running up ferociously, and occasionally a ball driven smartly over the brow of the hill in his direction.

The sound club player having taken guard, having twiddled his bat round several times in a nonchalant manner, and having stared arrogantly at each fieldsman in turn, was somewhat surprised to find that, although the field was ready, no bowler was visible. His doubts, however, were resolved a second or two later, when the blacksmith came up, breasting the slope superbly like a mettlesome combination of Vulcan and Venus Anadyomene. The first ball, which he delivered, was a high full pitch to leg, of appalling velocity. It must have lighted upon a bare patch among the grass near long leg, for it rocketed, first bounce, into the hedge and four byes were reluctantly signalled by the village umpire. The row of gaffers on the rustic bench shook their heads, agreed that it was many years since four byes had been signalled on that ground, and called for more pints of old and mild. The other members of Mr Hodge's team blanched visibly and called for more pints of bitter. The youngish professor of ballistics, who was in next, muttered something about muzzle velocities and started to do a sum on the back of an envelope.



The second ball went full pitch into the wicketkeeper's stomach and there was a delay while the deputy wicketkeeper was invested with the pads and gloves of office. The third ball, making a noise like a partridge, would have hummed past Mr Livingstone's left ear had he not dexterously struck it out of the

ground for six and the fourth took his leg bail with a bullet-like full pitch. Ten runs for one wicket, last man 6. The professor got the fifth ball on the left ear and went back to the Three Horseshoes, while Mr Harcourt had the singular misfortune to hit his wicket before the sixth run was even delivered. Ten runs for two wickets and one man retired hurt.

A slow left hand bowler was on the other end, the local rate collector, a man whose whole life was one of infinite patience and guile. Off his first ball the massive Cambridge Blue was easily stumped, having executed a movement that aroused the professional admiration of the Ancient who was leaning upon his scythe. Donald was puzzled that so famous a player should play so execrable a stroke until it transpired, later on, that a wrong impression had been created and that the portentous Boone had gained his Blue at Cambridge for rowing and not for cricket. Ten runs for three wickets and one man hurt.

The next player was a singular young man. He was small and quiet, and he wore perfectly creased white flannels, white silk socks, a pale pink shirt and a white cap. On the way down in the char-à-banc he had taken little part in the conversation and even less in the beer drinking. There was a retiring modesty about him that made him conspicuous in that cricket eleven, and there was a gentleness, almost a finicky gentleness, about his movements which hardly seemed virile and athletic. He looked as if a fast ball would knock the bat out of his hands. Donald asked someone what his name was, and was astonished to learn that he was the famous novelist, Robert Southcott himself.



Just as this celebrity, holding his bat as delicately as if it was a flute or a fan, was picking his way through

the daisies and thistledown towards the wicket, Mr Hodge rushed anxiously, tankard in hand, from the Three Horseshoes and bellowed in a most unpoetical voice: 'Play carefully, Bobby. Keep your end up. Runs don't matter.'

'Very well, Bill,' replied Mr Southcott sedately. Donald was interested by this little exchange. It was the Team Spirit at work – the captain instructing his man to play a type of game that was demanded by the state of the team's fortunes, and the individual loyally suppressing his instincts to play a different type of game.

Mr Southcott took guard modestly, glanced furtively round the field as if it was an impertinence to suggest that he would survive long enough to make a study of the fieldsmen's positions worthwhile and hit the rate collector's first ball over the Three Horseshoes into a hay field.



The ball was retrieved by a mob of screaming urchins, handed back to the rate collector, who scratched his head and then bowled his fast Yorker, which Mr Southcott hit into the saloon bar of the Shoes giving Mr Harcourt such a fright that he required several pints before he fully recovered his nerve.



The next ball was very slow and crafty, endowed as it was with every iota of fingerspin and brain power which a long-service rate collector could muster. In

addition, it was delivered at the extreme end of the crease so as to secure a background of dark laurels instead of a dazzling white screen, and it swung a little in the air. A few moments later the urchins, by this time delirious with ecstasy, were fishing it out of the squire's trout stream with a bamboo pole and an old bucket.

The rate collector was bewildered. He had never known such a travesty of the game. It was not cricket. It was slogging; it was wild, unscientific bashing; and furthermore, his reputation was in grave danger. The instalments would be harder than ever to collect, and heaven knew they were hard enough to collect as it was, what with bad times and all. His three famous deliveries had been treated with contempt – the leg break, the fast Yorker, and the slow, swinging off break out of the laurel bushes. What on earth was he to try now? Another six and he would be laughed out of the parish.

Fortunately the village umpire came out of a trance of consternation to the rescue. Thirty-eight years of umpiring for the Fordenden Cricket Club had taught him a thing or two and he called 'over' firmly and marched off to square leg. The rate collector was glad to give way to a Free Forester, who had been specially imported for this match. He was only a moderate bowler, but it was felt that it was worthwhile giving him a trial, if only for the sake of the scarf round his waist and his cap.

At the other end the fast bowler pounded away grimly until an unfortunate accident occurred. Mr Southcott had been treating with apologetic contempt those of his deliveries which came within reach, and the blacksmith's temper had been rising for some time.

An urchin had shouted, 'Take him orf!' and the other urchin, for whom Mr Southcott was by now a firmly established deity, had screamed with delight. The captain had held one or two ominous consultations with the wicketkeeper and other advisers, and the blacksmith knew that his dismissal was at hand unless he produced a supreme effort.

It was the last ball of the over. He halted at the wicket before going back for his run, glared at Mr Harcourt, who had been driven out to umpire by his colleagues – greatly to the regret of Mr Bason, the landlord of the Shoes – glared at Mr Southcott, took another reef in his belt, shook out another inch in his braces, spat on his hand, swung his arm three or four times in a meditative sort of way, grasped the ball tightly in his colossal palm, and then turned smartly about and marched off like a Pomeranian grenadier and vanished over the brow of the hill. Mr Southcott, during these proceedings, lent elegantly upon his bat and admired the view. At last, after a long stillness, the ground shook, the grasses waved violently, small birds arose with shrill clamours, a loud puffing sound alarmed the butterflies, and the blacksmith, looking more like Venus Anadyomene than ever, came thundering over the crest. The world held its breath. Among the spectators conversation was suddenly hushed. Even the urchins, understanding somehow that they were assisting at a crisis in affairs, were silent for a moment as the mighty figure swept up to the crease. It was the charge of Von Bredow's Dragoons at Gravelotte all over again.

But alas for human ambition! Mr Harcourt, swaying slightly from leg to leg, had understood the menacing glare of the bowler, had marked the preparation for a titanic effort, and, for he was not a poet for nothing,

knew exactly what was going on. Mr Harcourt sober had a very pleasant sense of humour, but Mr Harcourt rather drunk was a perfect demon of impishness. Sober, he occasionally resisted a temptation to try to be funny. Rather drunk, never. As the giant whirlwind of volcanic energy rushed past him to the crease, Mr Harcourt, quivering with excitement and internal laughter, and wobbling uncertainly upon his pins, took a deep breath and bellowed, 'No ball!'

It was too late for the unfortunate bowler to stop himself. The ball flew out of his hand like a bullet and hit third-slip, who was not looking, full pitch in the kneecap. With a yell of agony third-slip began hopping about like a stork until he tripped over a tussock of grass and fell on his face in a bed of nettles, from which he sprang up again with another drum-splitting yell. The blacksmith himself was flung forward by his own irresistible momentum, startled out of his wits by Mr Harcourt's bellow in his ear, and thrown off balance by his desperate effort to prevent himself from delivering the ball, and the result was that his gigantic feet got mixed up among each other and he fell heavily in the centre of the wicket, knocking up a cloud of dust and dandelion-seed and twisting his ankle. Rooks by the hundreds arose in protest from the vicarage cedars. The urchins howled like intoxicated banshees. The gaffers gaped. Mr Southcott gazed modestly at the ground. Mr Harcourt gazed at the heavens. Mr Harcourt did not think the world had ever been, or could ever be again, quite such a capital place, even though he had laughed internally so much that he got hiccups.

Mr Hodge, emerging at that moment from the Three Horseshoes, surveyed the scene and then the scoreboard with an imperial air. Then he roared in the

same rustic voice as before, 'You needn't play safe any more, Bob. Play your own game.'

'Thank you, ...Bill,' replied Mr Southcott as sedately as ever, and, on the resumption of the game, he fell into a kind of cricketing trance, defending his wicket skilfully from straight balls, ignoring crooked ones, and scoring one more run in a quarter of an hour before he inadvertently allowed, for the first time during his innings, a ball to strike his person.

'Out!' shrieked the venerable umpire before anyone had time to appeal.

The score at this point was 69 for six, last man 52.

The only other incident in the innings was provided by an American journalist, by the name of Shakespeare Pollock, an intensely active, alert, on-the-spot young man. Mr Pollock had been roped in at the last moment to make up the eleven and Mr Hodge and Mr Harcourt had spent quite a lot of time on the way down trying to teach him the fundamental principles of the game. Donald had listened attentively and had been surprised that they made no reference to Team Spirit. He decided in the end that the reason must have been simply that everyone knows all about it already, and that it is therefore taken for granted.

Mr Pollock stepped up to the wicket in the lively manner of his native mustang, refused to take guard, on the ground that he wouldn't know what to do with it when he got it, and, striking the first ball he received towards square-leg, threw down his bat, and himself set off at a great rate in the direction of cover-point. There was a paralysed silence. The rustics on the bench rubbed their eyes. On the field no one moved.

Mr Pollock stopped suddenly, looked round, and broke into a genial laugh.

‘Darn me’ – he began, and then he pulled himself up and went on in refined English, ‘Well, well! I thought I was playing baseball.’ He smiled disarmingly round.

‘Baseball is a kind of rounders, isn’t it, sir?’ said cover-point sympathetically.

Donald thought he had never seen an expression change so suddenly as Mr Pollock’s did at this harmless, and true, statement. A look of concentrated, ferocious venom obliterated the disarming smile. Cover-point, simple soul, noticed nothing, however, and Mr Pollock walked back to the wicket in silence and was out next ball.



The next two batsmen, Major Hawker, the team's fast bowler, and Mr Hodge himself, did not score, and the innings closed at 69. Donald not out nought. Opinion on the gaffers' bench, which corresponded in years and connoisseurship very closely with the Pavilion at Lord's, was sharply divided on the question whether 69 was, or was not, a winning score.

After a suitable interval for refreshment, M Hodge led his men, except Mr Harcourt, who was missing, out into the field and placed them at suitable positions in the hay.

The batsmen came in. The redoubtable Major Hawker, the fast bowler, thrust out his chin and prepared to bowl. In a quarter of an hour he had terrified seven batsmen, clean bowled six of them, and broken a stump. Eleven runs, six wickets, last man 2.

After the fall of the sixth wicket there was a slight delay. The new batsman, the local rate collector, had arrived at the crease and was ready. But nothing happened. Suddenly the large publisher, who was acting as wicketkeeper, called out, 'Hi! Where's Hawker?'

The words galvanised Mr Hodge into portentous activity.

'Quick!' he shouted. 'Hurry, run, for God's sake! Bob, George, Percy to the Shoes!' and he set off at a sort of gallop towards the inn, followed at intervals by the rest of the side except the pretty youth in the blue jumper, who lay down; the wicketkeeper, who did not move; and Mr Shakespeare Pollock, who had shot off the mark and was well ahead of the field.

But they were all too late, even Mr Pollock. The gallant Major, admitted by Mr Bason through the back door, had already lowered a quart and a half of mild and bitter, and his subsequent bowling was perfectly innocuous, consisting, as it did, mainly of slow, gentle full pitches to leg which the village baker and even, occasionally, the rate collector hit hard and high into the long grass. The score mounted steadily.

Disaster followed disaster. Mr Pollock, presented with an easy chance of a run-out, instead of lobbing the ball back to the wicketkeeper, had another reversion to his college days and flung it with appalling velocity at the unfortunate rate collector and hit him in the small of the back, shouting triumphantly as he did so, 'Rah, rah, rah!' Mr Livingstone, good club player, missed two easy catches off successive balls. Mr Hodge allowed another easy catch to fall at his feet without attempting to catch it, and explained afterwards that he had been all the time admiring a particularly fine specimen of oak in the squire's garden. He seemed to think that this was a complete justification of his failure to attempt, let alone bring off, the catch.

A black spot happened to cross the eye of the ancient umpire just as the baker put all his feet and legs and pads in front of a perfectly straight ball, and, as he plaintively remarked over and over again, he had to give the batsman the benefit of the doubt, hadn't he? It wasn't as if it was his fault that a black spot had crossed his eye just at the moment. And the stout publisher seemed to be suffering from the delusion that the way to make a catch at the wicket was to raise both hands high in the air, utter a piercing yell, and trust to an immense pair of pads to secure the ball. Repeated experiments proved that he was wrong.

The baker dashed away vigorously and the rate collector dabbled the ball hither and thither until the score – having once been 11 runs for six wickets – was marked up on the board at 50 runs for six wickets. Things were desperate. Twenty to win and five wickets – assuming that the blacksmith’s ankle and third-slip’s knee-cap would stand the strain – to fall. If the lines on Mr Hodge’s face were deep, the lines on the faces of his team when he put himself on to bowl were like plasticine models of the Colorado Canyon. Mr Southcott, without any orders from his captain, discarded his silk sweater from the Rue de la Paix, and went away into the deep field, about a hundred and twenty yards from the wicket. His beautifully brushed head was hardly visible above the daisies. The professor of ballistics sighed deeply. Major Hawker grinned a colossal grin, right across his jolly red face, and edged off in the direction of the Shoes. Livingstone, loyal to his captain, crouched alertly. Mr Shakespeare Pollock rushed about enthusiastically. The remainder of the team drooped.

But the remainder of the team was wrong. For a wicket, a crucial wicket, was secured off Mr Hodge’s very first ball. It happened like this. Mr Hodge was a poet, and therefore a theorist and an idealist. If he was to win a victory at anything, he preferred to win by brains and not by muscle. He would far sooner have his best leg spinner miss the wicket by an eighth of an inch than dismiss a batsman with a fast, clumsy full-toss. Every ball that he bowled had brain behind it, if not exactness of pitch. And it so happened that he had recently watched a county cricket match between Lancashire, a county that he detested in theory, and Worcester, a county that he adored in fact. On the one side were factories and the late Mr Jimmy White; on

the other, English apples and Mr Stanley Baldwin. And at this particular match, a Worcestershire bowler, by name Root, a deliciously agricultural name, had outed the tough nuts of the County Palatine by placing all his fieldsmen on the leg side and bowling what are technically known as 'in-swingers'.

Mr Hodge, at heart an agrarian, for all his book-learning and his cadences, was determined to do the same. The first part of the performance was easy. He placed all his men upon the leg side. The second part – the bowling of the 'in-swingers' – was more complicated, and Mr Hodge's first ball was a slow long-hop on the off side. The rate collector, metaphorically rubbing his eyes, felt that this was too good to be true, and he struck the ball sharply into the untenanted off side and ambled down the wicket with as near an approach to gaiety as a man can achieve who is cut off by the very nature of his profession from the companionship and goodwill of his fellows. He had hardly gone a yard or two when he was paralysed by a hideous yell from the long grass into which the ball had vanished, and still more by the sight of Mr Harcourt, who, aroused from a deep slumber amid a comfortable couch of grasses and daisies, sprang to his feet and, pulling himself together with miraculous rapidity after a lightning if somewhat bleary glance round the field, seized the ball and unerringly threw down the wicket. Fifty for seven, last man 22. Twenty to win, four wickets to fall.

Mr Hodge's next ball was his top-spinner, and it would have, or might have, come very quickly off the ground had it ever hit the ground; as it was, one of the short legs caught it dexterously and threw it back while the umpire signalled a wide. Mr Hodge then tried some more of Mr Root's stuff and was promptly hit for two

sixes and a single. This brought the redoubtable baker to the batting end. Six runs to win and four wickets to fall.

Mr Hodge's fifth ball was not a good one, due mainly to the fact that it slipped out of his hand before he was ready, and it went up and came down in a slow, lazy parabola, about seven feet wide of the wicket on the leg side. The baker had plenty of time to make up his mind. He could either leave it alone and let it count one run as a wide; or he could spring upon it like a panther and, with a terrific six, finish the match sensationally. He could play the part either of a Quintus Fabius Maximus Cunctator or a sort of Tarzan. The baker concealed beneath a modest and floury exterior a mounting ambition. Here was his chance to show the village. He chose the sort of Tarzan, sprang like a panther, whirled his bat cyclonically, and missed the ball by about a foot and a half. The wicketkeeping publisher had also had time in which to think and to move, and he had also covered the seven feet. True, his movements were less like the spring of a panther than the sideways waddle of an aldermanic penguin. But nevertheless he got there, and when the ball had passed the flashing blade of the baker, he launched a mighty kick at it, stopping to grab it was out the question, and by an amazing fluke kicked it on to the wicket. Even the ancient umpire had to give the baker out, for the baker was still lying flat on his face outside the crease.

'I was bowling for that,' observed Mr Hodge modestly, strolling up the pitch.



'I had plenty of time to use my hands,' remarked the wicketkeeper to the world at large, 'but I preferred to kick it.'

Donald was amazed by the extraordinary subtlety of the game.

Six to win and three wickets to fall.

The next batsman was a schoolboy of about sixteen, an ingenuous youth with pink cheeks and a nervous smile, who quickly fell a victim to Mr Harcourt, now wide awake and beaming upon everyone. For Mr Harcourt, poet that he was, understood exactly what the poor, pink child was feeling, and he knew that if he played the ancient dodge and pretended to lose the ball in the long grass it was a hundred to one that the lad would lose his head. The batsman at the other end played the fourth ball of Mr Livingstone's next over hard in the direction of Mr Harcourt. Mr Harcourt rushed towards the spot where it had vanished in the jungle. He groped wildly for it, shouting as he did so, 'Come and help. It's lost.' The pink child scuttled nimbly down the pitch. Six runs to win and two wickets to fall. Mr Harcourt smiled demoniacally.

The crisis was now desperate. The fieldsmen drew nearer and nearer to the batsman, excepting the youth in the blue jumper. Livingstone balanced himself on his toes. Mr Shakespeare Pollock hopped about almost on top of the batsmen and breathed audibly. Even the imperturbable Mr Southcott discarded the piece of grass which he had been chewing so steadily. Mr Hodge took himself off and put on the Major, who had by now somewhat lived down the quart and a half.

The batsmen crouched down upon their bats and defended stubbornly. A snick through the slips brought a single. A ball which eluded the publisher's gigantic pads brought a bye. A desperate sweep at a straight half-volley sent the ball off the edge of the bat over third-man's head and in normal circumstances would have certainly scored one, and possibly two. But Mr Harcourt was on guard at third man, and the batsmen, by nature cautious men, one being old and the sexton, the other the postman and therefore a government official, were taking no risks. Then came another single off a miss-hit and then an interminable period in which no wicket fell and no run was scored.

It was broken at last disastrously, for the postman struck the ball sharply at Mr Pollock, who picked it up and, in an ecstasy of zeal, flung it madly at the wicket. Two overthrows resulted.

The scores were level and there were two wickets to fall. Silence fell. The gaffers, victims simultaneously of excitement and senility, could hardly raise their pint pots for it was past six o'clock, and the front door of the Three Horseshoes was now as wide open officially as the back door had been unofficially all afternoon.

Then the Major, his red face redder than ever and his chin sticking out almost as far as the Napoleonic Mr Ogilvy's, bowled a fast half-volley on the leg-stump. The sexton, a man of iron muscle from much digging, hit it fair and square in the middle of the bat, and it flashed like a thunderbolt, waist-high, straight at the youth in the blue jumper. With a shrill scream the youth sprang backwards out of its way and fell over on his back. Immediately behind him, so close were the fieldsmen clustered, stood the mighty Boone. There was no escape for him. Even if he had

possessed the figure and the agility to perform back-somersaults, he would have lacked the time. He had been unsighted by the youth in the jumper. The thunderbolt struck him in the midriff like a red-hot cannonball upon a Spanish galleon and with the sound of a drumstick upon an insufficiently stretched drum. With a fearful oath, Boone clapped his hands to his outraged stomach and found that the ball was in the way. He looked at it for a moment in astonishment and then threw it down angrily and started to massage the injured spot while the field rang with applause at the brilliance of the catch.

Donald walked up and shyly added his congratulations. Boone scowled at him.

'I didn't want to catch the bloody thing,' he said sourly, massaging away like mad.

'But it may save the side,' ventured Donald.

'Blast the bloody side,' said Boone.



Donald went back to his place.

The scores were level and there was one wicket to fall. The last man in was the blacksmith, leaning heavily upon the shoulder of the baker, who was going to run

for him, and limping as if in great pain. He took guard and looked round savagely. He was clearly still in a great rage.

The first ball he received he lashed at wildly and hit straight up in the air to an enormous height. It went up and up and up, until it became difficult to focus on it properly against the deep, cloudless blue of the sky, and it carried with it the hopes and fears of an English village. Up and up it went, and then at the top it seemed to hang motionless in the air, poised like a hawk, fighting, as it were, an heroic but forlorn battle against the chief invention of Sir Isaac Newton, and then it began its slow descent.

In the meanwhile things were happening below, on the terrestrial sphere. Indeed, the situation was rapidly becoming what the French call *mouvementé*. In the first place, the blacksmith forgot his sprained ankle and set out at a capital rate for the other end, roaring in a great voice as he went, 'Come on, Joe!' And side by side, like a pair of high-stepping hackneys, the pair cantered along. From the other end Joe set out on his mission, and he roared, 'Come on, Bill!' So all three came on. And everything would have been all right, so far as the running was concerned, had it not been for the fact that Joe, very naturally, ran with head thrown back and his eyes goggling at the hawk-like cricket ball. And this in itself would not have mattered if it had not been for the fact that the blacksmith and the baker, also very naturally, ran with their head turned not only upwards but also backwards as well, so that they too gazed at the ball, with an alarming sort of squint and truly terrific kinks in their necks. Half-way down the pitch the three met with a magnificent clang, reminiscent of early, happy days in the tournament-ring at Ashby-de-la-Zouch, and the hopes of the

village fell with the resounding fall of their three champions.

But what of the fielding side? Things were not well with them. If there was doubt and confusion among the warriors of Fordenden, there was also uncertainty and disorganization among the ranks of the invaders. Their main trouble was the excessive concentration of their forces in the neighbourhood of the wicket. Napoleon laid it down that it was impossible to have too many men upon a battlefield, and he used to do everything in his power to call up every available man for a battle. Mr Hodge, after a swift glance at the ascending ball and a swift glance at the disposition of his troops, disagreed profoundly with the Emperor's dictum. He had too many men, far too many.

And all except the youth in the blue silk jumper, and the mighty Boone, were moving towards strategic positions underneath the ball, and not one of them appeared to be aware that any of the others existed. Boone had not moved because he was more or less in the right place, but then Boone was not likely to bring off the catch, especially after the episode of the last ball. Major Hawker, shouting 'Mine, mine!' in a magnificently self-confident voice, was coming up from the bowler's end like a battlecruiser.

Mr Harcourt had obviously lost sight of the ball altogether, if indeed he had ever seen it, for he was running round and round Boone and giggling foolishly. Livingstone and Southcott, the two cracks, were approaching competently. Either of them would catch it easily. Mr Hodge had only to choose between them, and, coming to a swift decision, he yelled above the din, 'Yours, Livingstone!' Southcott, disciplined cricketer, stopped dead. Then Mr Hodge made a fatal

mistake. He remembered Livingstone's two missed sitters, and he reversed his decision and roared, 'Yours, Bobby!' Mr Southcott obediently started again while Livingstone, who had not heard the second order, went straight on. Captain Hodge had restored the *status quo*.

In the meantime the professor of ballistics had made a lightening calculation of angles, velocities, density of the air, barometer-readings and temperatures, and had arrived at the conclusion that the critical point, the spot which ought to be marked in the photographs with an X, was a yard to the north-east of Boone, and he proceeded to take up station there, colliding on the way with Donald and knocking him over. A moment later Bobby Southcott came racing up and tripped over the recumbent Donald and was shot head first into the Abraham-like bosom of Boone. Boone stepped back a yard under the impact and came down with his spiked boot, surmounted by a good eighteen stone of flesh and blood, upon the professor's toe.

Almost simultaneously the portly wicketkeeper, whose movements were a positive triumph of the spirit over the body, bumped into the professor from behind. The learned man was thus neatly sandwiched between Tweedledum and Tweedledee, and the sandwich was instantly converted into a ragout by Livingstone, who made up for his lack of extra weight – for he was always in perfect training – by his extra momentum. And all the time Mr Shakespeare Pollock hovered alertly upon the outskirts like a rugby scrum-half, screaming American university cries in a piercingly high tenor voice.

At last the ball came down. To Mr Hodge it seemed a long time before the invention of Sir Isaac Newton

finally triumphed. And it was a striking testimony to the mathematical and ballistical skill of the professor that the ball landed with a sharp report on the top of his head. Thence it leapt up into the air a foot or so, cannoned onto Boone's head, and then trickled slowly down the colossal expanse of the wicketkeeper's back, bouncing slightly as it reached the massive lower portions. It was only a foot from the ground when Mr Shakespeare Pollock sprang into the vortex with a last ear-splitting howl of victory and grabbed it off the seat of the wicketkeeper's trousers. The match was a tie.



And hardly anyone on the field knew it except Mr Hodge, the youth in the blue jumper, and Mr Pollock himself. For the two batsmen and the runner, undaunted to the last, had picked themselves up and were bent on completing what was to give Fordenden the crown of victory. Unfortunately, dazed with their falls, with excitement, and with the noise, they all

three ran for the same wicket, simultaneously realised their error, and all three turned and ran for the other – the blacksmith, ankle and all, in the centre leading by a yard, so that they looked like pictures of the Russian troika. But their effort was in vain, for Mr Pollock had grabbed the ball and the match was a tie.

And the team spent the evening at the Three Horseshoes, and Mr Harcourt made a speech in Italian about the glories of England and afterwards fell asleep in a corner, and Donald got home to Royal Avenue at one o'clock in the morning, feeling that he had learnt very much about the English from his experience of their national game.

Playing with a straight bat

The origins of the characters in the cricket match
and some observations on the sport's social and political roles

'Cricket is God in another form'^{vi}

Introduction

Macdonell wrote *England, their England* after a devastating war in which thousands lost their lives fruitlessly. The very fact that the cricket club came to be called the Invalids arose from the members' roles as victims of the slaughter. Their participation in the gentle game – more especially as poets and writers – was juxtaposed with their recent tragic experiences. They witnessed and wrote about the carnage that flowed from the ambitions of the British Empire. They believed that England was a nation of poets and thus had no role to play in battle.

In the majesty of the English language, cricket has become a metaphor for justice and equality and fair play. For this reason Macdonell uses cricket to illustrate the true English spirit. The questions concerning the genuine nature of the English in the context of world power continue to be posed even today. The recent war in Iraq and the vigorous debate around the participation of Great Britain therein has resurrected notions of how the English define themselves.

For those opposed to the war in Iraq, to be English and to subscribe to the values embodied in cricket forms the antithesis of the vision of the warmongers. And there is another illuminating dimension: when warmongering and the imperial spirit is in the ascendant, the game's values are in tatters, and vice versa. When cheating, sledging and gamesmanship are at their height then the nation's morale is low.

The new forces at work in cricket, including the domination of professionalism, have introduced a spirit which starkly contradicts the more traditionally espoused metaphor. In some ways Macdonell is advocating a return to those values in his tale.

Despite the depressing depths to which bad sportsmanship has plummeted, there is revival in the public interest in the game. At another level, the morality of the game has been placed in the spotlight with regard to the controversy of batsmen walking when they know they are out. This can largely be attributed to the attitude of Australian attacking batsman, wicketkeeper and vice-captain Adam Gilchrist. He has decided as a matter of personal principle to walk if he knows he is out. Thus there is a new force at work in the game, and it is interesting to speculate whether this augurs well for England to return to its traditional values.

The English disposition

England, their England is but one of numerous investigations into what makes the English character so different from that of all others. In his article 'England, whose England? Class, gender and national identity in the 20th century folklore revival', Mike Sutton identifies some of the books and TV programmes that have investigated the soul of the English. Sutton mentions J V Morton's *In Search of England*, J B Priestley's *English Journey* and, of course, Macdonell's novel.

Sutton maintains that the most celebrated example of this quest is George Orwell's, *England, your England*, which was written during the early and indeed the darkest part of the Second World War. Sutton describes this novel as 'a mental journey through scenes witnessed during [Orwell's] years on the road, from which John Major once borrowed a few memorable phrases'.^{vii}

If a prime minister saw fit to quote from Orwell we can do no worse. One must also bear in mind that the author is speaking of an England a generation ago, one that had not yet undergone the changes that the computer age has brought. Orwell is a keen observer and never fails to mention the faults of his countrymen, from the lack of subtlety in their marketing to their need for modern dentistry:

When you come back to England from any foreign country, you have immediately the sensation of breathing a different air. Even in the first few minutes dozens of small things conspire to give you this feeling. The beer is bitterer, the coins are heavier, the grass is greener, the advertisements are more blatant. The crowds in the big towns, with their mild knobby faces, their bad teeth and gentle manners, are different from a European crowd.^{viii}

Orwell is always wary of the danger of generalisation, but has the uncanny knack, shared by all great writers, of finding the details that describe the whole so evocatively:

Then the vastness of England swallows you up, and you lose for a while your feeling that the whole nation has a single identifiable character. Are there really such things as nations? Are we not forty-six million individuals, all different? And the diversity of it, the chaos! The clatter of clogs in the Lancashire mill towns, the to-and-fro of the lorries on the Great North Road, the queues outside the Labour Exchanges, the rattle of pin-tables in the Soho pubs, the old maids hiking to Holy Communion through the mists of the autumn morning – all these are not only fragments, but *characteristic* fragments, of the English scene.^{ix}

And who would ever think of bacon and eggs without recalling the English? Orwell mentions these and other features that could only be found there:

Yes, there *is* something distinctive and recognizable in English civilization. It is a culture as individual as that of Spain. It is somehow bound up with solid breakfasts and gloomy Sundays, smoky towns and winding roads, green fields and red pillar-boxes.^x

A feature of the English is their dislike for interference in their private lives. Whether it be a government official, a foreigner or even someone native to the country, there is nothing that is resented more than the nosy parker. Perhaps that is why England has always risen to the occasion in the face of any external military threat. Orwell understands this better than most when he speaks of 'another English characteristic which is so much a part of us that we barely notice it, and that is the addiction to hobbies and spare-time occupations, the *privateness* of English life'. He goes on to explain:

We are a nation of flower-lovers, but also a nation of stamp-collectors, pigeon-fanciers, amateur carpenters, coupon-snippers, darts-players, crossword-puzzle fans. All the culture that is most truly native centres round things which even when they are communal are not official – the pub, the football match, the back garden, the fireside and the "nice cup of tea". The liberty of the individual is still believed in, almost as in the nineteenth century. But this has nothing to do with economic liberty, the right to exploit others for profit. It is the liberty to have a home of your own, to do what you like in your spare time, to choose your own amusements instead of having them chosen for you from above. The most hateful of all names in an English ear is Nosey Parker.^{xi}

Much of the western world's culture emanates from England. What discipline has not seen the influence of English science? One is immediately transported into the worlds dominated by Darwin, Newton and scores of others. But Macdonell also emphasises that Mr Hodge and Mr Harcourt are poets. And so perhaps the world of literature is another field in which the English have been undoubted leaders. As Orwell believes, 'there is one art in which [the English] have shown plenty of talent, namely literature'. He furthermore proposes that literature does not migrate well across other countries:

Literature, especially poetry, and lyric poetry most of all, is a kind of family joke, with little or no value outside its own language-group. ... Except for Shakespeare, the best English poets are barely known in Europe, even as names. The only poets who are widely read are Byron, who is admired for the wrong reasons, and Oscar Wilde, who is pitied as a victim of English hypocrisy. And linked up with this, though not very obviously, is the lack of philosophical faculty, the absence in nearly all Englishmen of any need for an ordered system of thought or even for the use of logic.^{xii}

Critics' views of England, their England

It's worth emphasising that Macdonell's novel, including the now-famous cricket match, received stunning reviews. There was no doubt that Englishmen enjoyed its humorous and deft characterisation of their social life. The *Sunday Times* called it 'a joy to read ... a book which must certainly not be missed'. 'Praise be for a book which is really funny,' commented the *Spectator*. 'Again and again,' the *Manchester Guardian* reflected, 'Mr Macdonell has hit off the peculiar foibles of the educated Englishman and the strange meanderings of his existence ... this book is so amusing, so sly and so good-humoured that it would need no further justification.'^{xiii} Macdonell himself said that following the publication of the book he 'awoke and found

himself famous'. The novel's auspicious beginning has been confirmed by its continued popularity – it has been through more than twelve reprints.

Who was Archie Macdonell?

To many, the name of Archibald Gordon Macdonell will conjure up the image of a Scot who tried to understand English social life and customs. Perhaps surprising then is the fact that he was born in Poona, India, on 3 November 1895, the second son of William Robert Macdonell and his wife, Alice Elizabeth.^{xiv} The family included a daughter and another son, though little is known of them. Macdonell's father was a businessman of considerable success. He plied the burgeoning trade of East India and in time became the chairman of the Bombay Chamber of Commerce. There are hints of the origins of Macdonell's literary skills in his mother, who was the daughter of John Forbes White, a noted classical scholar and patron of the arts.



Archie Macdonell^{xv}

The perception of Macdonell as a Scot can be attributed to the fact that the family returned to Scotland shortly after he was born. His earlier years were spent north of the border, but he was educated in England. His primary education took place at Horris Hill Preparatory School in Berkshire, and then, most importantly, he attended Winchester College. That environment was to have a considerable effect on his thinking and his perceptions of England and her culture. The school upheld the rich tradition of cricket, and the members of the first team were reckoned nigh unto gods. As we have seen above, in

England, their England Macdonell portrays the scene at the Lord's tree on the school grounds. Only the members of the first team are allowed to sit on the bench in front of the tree. It is called 'the Lord's tree' because when Winchester played Eton until the middle of the nineteenth century, the match took place at the Lord's cricket ground.

Macdonell's world view was also highly influenced by his experiences in the First World War. Having left Winchester in 1914, he signed up and served as an officer. All that we know is that he was a lieutenant in the Royal Field Artillery of the 51st Highland division from 1916 to 1918. He was injured, more of which later. During a short stint with the Friends' Emergency and War Victims Relief Committee in Poland and Russia, Macdonell witnessed some of the horrors of the aftermath. In 1922, he joined the staff of the League of Nations Union and spent the next five years in Geneva.^{xvi}

A brief and largely unsuccessful political career took up his attention and efforts for a while. He worked for the Liberal Party and stood unsuccessfully as their candidate for Lincoln in 1923 and 1924. A literary career appealed to him far more. After leaving the League of Nations Union in 1927, he tried his hand at theatre journalism and was employed as the *London Mercury's* drama critic, and over the next six years he wrote a series of detective novels under the pseudonyms Neil Gordon and John Cameron. As Neil Gordon he wrote *Seven Stabs* (1927), *The New Gun Runners* (1928), *The Factory on the Cliff* (1928), *The Professor's Poison* (1928), *The Silent Murders* (1929), *The Big Ben Alibi* (1930), *Murder in Earl's Court* (1931) and *The Shakespeare Murders* (1933). As John Cameron he wrote *Body Found Stabbed* (1932). In his own name, he wrote *England, their England* (1933), *How like an Angel* (1934), *Lords and Masters* (1936), *Autobiography of a Cad* (1938), *Flight from a Lady* (1939) and *The Crew of the Anaconda* (1940).

He also wrote three works of non-fiction: *Napoleon and his Marshals* (1934), *A Visit to America* (1935) and *My Scotland* (1937). His text on Napoleon is considered a classic. There is a mention of the French leader in *England, their England's* cricket match, related to his need for superiority of numbers on the battlefield. The result of Mr Hodge's profound disagreement 'with the Emperor's dictum' – 'he had too many men, far too many' – is the highly amusing portrayal of the last dismissal of the game.

Macdonell also contributed regularly to *The Observer* and made a number of radio broadcasts for the BBC. But it was his meeting with the *Mercury's* editor, John Collings Squire, which would prove more fruitful in this context, as it resulted in the author participating in the cricket matches of the Invalids team. Interestingly, Squire did not share Macdonell's enthusiasm for detective fiction and encouraged him to try his hand at more 'serious' work.

Though there is little evidence that Macdonell excelled at the game, perhaps one can assume that he had at least a keen interest in it. In Patrick Howarth's biography of Squire, *Squire: Most Generous of Men*, Macdonell is portrayed as a competent bowler. It is clear that he played for the Invalids, as he is described as having taken a catch in a game played at Rodmell on 9 June

1923. The quality of the Invalid members' play was variable, and that of the opposition was probably as inconsistent – the abovementioned game featured a very low score of 32 by Rodmell. Significantly, eight wickets were reaped by Alec Waugh, seven of them bowled! There is a considerable body of evidence that Macdonell's character Bobby Southcott is based on Alec Waugh, brother of the more famous Evelyn.

There is one other reference to Macdonell's participation in cricket-playing – in a most unusual game played in the middle of winter. The venue was the Hambledon Ground on Broadhalfpenny Down on New Year's Day 1929. Squire's friend Whalley-Tooker arranged a side called the Hampshire Eskimos. The match was unusual in other ways as well. To mark the occasion the composer Peter Warlock composed 'The Cricketers of Hambledon'. The fact that the game was played in the middle of winter meant that the players were compelled – against their better judgement, of course – to drink copious draughts of strong ale to keep themselves warm. The local hunt added colour to the spectacle by crossing the ground during the match.^{xvii}

Many favour the little village of Rodmell as the setting for Fordenden, and Squire was highly attracted to the village, according to Howarth. L J Hurst agrees with this.^{xviii} The poet and writer Hilaire Belloc, who had lectured Squire at Cambridge, lived there. Belloc's daughter Elizabeth found Squire lost there one cold winter's evening:

The girl had been riding her pony in a park on a winter evening when a thick mist came down. She could see only a few feet in front of her and began to sing to keep her spirits up. Then she heard a shout, which was repeated several times, and eventually found a dark, wet and bedraggled figure, which was Squire. He was staying in a nearby inn and he had been to tea with a friend. Trying to walk back he lost his way, and despairing of ever finding it had decided to settle down under a pine tree for the night. He had already come to the conclusion that he would probably die.^{xix}

Details of Macdonell's private life are relatively unknown, though he is reputed to have been married twice. His first marriage, on 31 August 1926, was to Mona Sabine Mann, the daughter of the artist Harrington Mann. A daughter, Jennifer, was the sole issue to the union that was dissolved in 1937 on the grounds of Macdonell's adultery. A Viennese refugee, Rose Paul-Schiff, of the Schiff banking family, became his second wife on 22 June 1940. But his health soon deteriorated and he died of heart failure in his bath at 14A Broad Street, Oxford on 16 January 1941, at the age of forty-five.^{xx}

Why the title?

Macdonell was clearly a great admirer of English life. It held every sort of fascination for him, and for that reason he determined on the title of this particular book. As we have seen above, such patriotism is echoed in other texts, such as D H Lawrence's *England, my England* (1915),^{xxi} Orwell's *England, your England* (1940), Colin Maclnnes's *England, Half English*, and the Keith Waterhouse and Willis Hall revue *England, our England* (1962), for

which Dudley Moore composed the music.^{xxii} English writer W E Henley's poem includes the following lines:

What have I done for you, England, my England?
What is there I would not do, England, my own?^{xxiii}

Squire and William Hodge

England, their England is dedicated simply and effectively: 'to J C Squire The English Poet'. The captain and colourful organiser of the London team, William Hodge, was based on Sir John Squire, poet, publisher and critic, and founder of the Invalids cricket club. Squire was the editor of the *London Mercury* and wrote a number of volumes of poetry. Macdonell comments that Squire was 'exquisite in words, severe in style, lofty in thought – a fastidious genius who published a poem seldom, a bad poem never'.^{xxiv}

Squire was born on April Fool's Day 1884, but his mother feared the portents of such a circumstance and named his birthday as the next day.^{xxv} Squire was awarded a history scholarship to St John's College, Cambridge. When invited to play cricket by Alec Waugh, he replied, 'I cannot bat, cannot bowl and cannot hold a catch. My only merit as a cricketer is that I can remain cheerful when it's raining.' His great dream was to hit sixes at Lord's. Although he was always interested in politics, he never aspired to be Minister of Transport.^{xxvi}



Sir John Squire as a young man^{xxvii}

One of his great friends at Cambridge was Charles Hodges and that may have been the reason for Macdonell choosing the name Hodge for his cricket captain. The portrait of Squire as Hodge is benign and lovable, and yet Squire did not like having a 'cloddish, Saxon name like Hodge'. Hodges remembers Squire for playing lengthy bridge sessions – up to twenty-four hours in duration – and he chose that form of leisure to mark his coming of age, arranging four tables of bridge to celebrate his twenty-first birthday.^{xxviii}

Squire met his wife, Eileen Wilkinson, at Hodges' rooms at Cambridge on 9 June 1905.^{xxix} He championed other race groups, despite the hardship it

caused him in his own limited ambitions. When an Indian man, C R Reddy, stood for president of the Cambridge Union, Squire was his most vocal supporter, an action that probably cost Squire a place on the committee. Reddy failed in his election as a result of blatant racism from conservative students at Trinity College, who went to extraordinary measures to keep him out of office. Their discreditable slogan, 'Keep the nigger out', not only was stated but also appeared on some of their notices and placards. As Squire explains, his support was probably never going to be sufficient with the rampant racism of the time at the college: 'the colour feeling here is too strong'.^{xxx} Reddy later distinguished himself in his own country in politics and the academic world, earning a knighthood from King George VI.

In addition to his social conscience and interest in social issues, Squire was determined to write poetry. In a letter to his future wife, dated May 1906, he writes, 'You must know that at the bottom of my indolence up here has been – poetry. You can't serve Art and Mammon'.^{xxxi}

In *England, their England* Macdonell describes the protagonist Donald Cameron – based undoubtedly on himself – investigating several features of English life that are not found in any other cultures, including the hunt, the cricket match, the weekend party and sundry other oddities. During this social odyssey, Donald explores the England of the third decade of the twentieth century and meets Hodge (Squire) at the offices of the *London Weekly* (the real paper being the *London Mercury*).

For this meeting, Donald decides to wear a pale blue jersey. This is echoed by Bobby Southcott's pale blue jersey on the day of the game. He describes Hodge as:

of medium height, squarely built, rather stout, a little bald, and he had a pair of brown eyes behind enormous horn-rimmed, powerfully-lensed glasses. He was clean-shaven, or rather the last time he had shaved he had been clean-shaven. He was wearing patent-leather shoes, striped trousers, a morning coat, a grey waistcoat, a grey bow-tie, huge pink carnation, and a grey bowler hat ...^{xxxii}

Not that all that Squire (in his description of events) wrote appears to have the blessing of veracity. He describes how he met Macdonell in a pitched battle in the First World War:

"What are you doing the first Sunday this is all over?" said the quiet voice to a terrified corporal as all hell was breaking loose in a dismal, blood-spattered trench somewhere in Flanders.

"I've ... really... no idea, sir," replied the corporal in a soft Scottish brogue. [It is this reference to his accent that points to Macdonell's identity.]

"You're playing cricket for me."^{xxxiii}



Sir John Squire and the Invalids cricket team in 1955.^{xxxiv}

Although Squire wrote a foreword to James Elroy Flecker's volume of First World War poems, he seems to have been passionately against war.^{xxxv} The title of Howarth's biography, *Most Generous of Men*, has its source in a quote from the poet Siegfried Sassoon. Clifford Bax wrote to Squire, saying, 'Siegfried Sassoon sends his love to you – most generous of men, he calls you.' Squire recognised Sassoon's great talent in his first volume of poetry, and any notion that Sassoon may have had pacifist tendencies never affected this view – 'They are not any the less good because he dislikes war'.^{xxxvi} Indeed, for Squire the fact that Sassoon hated war was a firm recommendation of the poet's verse.

Howarth does not believe Squire's account of meeting Macdonell. It seems that Squire took no part in the fighting, 'being classified as unfit because of poor eyesight, though he did carry out certain guard duties, in the precincts of Buckingham Palace'.^{xxxvii} And Howarth furthermore doubts the story for two other reasons, namely, that Macdonell went to Winchester and would not

have had a Scottish accent, and in all probability would have had a commission and been an officer.^{xxxviii} Perhaps Howarth was being a trifle harsh. It's not improbable that Macdonell had a Scottish accent given the fact that his parents were Scottish and he lived there before his schooling in England. Moreover, in *England, their England* Donald speaks 'the pure, accurate English of Inverness-shire'.^{xxxix} Squire probably *wished* above all else that he had met Macdonell on the battlefield as he described, but wishing does not make it so.

Why did Squire indulge in the fantasy? A clue may be found in Macdonell's explanation of the inspiration for his book: 'the events which are described in this book had their real origin in a conversation which took place between two artillery subalterns on the Western Front in the beginning of October 1917'.^{xi} So opens *England, their England*. The conversation occurred on the slopes of the Passchendaele Ridge, about two hundred yards east of the Steenbeek River in Flanders.^{xii}

Donald describes his regiment as the thirteenth Sutherland Battery, attached to the Melton Mowbrays, a Scottish regiment. His companion Davies is a Welshman who belongs to the Rutland Fusiliers.^{xiii} Davies is a publisher, working near Covent Garden, London. Davies tells Donald that he finds the Englishman as a businessman, a literary man or any other sort of man most bewildering:

They're the kindest souls in the world. But if you see anything beautiful flying in the air or running along the ground, they rush off for a gun and kill it. If an earthquake devastates North Borneo, they dash off to the Mansion House and block all the traffic for miles round trying to hand over money for earthquake relief, but do you think they'll lift a finger to abolish their own slums? Not they. If you assault a man in England and bash his teeth down his throat and kick him in the stomach, that's just playfulness and you'll get fourteen days in the jug. But if you lay a finger on him and pinch his watch at the same time, that's robbery with violence, and you'll probably get eighteen strokes with the "cat" and about three years in Dartmoor. You can do pretty nearly anything you like to a stag or a fox. That's sport. But you stand up and say you approve of bull-fight, and see what happens to you! You'll be lucky if you escape with your life. And there's another thing. They're always getting themselves up in fancy-dress. They adore fancy-dress: look at their Beef-Eaters, and their Chelsea Pensioners, and barrister's wigs, and Peers' Robes, and the Beadle of the Bank of England, and Lord Mayor's Show, and the Presenting at Court, and the Trooping of the Colour, and all that sort of thing. Show an Englishman a fancy-dress and he puts it on.

Davies has a theory about the Englishman that he wants to test 'if [he] can extract [him]self unpunctured from this bloody Armageddon'. Donald is equally fascinated, and his own theory is that 'all their queernesses and oddities and incongruities arise from the fact that, at heart, fundamentally, they're a nation of poets', though 'they'd be lurid with rage if you told them'.^{xliii}

When Donald investigates the English hunt he comes across a woman who had nursed him when he had measles near Hazebrouck in Flanders. His description of her must have been true to Macdonell's own experience:

One pouring wet night when the hospital, which by an unfortunate mischance had been placed immediately beside a large ammunition dump, was being bombed by German aircraft, this hard-faced Diana carried out seven wounded officers from a burning ward into which the stretcher-bearers refused to go, rigged up a shelter for them from the rain, and boiled tea for them by the light of the blazing huts, to the accompaniment of a full orchestra of machine-guns, anti-aircraft artillery, bombs, pattering splinters, and screams and groans. And on another occasion she held the icy hand of a dying subaltern for twenty-seven hours. And on another she told the Matron what she thought of her.^{xiv}

Macdonell was wounded when a 5.9 inch high-explosive shell pitched beside him and he ended up in the Duchess of Westminster's Hospital at Le Touquet.^{xv} He recuperated at base hospitals, in one of the huts in Palace Green, and then finally in a hydropathic institution in Scotland. He was declared sixty per cent disabled and received a pension of £85 a year for seven years, after which he would be regarded as properly recovered.^{xvi} He was a highly suitable candidate to join the Invalids cricket club.

The soldiers who limped back from the war gradually rehabilitated themselves and turned to lighter matters. The Invalids was their port of call, and their colours were the hospital blue-and-gold of the wounded. An interesting mix of personalities was involved in the early matches and it's not surprising that Squire's literary friends, many of whom had served gallantly, formed the bulk of the early teams. It is also no coincidence that Macdonell's cricket match includes a number of players who were poets and writers.

An account of the club's first match was written up by Squire in a privately published pamphlet in 1923. Seabrook obtained a copy from Peter Waugh, son of Alec Waugh.^{xvii}

The game arose out of a conversation that Squire had with a most interesting personality and uncle by marriage, E W Hornung, who wrote the novel *Raffles, The Gentleman Thief*. Hornung was related to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the inventor of Sherlock Holmes.^{xviii} Paul notes that 'Doyle once hit a century for the MCC [Marylebone Cricket Club] against Scotland at Lord's, went on to an excellent dinner and returned home late to polish off a Sherlock Holmes story for the *Strand Magazine* the next morning'.^{xlix}

Hornung and his brother, JP, who was the financial backbone of the *London Mercury* that provided Squire with a job, had their own cricket ground in West Grinstead. The suggestion was made that Squire raise a team of journalists and authors to play there on August Bank holiday, 1920.¹ Squire's team was originally called the Old Age Pensioners, but the name soon changed to the Invalids. Squire's notes on the game indicate that a twelfth player was secured at the ground, and indeed if one counts the wickets twelve a side it was. As we saw, in Macdonell's memorable game there is also an excessive number. An American, Manning Pike, was invited in case he was needed for Squire's first game and was clearly the forerunner of Macdonell's Mr Shakespeare Pollock.ⁱⁱ

Some prominent personalities were involved in the game, including the Honourable Neville Lytton and Edmund Blunden. Blunden became professor of poetry at Oxford and author of the lyrical essays *Cricket Country*. Later, at a reunion, Lytton was most astonished and delighted to see Blunden again, as the man had been reported dead in the war on two occasions in the press.



Sir John Squire and Edmund Blunden.^{lii}

Little else is known of that first game, save that Hornung's team had mustered a highly respectable 188 for five, and Squire's team only 65 for nine when bad light stopped play. The score book records that Squire was bowled by Hornung for a duck!^{liii}

Squire's passion for cricket was unequalled by his love for anything else. This seems to be confirmed by J B Priestley, who stated in his autobiography that while Squire 'had a wide knowledge of literature', he suspected that 'from the 20's onward ... he cared more for architecture and cricket'.^{liv}

Perhaps the funniest moment, the highlight of the memorable account, is Hodge's dismissal of the village baker. It is worth repeating here in order to help us to understand how well Macdonell sums up Squire as a captain and a bowler:

Mr Hodge's fifth ball was not a good one, due mainly to the fact that it slipped out of his hand before he was ready, and it went up and came down in a slow, lazy parabola, about seven feet wide of the wicket on the leg side. The baker had plenty of time to make up his mind. He could either leave it alone and let it count one run as a wide; or he could spring upon it like a panther and, with a terrific six, finish the match sensationally. He could play the part either of a Quintus Fabius Maximus Cunctator or a sort of Tarzan. The baker concealed beneath a modest and floury exterior a mounting ambition. Here was his chance to show the village. He chose the sort of Tarzan, sprang like a panther, whirled his bat cyclonically, and missed the ball by about a foot and a half. The wicketkeeping publisher has also had time in which to think and to move, and he also had covered the seven feet. True, his movements were less like the spring of a panther than the sideways waddle of an aldermanic penguin. But nevertheless he got there, and when the ball had passed the flashing blade of the baker, he launched a mighty kick at it, stopping to grab it was out the question, and by an amazing fluke kicked it on to the wicket. Even the ancient umpire had to give the baker out, for the baker was still lying flat on his face outside the crease.

"I was bowling for that," observed Mr Hodge modestly, strolling up the pitch.

"I had plenty of time to use my hands," remarked the wicketkeeper to the world at large, "but I preferred to kick it."

Donald was amazed by the extraordinary subtlety of the game.

Howarth explains why Macdonell is being so accurate in this scene:

With these last words Macdonell caught the spirit of Squire's cricket perfectly. Although to others it was high comedy, to him it was a serious matter, and he also appreciated that one of the great advantages a captain of a side has is that he can put himself on to bowl whenever he wants to. Squire wanted to frequently, and this in itself led to some interesting tactical manoeuvres. The captain of one team which played the Invalids regularly gave definite instructions that nobody was to score more than twenty runs in an over off Squire's bowling, for so long as they scored less Squire would be under the impression that he was keeping the runs down.^{iv}



Sir John Squire bowling.^{lvi}

Apart from the Sunday games there were week-long tours to the West Country, during which the cricketers became involved in all sorts of activities. On one occasion Squire and Howard Marshall were invited to judge a beauty contest. Unable to decide between the contenders, and being fair to a fault, they awarded joint first prize to the youngest and the oldest competitors.^{lvii} On a tour a cricketer of some renown, W T S Stallybrass, calculated that thirty-nine catches were dropped off his bowling in one week, mostly by Squire in the slips. As Howarth succinctly puts it: 'it was another of Squire's characteristics to position himself wherever his short-sightedness was likely to afford the maximum handicap'.^{lviii}

When Squire took on Brasenose College, Oxford in 1922, he was incensed to learn that they were not fielding their best team. An Oxford Blue by the name of F H Barnard then pillaged their bowling for a score of 191, which rather seemed to settle that score.^{lix} The legendary sports and cricket writer Neville Cardus spoke highly of Squire in his autobiography: 'amongst the friends I have found through cricket, Jack Squire comes nearly first'. Cardus relates the story of the dropped catch that was to become such a legendary feature of Macdonell's story. Though Squire later denied the story, it enhances the comical nature of his captaincy. As Cardus tells it, the ball rose in the air and any of six fielders could have made the catch. Squire yelled, 'Leave it to Thompson!' But Thompson was not playing that day and the catch went abegging.^{lx}

Cardus also relates another calamity. He had been toiling for some time in the field while the Invalids secured five or six wickets. The side included Arnold Bax, the composer; Clifford Bax, the playwright; C R W Nevinson, the artist; William Murdoch, the musician; and Hugh Walpole, the novelist.^{lxi} This glittering array was to no avail – nobody was keeping the score.

The personalities of the four succeeding captains determined the composition of the teams thereafter, the most important ingredient being the time and inclination to play the national game in lovely rural surroundings. The outcome seldom mattered so long as a thirst was developed. Paul engagingly describes the personalities that later represented the team. They hailed from every walk of life and photographs in his book show some of them in action. They have inherited a precious tradition.

Although Macdonell's treatment of Hodge assured Squire of an immortality he might never have acquired through his own efforts, Squire was not very happy with the portrayal. He thought the cricket match was treated too light-heartedly, and probably he hoped for more attention to himself.^{lxii} Howarth assessed Squire as a 'good minor poet, a perceptive critic, a brilliant parodist and a great editor'. He was certainly a public-minded citizen and his energy took him into a number of diverse fields. He was the first literary editor of the *New Statesman* and he founded the Architecture Club, saving Stonehenge and Carlton House Terrace from what Howarth calls 'spoliation'.^{lxiii}

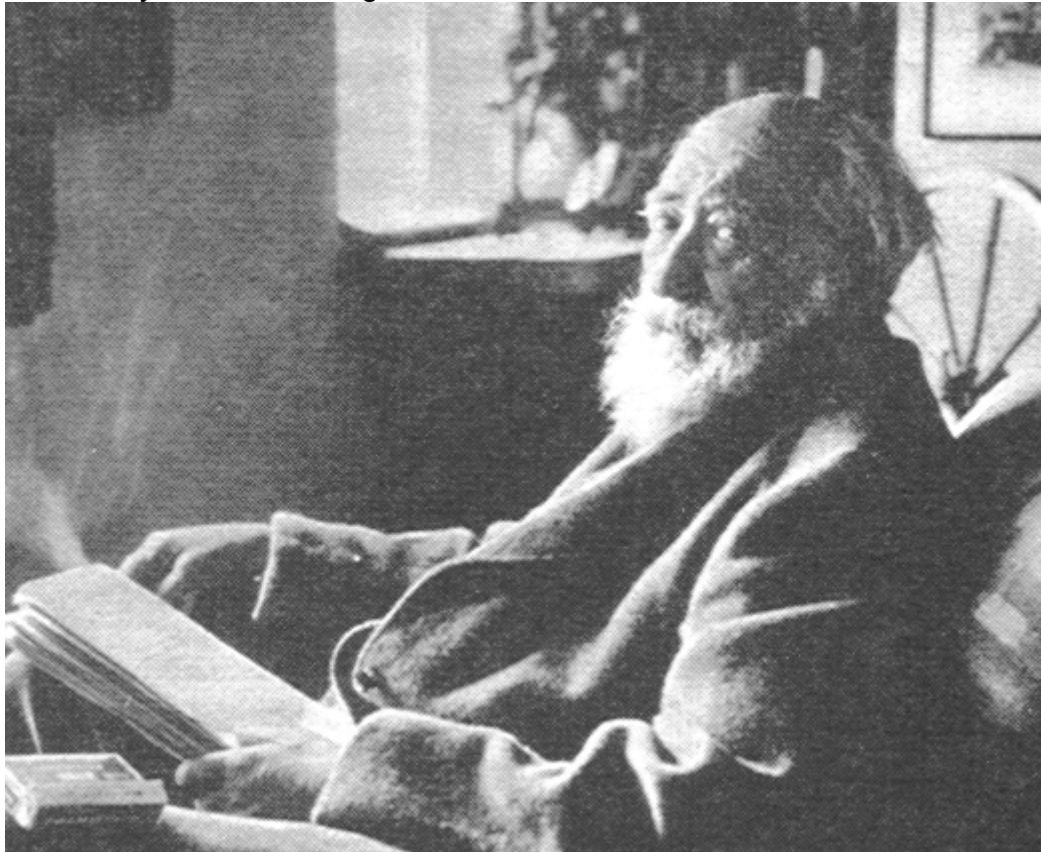
Squire was also a man who loved a drink. Is this a characteristic typical to the Englishman generally? Orwell tries to find the roots of the English exuberance:

The genuinely popular culture of England is something that goes on beneath the surface, unofficially and more or less frowned on by the authorities. One thing one notices if one looks directly at the common people, especially in the big towns, is that they are not puritanical. They are inveterate gamblers, drink as much beer as their wages will permit, are devoted to bawdy jokes, and use probably the foulest language in the world. They have to satisfy these tastes in the face of astonishing, hypocritical laws (licensing laws, lottery acts, etc. etc.) which are designed to interfere with everybody but in practice allow everything to happen.

One of the themes of cricket-playing is the harmless and amusing indulgence in liquor. But if Mr Hodge's dealings with the demon are characterised by moderation during the match, that bottled scourge became Squire's nemesis in real life. Despite the onslaught of alcoholism, however, Squire was honoured for all he had done. There was a splendid dinner at the Dorchester Hotel on 15 December 1932, at which four to five hundred dignitaries paid their respects. The praise singers included G K Chesterton, who described Squire as a person who would be recognised for many centuries as someone who controlled creative power. Others who also lauded his contribution to the literary world included Duff Cooper and Sir William Rothenstein. Squire's terse response was a poem of two lines:

For me I never cared for fame:
Solvency was my only aim.

The next year he was knighted.^{lxiv}



Sir John Squire in old age.^{lxv}

Rupert Harcourt

At his first meeting with Hodge, in his guise as Donald in *England, their England*, Macdonell meets Rupert Harcourt, a tall, thin youth of twenty-four or -five. Harcourt is already a famous poet. His invitation to play in the famous cricket match is confirmed by an amusing anecdote given by Howarth:

On meeting the editor, William Hodge, who is of course Macdonell's representation of Squire, he [Harcourt] was immediately asked whether he played cricket, engaged to do so and then invited out for a drink. William Hodge informed his secretary that he would be back in a quarter of an hour. "No, you won't, William," she replied without looking up.^{lxvi}

Harcourt is reckoned to be based on Hugh Mackintosh. Mackintosh belonged to a dining club which was the culinary branch of the Invalids, who indulged in drinking, eating and singing. Mackintosh wrote ballads, and in this was joined by J B Morton, Gerald Barry and Hilaire Belloc.^{lxvii} Howarth maintains that Mackintosh was the most devoted and faithful of Squire's friends. He:

expressed the opinion that there was probably no man of his time who caused as much love and laughter as Squire did. Squire's humour, he felt, consisted essentially in taking the ridiculous seriously, and in this respect he compared him with Mr Pickwick, except that Mr Pickwick did not see the joke, whereas Squire did.^{lxviii}

In Macdonell's novel they repair to a nearby pub at midday, with Harcourt regretting their loss of half an hour of drinking time, as the pubs opened at 11.30 a.m.

One of the institutions that Donald learns about is the weekend party. And we learn a little more about Hodge (Squire) as he goes to such parties in his football shirt and white flannel trousers and pumps, and 'sends out the footman on Sunday morning to knock up the local chemist for a razor'. Bobby Southcott tells Donald that there are no deep thinkers at the weekend parties, and that all the young ladies were slim, and exquisitely gowned with lovely long legs in the finest stockings. 'All were seductive and all were, in due course, seduced,' Southcott states.

One night Rupert Harcourt arrives late at supper, having had too much to drink, 'his eye was glittering and roving; and there was a devilish look of mischief about his whole jaunty demeanour'.^{lxix} He plays havoc with the conversation, and when mention is made of playing cricket on mats in the Gold Coast in Africa he suggests selling the country to the USA in part payment of the war debt. He concludes his imperial policy review with the suggestion that he 'would use the British fleet to coerce Japan into accepting Australia with all the Australians'.

Harcourt claims to be a Liberal, a leaning with which Macdonell was surely familiar, having twice been a Liberal candidate for Lincoln.^{lxx} At one of the weekend parties Harcourt is acutely aware of the charms of Esmeralda Ormerode, and when she sighs one of her biggest sighs and announces that she is going to bed he makes a cavalier suggestion:

"I wish," said Mr Harcourt plaintively, "that someone would tell me if this is the sort of week-end party where I offer to come up with you."

"Really, Rupert!" exclaimed Lady Ormerode, scandalised, "I won't allow you to say such things."

Harcourt was also a drama critic, and fell out with his editor. According to Macdonell he had ‘a fit of artistic tantrums and threw a raw tomato’ at his boss. Harcourt then took the route envied by many other writers and artists, retiring to Capri with five hundred litres of white wine and a two-piece bathing suit.^{lxxi}

Other characters

Although Tommy Huggins is not mentioned with regard to the cricket match, he is an important personality in the rest of the novel. Reliable authority reckons that Huggins was based on the legendary J B Morton.^{lxxii} Seabrook describes Morton as the ‘immortal, still vastly missed and lamented “Beachcomber”, who wrote a column in the *Daily Express* every day for over 55 years, and quite possibly brought more laughter into this miserable world than any other mortal in history’.^{lxxiii}

Seabrook maintains that the stout publisher who ‘squashed Donald in the charabanc and kept wicket mainly with his enormous pads’ was Cecil Palmer. And he identifies the character of Major Hawker, who “‘had terrified seven batsmen, clean bowled six and broken a stump”, before becoming hors de combat via the illicitly open back door of the village pub after the fall of a wicket’, as the playwright Reginald Berkeley.^{lxxiv}

Donald’s exposure to cricket

Donald is posted to the League of Nations in Geneva. He describes his boss, Sir Henry Wooton, as a colourful character who must have epitomised the English bureaucrat of the time. Wooton had driven his coach-and-six to the Derby and been taken to watch Lord Frederick Beauclerk play a single-wicket match at Lord’s. Although Sir Henry is in favour of peace, he has ‘a sort of notion that the best way to keep the peace is the good old British way of building a thumping great fleet and letting the dagoes do what they damned well like, eh?’ His views on race are not very enlightened: ‘if we’ve got to love the black man like brother, I’m quite prepared to do it. At present I have drawn the line at loving him like a brother-in-law, but I expect that will come later’.^{lxxv}

This view would have fitted in seamlessly in the British colonies, including South Africa. Race segregation was to have a devastating effect on sport, among other aspects of life in our country, a prime example of the tragedy of that policy with regard to cricket being Basil D’Oliveira.

The first recorded game in South Africa was played on Green Point Common, Cape Town in early 1808 between British military officers. When an English team toured South Africa in 1905, the team’s captain Pelham Warner described the tour as a great success, emphasising the ‘fighting spirit’, ‘fair play’ and ‘hearty good fellowship’ – all part of ‘British manhood’ that characterised the series of test matches. Cricketer Aubrey Smith commented on how he noticed ‘while driving through the suburbs of Cape Town that every spare patch of ground was used by blacks to pitch wickets – or paraffin cans

in some cases – in order to play cricket’. James Orrock, who travelled from Cape Town to Port Elizabeth on the *Drummond Castle* in 1890, found on board a team of ‘native cricketers’. He describes the chagrin of the white passengers: ‘the steerage passengers are in a great stew about sleeping with the native cricketers. The most of them decided to sleep on the floor rather than occupy the same bunk’.

In his exploration of English customs, Donald is appalled at some newspaper placards bearing these ominous tidings: ‘England overwhelmed with disaster’ (*Evening News Late Special*), ‘Is England doomed?’ (*The Star*) and ‘Collapse of England’ (*Evening Standard*). At the time, Adolf Hitler was gaining power in Germany, and fresh in everyone’s memories was the financial collapse of the Wall Street Stock Exchange and the onslaught of the Great Depression. After extensive enquiries Donald finds that cricket is the subject of the apocalyptic messages. Arthur Mailey, the Australian medium-pace bowler, had bundled out England at Melbourne. The pantheon of English gods that reign on the cricketing Mount Olympus was in disarray. Sir Jack Hobbs was out first ball, Hearne had accumulated a mere 9 runs, and the elegant left-hander Frank Wooley another duck to compound the misery of the island race. All prayers were that Patsy Hendren would save the country.^{lxxvi}

Bobby Southcott

Hurst reckons that there are three candidates who qualify for the character of Bobby Southcott, all novelists in their own way: Michael Arlen, William Gerhardie and Alec Waugh. Michael Arlen was the son of an Armenian merchant and was brought up in England, to which his father had escaped to avoid Turkish persecution. His best-known work is *The Green Hat* (1924), a sophisticated and saccharine novel set in Mayfair, London’s most fashionable romantic district of the period.

Little is known about William Gerhardie, and most evidence suggests rather that Bobby Southcott was based on Alec Waugh. Waugh was born on 8 July 1898 in Hampstead, London and died on 3 September 1981 in Tampa, Florida. He was an English popular novelist and travel writer, and, as noted above, the older brother of the more famous writer Evelyn. Waugh was educated at Sherborne, from which he was expelled, and the Royal Military Academy in Sandhurst. At seventeen, he wrote *The Loom of Youth* (1919), a novel about public school life that created a considerable stir. Seabrook states of the novel:

In passing, it may be mentioned that this is one of the most remarkable novels ever written in English. It achieved notoriety at the time of its publication in 1919, because it was the first book in history to state openly that homosexual activity was commonplace in public schools; for this appalling breach of convention its youthful author was for some time struck off the roll of Old Boys at his own school, Sherborne. Nowadays his revelations are as tame as can be imagined, and his name was restored to the rolls before too long; but the book is astonishing not for this nine-day notoriety, but for its beautiful limpid prose style – the book reads as if it was written

yesterday – and for the astonishingly adult insights, and sheer wisdom, that pervade it throughout its great length.^{lxxvii}

Waugh's revelations were responsible for his brother Evelyn being sent to Lancing rather than following him to Sherborne. In an account of his son Peter, Waugh admitted that he was the model for 'Bobby Southcott, boy novelist' in Macdonell's novel.^{lxxviii} During the First World War, he served in France and was taken prisoner. After the war he worked as a publisher's reader until 1926, and it was during this period that he played for the Invalids cricket club. He then went to live in Tahiti.

It's clear that both Squire and Waugh were against war, and were acutely aware of their social responsibilities. Squire arranged for Waugh to debate against Alfred Noyes in order to raise funds for hospitals in Stockholm. He describes Waugh as 'really a delightful creature'.^{lxxix} And in his autobiography Waugh says that 'Squire was a much loved man: the loyalty of his friends was great'.^{lxxx}

Vulcan and Venus Anadyomene

Macdonell's classical education certainly shows in his novel. He describes the blacksmith's approach with wonderful detail. It is of course the prelude to Mr Harcourt's mischievous prank in calling a no ball:

At last, after a long stillness, the ground shook, the grasses waved violently, small birds arose with shrill clamours, a loud puffing sound alarmed the butterflies, and the blacksmith, looking more like Venus Anadyomene than ever, came thundering over the crest. The world held its breath.

Vulcan is one of the oldest of the Latin gods and is traditionally portrayed as a blacksmith, with hammer, tongs, anvil and forge. He is also the god of the thunderbolt and of the sun, and associated with fire and the attribute of life-giving warmth. He is clearly a highly appropriate character to describe the blacksmith, given his occupation and his discharge of thunderbolts.

Venus is the Roman goddess of love, especially sensual love and passion. Based on the Greek goddess Aphrodite, the addition of the term 'anadyomene' – that is, rising from the waters – refers to her birth. According to legend Cronus castrated his father Uranus at the instigation of his mother Gaea, and threw the severed genitals into the sea. The genitals floated on the surface of the water, producing a white foam from which emerged Aphrodite. Carried by the moist breath of Zephyrus, the west wind, the goddess landed on Cyprus. She was conducted to the assembly of immortals, the chief of whom was struck with admiration and wished in his heart to take her as a wife and lead her to his abode. The metaphor is apt – the portrayal of the blacksmith breasting the slope effectively evokes Venus rising from the waters.

Stanley Baldwin

In the famous cricket match, Hodge secures a crucial wicket off his first ball:

He had recently watched a county cricket match between Lancashire, a county that he detested in theory, and Worcester, a county that he adored in fact. On the one side were factories and the late Mr Jimmy White; on the other, English apples and Mr Stanley Baldwin.

Stanley Baldwin was born on 3 August 1867 in Bewdley, Worcestershire and died on 14 December 1947 in his home at Astley Hall, near Stourport-on-Severn. A Conservative, he rose to great heights and was three times prime minister between 1923 and 1937. He had to face many crises, including the General Strike of 1926, the Ethiopian crisis of 1935, and the abdication crisis of 1936. He was a talented man and came from a creative family, being a relative of the author Rudyard Kipling and the painter Sir Edward Burne-Jones. He was the only son of Alfred Baldwin, chairman of the Great Western Railway and head of a large concern that included iron and steel factories and collieries.

Squire much admired Baldwin and wrote about his speeches, describing the unveiling of the memorial to W H Hudson in Hyde Park as follows: 'Mr Baldwin spoke with that captivating straightforwardness and sincerity, that humour, that unaffected polish, and rare union of commonsense and poetical feeling, which makes his speeches unique amongst the speeches of statesmen'. To some extent the hero worship was reciprocated, as Baldwin sought Squire's views on literary matters.^{lxxxix}

Upon Hitler's rise to power in Germany in 1933, Nazism became recognised as an international threat. Because Baldwin feared the domestic political consequences of British rearmament and a firm foreign policy to meet that threat, he failed to act with any rigour at the time. Other voices were more strident, including that of Winston Churchill, who saw the dangers more clearly. Baldwin's hesitation quickly became a political embarrassment. There was public outrage over the agreement in December 1935 between the British foreign secretary and the French premier, to permit fascist Italy to conquer Ethiopia. And there were to be other domestic crises. When the new king, Edward VIII, determined to marry an American divorcée, Wallis Simpson, Baldwin feared for the unity of the Empire. He took the bold move of persuading the monarch to abdicate on 10 December 1936, and the public seemed to be satisfied.

All these matters took their toll on his peace of mind and the confidence of the party. A short while later, Baldwin resigned and Neville Chamberlain took over as prime minister. But at the time Macdonell was writing his novel, Baldwin was still a hero to the followers of the Conservative Party, especially for his iron-fisted dealings with the rampant trade union movement.

Leg theory

As we saw, Mr Hodge had watched a county cricket match between Lancashire and Worcester in which a bowler by the name of Root had

successfully dismissed the other side by dint of placing all his fielders on the leg side and bowling what are technically known as ‘in-swingers’.

This is the leg theory that was to be at the centre of the body-line series in Australia in 1932–33. The theory was devised to deal with the scourge of Don Bradman, who as a 21-year-old had scored 974 runs in the 1930 test series in England at an average of 139.^{lxxxii}

At a secret meeting at the Piccadilly Hotel in London, Douglas Jardine and Arthur Carr met with Harold Larwood and Bill Voce to refine the theory for the tour to Australia. In his autobiography, Jardine mentions that ‘in recent years McDonald, the Australian Lancastrian, Root, of Worcestershire, and Bowes, of Yorkshire, have followed the same tradition, and, with one exception, without protest’.^{lxxxiii} The series witnessed horrifying shot-pitched deliveries aimed at the batsman, sometimes with seven fielders on the leg side.



The leg theory practised by Jardine in the 1932–33 MCC tour of Australia. Harold Larwood is bowling to Don Bradman with six fielders in catching positions on the leg side.^{lxxxiv}

Relations between the two teams soured intensely. Matters became so bad at one stage that the future existence of Australia as a member of the Commonwealth was in jeopardy. The Australian Board of Control cabled the MCC on 18 January 1933 and described the injury problems and ill-feeling between the teams. The cable ended ominously: ‘unless stopped at once it is likely to upset the friendly relations existing between Australia and England’.^{lxxxv} The MCC easily won the Ashes and Don Bradman, the scourge of England, was tamed by the leg theory put into practice. In an attempt to curb this tactic, the rules were subsequently amended to restrict the number of fielders on the leg side and also behind the square leg umpire. There

seems to be little doubt that the character of the blacksmith was modelled, along with his Roman mythological origins, on the fast bowlers Larwood and Voce, who had been intimidating Australia.

'Quintus Fabius Maximus Cunctator or a sort of Tarzan'

Mr Hodge's fifth ball was seven feet wide of the wicket. The baker had the choice of two roles – hero or sensible man. By an amazing fluke, the wicketkeeping publisher – reckoned by Hurst to be Cecil Harmer – kicked the ball onto the wicket. Then follows arguably the funniest comment in the story: "I was bowling for that," observed Mr Hodge modestly, strolling up the pitch'.

Quintus Fabius Maximus Cunctator was a Roman commander who employed cautious tactics in warfare. His surname Cunctator, meaning 'delayer', was derived from these tactics. This style of warfare was at its most effective during the early stages of the Second Punic War, which raged from 218 to 201 BC. The delays and difficulties that the enemy experienced in engaging the Roman forces gave the forces time to recover their strength and take the offensive against the invading Carthaginian army of Hannibal.

'Fabianism' has come to mean a gradual or cautious policy. Interestingly, Squire was a founder member and the first secretary of the Cambridge Fabian Society. At that time it was also socialist in ideology, and one of the first members was the poet Rupert Brooke, who portrayed the horrors of war in his poetry.^{lxxxvi}

Tarzan is the creation of the American novelist Edgar Rice Burroughs. More than twenty-five million copies of *Tarzan of the Apes* (1914) and a series of sequels have been sold worldwide. The silver screen idol bears little resemblance to the hero of the book. The son of an English nobleman, Tarzan is abandoned in the jungles of Africa, where he is adopted and raised by a tribe of great apes. In the course of some exciting adventures he learns English, meets and falls in love with Jane, the daughter of an American scientist, and recovers his title. More than a dozen actors have since swung through the trees as Tarzan, perhaps the most popular being Johnny Weissmuller, a former Olympic swimming champion.

Newton and Copernicus

Macdonell describes the cricket ball rising into the air and then having a 'forlorn battle against the chief invention of Sir Isaac Newton'. The invention, of course, is gravity. One of the greatest geniuses of all time, Sir Isaac Newton excelled in many branches of science, principally as a physicist and mathematician. He was born on Christmas Day 1642 and became the culminating figure of the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century. In optics, his discovery of the composition of white light integrated the phenomena of colours into the science of light and laid the foundation for modern physical optics. In mechanics, his three laws of motion, the basic principles of modern physics, resulted in the formulation of the law of

universal gravitation. In mathematics, he was the original discoverer of infinitesimal calculus.

At the start of the game, Mr Hodge wins the toss 'by a system of his own founded upon the differential calculus and Copernican theory'. The manner in which the coin spins in the air is attributed to the ideas of the well-known astronomer. Prior to the work of Nicolaus Copernicus, astronomers postulated that the moon and sun encircled the motionless Earth and that Mars, Jupiter and Saturn respectively were situated beyond the sun. In his *Commentariolus*, Copernicus suggests that if the sun is assumed to be at rest and if Earth is assumed to be in motion, then the remaining planets fall into an orderly relationship. This revolutionary notion conflicted the teachings of the Church.

A concise background of the game

There is no doubt that cricket is part of English folklore, but its precise beginnings are shrouded in mystery. Nevertheless, there are some interesting speculative details of its earlier days. The sport developed from 'creag', which is the Anglo-Saxon word for a crooked stick used to hit a ball. Some have dared to suggest that the game first took place on Gallic turf. These denialists believe it began in north-east France, where a game called '*criquet*,' meaning a goal post or wicket, was played in St Omer. There is also a reference to *criquet* being played in fifteenth-century Flanders.^{lxxxvii}

However, there can be no dispute that the game flourished on English soil. In *Sports and Pastimes of the People of England* (1801), Strutt locates the origins of the game in club ball. In a 1598 legal dispute over land, one John Derrick, a witness for the claimants, maintained that he had played the game on the land as a youngster: 'the Free schoole of Guldeford ... hee and several of his fellows did runne and play there at creckett and other plaies'.^{lxxxviii}

The game was played at Macdonell's Winchester College before the English Civil War (1642–51).^{lxxxix} The first match on record took place in 1646 at Coxheath in Kent. It seems that generally the villagers played their games on a Sunday – in 1654 the churchwardens and overseers of the parish of Eltham, Kent fined their parishioners two shillings each for playing cricket on that day. Cricket bats were seen as seditious, as Oliver Cromwell ordered that all 'krickett sticks and balls' should be burned by the common hangman.

Cricket came into its own in the eighteenth century, credit for which should go to the Hambledon Club matches on Broadhalfpenny Down, Hampshire, which unfortunately came to an end in 1793. Founded in 1787, the MCC became the governing body of the game and the sport's headquarters were established at Lord's Cricket Ground in 1814.^{xc}

Cricket is portrayed by Samuel Johnson as a sport 'at which the contenders drive a ball with sticks in opposition to each other',^{xc1} while in *Our Village* (1832) Nancy Mitford rhetorically wonders how 'a little bit of leather, and two pieces of wood' could have 'such delightful and delighting power'.^{xc2}

Cricketing metaphors

As a game cricket has lent a number of metaphors to the English language, many of which are also used in other contexts. A 'hat trick' entails taking three wickets with three consecutive balls. The term originated with the bowler earning the right to take his hat round the ground for a collection.^{xciii} In 1999, 'Darren Gough earned himself a hat-trick. He removed [Australians] Ian Healy, knocked out Stuart MacGill's middle stump with his next, and inswinging Yorker, and then banged into the outside of Colin Miller's off stump with an away-swinger which was nearer a Yorker than a long half-volley'.^{xciv}

A 'Yorker' is usually delivered by a fast bowler and bounces very close to the wicket. It is difficult to play when delivered at great pace as it slips under the place the bat would be at the foot of its swing. It was probably developed by a Yorkshire bowler, as that county has a rich cricketing tradition and unique sense of humour.

A 'googly' is a ball that given the structure of the hand and wrist can only be bowled by a leg spin bowler, of either hand. It is highly deceptive, especially when carefully disguised, as it looks like a leg-break but is in fact an off-break. Tradition has credited the invention of the googly to B J T Bosanquet, who first used it in 1890. He used it against the Australians in 1903 and it is therefore called a 'Bosey' in Australia. Its linguistic origin is not known, but it may come from the word 'goggle'.^{xcv}

Allied to the googly is a 'chinaman', which is an off-break bowled by a left-hand bowler to a right-handed batsman. It would be a leg break to a left-hander and has the same action as a leg break bowled by a right-hander; in other words, it is affected not by finger spin but by the wrist action. The chinaman was named after a West Indian bowler, Ellis Achong, who was of Chinese extraction and bowled that sort of delivery.^{xcvi}

The virtues of cricket

To some, the notion of a cricket game may be very strange. The fact that after five days of vigorous play it's possible that there is no discernible winner has them scratching their heads in perplexity. George Bernard Shaw commented that 'baseball has the great advantage over cricket of being sooner ended'.^{xcvii} Cricket is the only game known to last five days. Even the duration of Wagner's mighty opera, *The Ring of the Nibelung*, spread as it is over four evenings and encompassing more than sixteen hours of listening, cannot be equated to the game's length. Squire was a keen Wagnerian, believing that 'when one shuts one's eyes and gives oneself up to Wagner one feels capable of unnumbered worlds of love'.^{xcviii}

Lord Harris, a cricketer, sometime governor of Bombay, and Lord Randolph Churchill's under-secretary for India wrote:

You do well to love cricket, for it is more free from anything sordid, anything dishonourable, than any game in the world. To play it keenly, honourably,

generously, self-sacrificingly, is a moral lesson in itself and the classroom is God's air and sunshine. Foster it, my brother, so that it may attract all who can find the time to play it; protect it from any that would sully it, so that it may grow in favour with all men.^{xcix}



Lord Harris^c

An American author said:

Our constitution is dedicated to liberty and has of necessity to assume a moral code of honourable conduct without which there can be no liberty – only licence. Our youth cannot be properly trained for that heritage unless games and sports are infused with the inner compulsion towards honourable and generous conduct.

If cricket is alien to our ideal of democracy, so much the worse for our democracy; because in the end it is the decent respect lodged in the breast of each citizen for the feelings and opinion of others that alone can preserve it.^{ci}

A great Indian cricketer, Prince Ranjitsinhji, the 'Jam Sahib of Nawanagar', wrote:

No institution is perfect – it will always tend to excess or defect. But how nearly perfect is cricket. It is a game which keeps boys out of mischief. It is a training of youth for a manly life. It lays up a store of strength and health against old age. It makes individual men life-long friends.

Learning itself has gradually learnt to take up a different attitude towards cricket. It has discovered that cricket is consistent with study and the cricketer makes a good schoolmaster. The truth is that athletics are an integral part and a powerful support of all education.^{cii}

When Sir Jack Hobbs made his hundredth century in first class cricket Ranjitsinhji sent him a souvenir inscribed with these words: 'from a humble student of the game'.^{ciii}

Nyren, a writer from bygone days, extolled the virtues of cricket and said of those who wanted to play the game that they would find rewards that compensated for excesses of smoking and drinking. He also castigates the gourmands of this world:

The brain must glow with nature's fire and not depend upon a spirit lamp. You, sir, with pallid face and shaky hand, rise with the lark and scent the morning air. And when your veins are no longer fevered with alcohol nor puffed with tobacco smoke, come again and devour up my discourse.

Our noble game has no sympathy with gluttony, still less with the habitual "diner out", on whom outrage nature has taken vengeance by emblazoning what was his face, encasing each limb in fat, and condemning him to be his own porter to the end of his days.^{civ}

Sir Donald Bradman, without doubt the greatest batsman of all time, acknowledged the power of the game to unite people:

Just think of the myriad adoring small boys in India who will flock to see their Australian cricket idols play when they visit that country. Different in colour, differing in religious beliefs and in other respects but still human beings, flesh and blood, who have a common heritage in their desire to work and play without devastating the earth for selfish, greedy ends.^{cv}



Sir Donald Bradman, undoubtedly the greatest batsman ever, drives at his majestic best during his world record score, then of 452.^{cv}

Vanderbilt sportswriter Grantland Rice wrote a poem called 'Only the Brave' in 1941. The following verse was published in *The Nashville Banner*.

*For when the one Great Scorer comes
To write against your name
He marks not whether you won or lost
But how you played the game.*

Cheating in cricket

With these wonderful principles in mind it is interesting to note the attitude that is adopted towards those who cheat in the game. I watched with great interest the second one-day cricket international between Australia and South Africa played at Newlands, Cape Town on a warm Friday evening in March 2006. Makhaya Nthini bowled magnificently and early in the Australian innings, and cut a ball back at Adam Gilchrist, who snicked it to the wicketkeeper.^{cvii} A desultory appeal emanated from Mark Boucher and Nthini looked perplexed; the umpire was nonplussed. Gilchrist turned round and, with nary a look at the

umpire, walked to the pavilion. There is little doubt in my mind that had he awaited the umpire's decision he would have been given no out. The television replay would have revealed that he was out – caught behind.

There ensued a most illuminating debate on television between Tony Greig and Daryll Cullinan. The former explained that the Australians were not harmonious in their support of Gilchrist's stand – by which I understood that his honesty was not universally approved by the team. There is a story that suggests that the notion of walking was hitherto anathema to them – 'Australians only walk when their car breaks down'.^{cviii} Cullinan was asked his views by Greig and he cynically remarked that 'there are two umpires, you know'. I took this to mean that he feels all decisions should be left to the umpire and no batsman should walk even if he knows that he is out.

Greig called in the aid of the softer gender by suggesting that women would reason that the failure to walk when a batsman knows he is out is tantamount to cheating. As if the male gender universally approves of dishonesty! After the Gilchrist incident, the Australian batsmen did not acquit themselves with any great distinction and one had the feeling that this great team was not at peace with itself. There is no doubt in my mind that Adam Gilchrist is one of the most talented and destructive one-day batsmen in the world. I am also of the view that had he stayed the result might have been very different. And it seems clear that umpires will know that when Gilchrist does not walk it is because he does not believe he is out. Most batsmen receive bad decisions and I'm sure Gilchrist has had his own fair share. Which makes his stand all the more laudable.

The failure to walk has also caused controversy. In his wonderful book, *It's not Cricket*, Simon Rae has recorded numerous examples. One of the most amusing occurred in 1898 when the demon fast bowler Charles Kortright had Dr W G Grace plumb in front for leg before wicket, but the umpire refused to give the legendary batsman out. Next ball he edged a clear catch to the keeper – again with negative results from the umpire. Finally, he knocked the middle and leg stump out of the ground and Grace waited, hoping for a no-ball call. Kortright summoned all his reserves of sarcasm and said, 'Surely you are not going, Doctor? There's still one stump standing!'^{cix}

Rae gives a detailed account of the occasion in the 2000–01 English tour of Sri Lanka when Aravinda da Silva nicked a ball to first slip and refused to walk after being given not out.^{cx} Also receiving mention were two bat-pad catches, after which Nasser Hussain refused to walk. The most obvious dismissal took place when Graeme Hick hit a straightforward return catch to Muttiah Muralitharan, but refused to walk. Rae relates that 'throughout the series, batsmen on both sides stood their ground [refusing to walk], however palpably out, reducing the fielding sides to a pantomime of self-righteous apoplexy'.^{cx}

Who can forget the fourth afternoon of the fourth test between England and South Africa at Trent Bridge, with England chasing 247 to win? Atherton was taking part at the crease in a turning point in the match and the series, as Rae

describes it. Atherton snicked a ball to Boucher from Alan Donald and stood his ground. Donald explains his reaction in his book *White Lightning*: ‘I was absolutely seething and I said to Atherton, “You had better be f***** ready for what’s coming ...” Next ball, he edged me for four, when he could easily have played on. I gave him a long look and called him a “f***** cheat” – in English, and Afrikaans’.^{cxii}

Rae also records an incident in the third test on the 1964–65 MCC tour of South Africa in which Eddie Barlow hit a ball to Parfitt at slip off Titmus and refused to walk after umpire Jack Warner gave him not out. Angry words were exchanged and the English cricketers refused to applaud Barlow’s century. When England batted, Ken Barrington touched a ball to Lindsay, the wicketkeeper, and despite a loud and sustained appeal the same umpire turned it down. Barrington then walked, which caused huge controversy.

Paul Irwin reported in the *Rand Daily Mail*:

Perhaps Barrington imagines he was making a magnificent gesture by signifying that he got a touch to the ball when the catch at the wicket was made. If so, his ideas of cricket don’t coincide with mine. All Barrington succeeded in doing was to hold the umpire up to ridicule and contempt ... [he] appears to have passed a public vote of no confidence in [the umpire].

The umpire, Irwin continues, should receive a public apology and, in the absence of such, refuse to stand for the remainder of the test because ‘it seems the England players are quite capable of umpiring the match themselves’.^{cxiii}

Who is right in this great controversy? The cynical may observe that batsmen usually walk when they realise that not to would be so embarrassing that they would be regarded as cheats. In other words, they only walk when they know there is no doubt that they are out. The corollary is that most batsmen will stay at the crease if they think they can get away with it. There is, after all, a lot at stake – their livelihoods as professional cricketers, and the fate of the nation.

Is it that all honour and fair play has gone out of the game of cricket? Since it has become so professional has it lost all claims to honesty and the better side of human nature? Is the sledging and swearing that seems so endemic, a symptom of a deeper moral malaise? What has happened to a game that typifies ethics and vilifies turpitude? ‘Playing with a straight bat’ and ‘it’s not cricket’ are expressions of a moral order in society that appears to have vanished, save for that one knight in shining armour, Adam Gilchrist.

If we are to uphold cricket as a metaphor for fairness and square dealing then it seems only right that batsmen *should* walk when they know they are out. This is not to criticise umpires, but to assist them in their difficult duties. What Gilchrist did was to set an example and it would be an indictment if he were to be fighting a lonely and arduous battle for that which is most noble in the wonderful game of cricket.

Team spirit

When Bobby Southcott makes his way to the wicket Macdonell refers to the idea of team spirit:

Just as this celebrity, holding his bat as delicately as if it was a flute or a fan, was picking his way through the daisies and thistledown towards the wicket, Mr Hodge rushed anxiously, tankard in hand, from the Three Horseshoes and bellowed in a most unpoetical voice: "Play carefully, Bobby. Keep your end up. Runs don't matter."

"Very well, Bill," replied Mr Southcott sedately. Donald was interested by this little exchange. It was the Team Spirit at work – the captain instructing his man to play a type of game that was demanded by the state of the team's fortunes, and the individual loyally suppressing his instincts to play a different type of game.

That Southcott does the exact opposite is incredibly funny, and also ironic. It's the rebellion of the idealist against authority. 'The Battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton,' said the Duke of Wellington.^{cxiv} The notion of sacrificing self in the interests of others is of great importance to those who want men to lay down their lives for their country.

Macdonell's character Davies echoes this sentiment, as he tells Donald that one of the things he has found out about the English is that they should not be ragged about team spirit: 'you must never suggest in any sort of way that there are any individuals in cricket. It's the highest embodiment on earth of the Team'.^{cxv} The team spirit with which pupils of English public schools were imbued would be carried through as a principle that these pupils would uphold when some of them became officers in the army. Orwell recognises, and laments the loss of, the importance for the officer class of their training on the sports fields in relation to their sterner tasks on the battlefields:

Probably the battle of Waterloo was won on the playing-fields of Eton, but the opening battles of all subsequent wars have been lost there. One of the dominant facts in English life during the past three quarters of a century has been the decay of ability in the ruling class.^{cxvi}

Cricket as a metaphor of fair play

The result of Macdonell's legendary match is a tie, both sides have equal scores. Macdonell wanted neither sorrowful losers nor gloating winners. If England is a nation of poets then the battlefield is not their first choice of terrain for their endeavours.

Over the centuries English poets and writers have eulogised their land of birth. In Shakespeare's *Richard II*, John of Gaunt identifies among England's cardinal virtues its military strength – as the home of the god of war, Mars – and the isolation it enjoys against plagues and enemies:

This royal throne of kings, this sceptred isle,

This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
This other Eden, demi-paradise,
This fortress built by Nature of herself
Against infection and the hand of war,
This happy breed of men, this little world,
This precious stone set in a silver sea,
Which serves it in the office of a wall,
Or as a moat defensive to a house,
Against the envy of less happier lands;
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England.^{cxvii}

As pointed out by Orwell in the above quotation in reference to the Battle of Waterloo, and without going into any detail, one can safely say that the aristocracy has relinquished its role as the officer class in the modern British military. Similar changes have taken place in English cricket as the players assumed their rightful place with the gentlemen. Once Len Hutton became the first player to captain England, the old order was past. But with that passing was an old morality also lost? The morality of the playing fields of the public schools that raised Alec Waugh and recognised honour and fair play as primary in what was still a sport and not a business?

The cricket match provides many insights into the characters of the team. The mighty Boone is not impressed when he pulls off the amazing catch. 'Sports do not build character. They reveal it,' said Heywood Broun.^{cxviii} It used to be only soccer players who kissed and hugged after a goal was scored; now the cricketers are indulging in the same antics. Jane O'Reilly suggests that the 'one nice thing about sports is that they prove men do have emotions and are not afraid to show them'.^{cxix}

The spectators

Macdonell gives us wonderful descriptions of the spectators in the cricket match. There are the gaffers – the 'row of elderly men, facing a row of pint tankards, and wearing either long beards or clean-shaven chins and long whiskers'. There are the 'small parties of villagers [who] were patiently waiting for the great match to begin'. And there is the 'ancient man [who] leaned upon a scythe, his sharpening stone sticking out of a pocket in his velveteen waistcoat'. The parson and the country squire are also in attendance.

Michael Roberts describes the spectators' role in sports as vicarious, involving an identification with the heroes on the field. The commercialisation of sport has depended on this phenomenon and the rewards have been rich for the sports administrators. Roberts comments:

For the most part the spectator's stake in the proceedings is the gratification that comes from identifying with success. Whoever can provide such vicarious joy needs no other justification as a human being. The capacity of one man's actions to buttress the self-esteem of another is demonstrably a potent force – a force that has been exploited whenever possible by the entrepreneurs of sports events.^{cxx}

Perhaps this explains the urge of young boys to obtain the players' autographs. They would like to identify with their gods and possess some part of them, albeit a quick scribble on a piece of paper.

Sport and war

Some writers have located the origins of sport within war and fighting. Orwell suggests that 'serious sport has nothing to do with fair play. It is bound up with hatred, jealousy, boastfulness, disregard of all rules and sadistic pleasure in witnessing violence: in other words it is war minus the shooting'.^{cxxi} Others echo these sentiments. Jonathan Swift proposes that most 'sorts of diversion in men, children, and other animals, are an imitation of fighting'.^{cxxii} Boxing would be the most obvious form of war, but other sports, including rugby, have many aspects that resemble classic war engagements.

Of course, in contrast to war, in cricket and most other sports the rules are clear and universally obeyed. The umpires are respected and modern technology helps to ensure that high standards of play are maintained. Some may cite the Geneva Convention and illustrate adherence to the principles outlined in that document with examples of fair play in war. But the war crimes tribunal in The Hague is testament to the fact that the rules are frequently breached in war. Some writers have also noted an absence of enforceable rules in the stock exchange and big business. Cases of insider trading and share fraud indicate that the rules of that game are also not clearly defined. Marshall McLuhan identified this phenomenon: 'what disqualifies war from being a true game is probably what also disqualifies the stock market and business – the rules are not fully known nor accepted by all the players'.^{cxxiii}

Society's need for sport has been a much debated topic for many years. When the British philosopher Bertrand Russell suggested that war was popular because it provided a refreshing change from the boredom of factory life, with its conveyor system of production, he was probably not thinking of sport as well. Lewis Mumford identifies the vicarious pleasure spectators acquire from sport as a stimulant to their diminishing life image. He comments:

Sport in the sense of a mass-spectacle, with death to add to the underlying excitement, comes into existence when a population has been drilled and regimented and depressed to such an extent that it needs at least a vicarious participation in difficult feats of strength or skill or heroism in order to sustain its waning life-sense.^{cxxiv}

Bearing in mind the ever-present danger of generalisation, perhaps it's impossible to accurately define the English. There seems to be a dichotomy between the law abiding, justice loving Englishman and the empire building, aggressive warmongers. How does one reconcile the wars of conquest through which the Empire was won with the notion of England as a nation of poets?

Is England a nation of poets?

As we saw above, in *England, their England* Donald suggests to Davies that the English are a nation of poets, even if they would hate to be told as much. The country seems to have more than its fair share of poets, making its literary tradition out of proportion with its population. Others, who could not have been real poets, oversaw the acquisition of the greatest empire ever created on Earth.

The frequent occurrence of wars has been noted as a time when some have found merit in natural selection. Darwinism at its worst has identified wars as purifiers of the human strain. Squire waxes eloquent on this topic. In December 1914, he lamented the death of a number of eminent writers, including Jules Romains:

I suppose, if every man of unusual intelligence or unusual physique in all the countries involved were killed in action, there would still remain imbeciles who would go on talking of war as a struggle for the survival of the fittest.

Squire's subsequent poem, 'The Survival of the Fittest', is about friends whom he had lost and features this memorable line: 'and all in a month, as summer waned, they perished'.

Warmonger John St Loe Strachey wrote in the *Spectator* that without war the race would degenerate. Squire concluded his first draft of the abovementioned poem with the line: 'Strachey, these died, and men like you still live'.^{CXXV}

This England was the same nation that Orwell was to describe with such approval. Writing in the darkest days of the Second World War – 1941 – Orwell sees something eternal in the English character, and seems to believe that attempts made by intellectuals to change it will never succeed: 'in whatever shape England emerges from the war it will be deeply tinged with the characteristics that I have spoken of earlier. The intellectuals who hope to see it Russianized or Germanized will be disappointed'.

In the following passage, is Orwell speaking about the entire nation when he summarises as part of the English character absence of cruelty and antipathy to militarism as important and lasting features?

The gentleness, the hypocrisy, the thoughtlessness, the reverence for law and the hatred of uniforms will remain, along with the suet puddings and the misty skies. It needs some very great disaster, such as prolonged subjugation by a foreign enemy, to destroy a national culture. The Stock Exchange will be pulled down, the horse plough will give way to the tractor, the country houses will be turned into children's holiday camps, the Eton and Harrow match will be forgotten, but England will still be England, an everlasting animal stretching into the future and the past, and, like all living things, having the power to change out of recognition and yet remain the same.^{CXXVI}

He remarks on the gentleness of the English civilisation. He points out that the bus conductors are good-tempered and the policemen carry no revolvers. He maintains that in England there is a hatred for war and militarism:

It is rooted deep in history, and it is strong in the lower-middle class as well as the working class. Successive wars have shaken it but not destroyed it. Well within living memory it was common for “the redcoats” to be booed at in the streets and for the landlords of respectable public houses to refuse to allow soldiers on the premises. In peace time, even when there are two million unemployed, it is difficult to fill the ranks of the tiny standing army, which is officered by the country gentry and a specialized stratum of the middle class, and manned by farm labourers and slum proletarians. The mass of the people are without military knowledge or tradition, and their attitude towards war is invariably defensive. No politician could rise to power by promising them conquests or military “glory”, no Hymn of Hate has ever made any appeal to them. In the last war the songs which the soldiers made up and sang of their own accord were not vengeful but humorous and mock-defeatist. The only enemy they ever named was the sergeant-major.^{cxxvii}

Has anything changed since the time he expressed this view?

Orwell is convinced that in England such concepts as justice, liberty and objective truth are still upheld even if they are powerful illusions:

Here one comes upon an all-important English trait: the respect for constitutionalism and legality, the belief in “the law” as something above the State and above the individual, something which is cruel and stupid, of course, but at any rate *incorruptible*.^{cxxviii}

He asks, ‘Where are the rubber truncheons, where is the castor oil?’ Would this be a fair way of describing the England under Tony Blair? Under New Labour, could one say as Orwell said that ‘the sword is still in the scabbard, and while it stays there corruption cannot go beyond a certain point’?^{cxxix}

The moral appeal is not to a religious conviction, as Orwell recognises that ‘the common people are without definite religious belief, and have been so for centuries’. He furthermore believes that the Anglican Church never had a genuine hold on the citizenry, it ‘was simply a preserve of the landed gentry’. He identifies ‘a deep tinge of Christian feeling, while almost forgetting the name of Christ’. He notes that ‘the power-worship which is the new religion of Europe, and which has infected the English intelligentsia, has never touched the common people. They have never caught up with power politics’.^{cxxx}

There will always be a part of the English that remain poets, who are against war and aggression, as we can see, for example, in Squire’s poem ‘The March’:

I heard a voice that cried,
“Make way for those who died!”
And all the coloured crowd like
Ghosts at morning fled;
And down the winding road, rank

After rank there strode,
In mute and measured march, a
Hundred thousand dead.^{cxxx}

What should the English do to properly establish their national character? Edmund Burke pessimistically proposes that 'it is enough for evil to triumph that good men do nothing'. In many senses, England has been the leading exponent of the tradition of democracy, even if Greece is its cradle. Churchill said that democracy is not a good system, but all the others are worse – this may be the way in which the English should let their voices be heard. It is with the help of the ballot box that they can prove whether they are a nation of poets or warmongers and imperialists.

In conclusion

We began with Macdonell, and he shall now have the last word. In *England, their England*, the author as Donald returns to his school, Winchester. His masterful portrayal of the beauties of the place indicates all that he finds best in England:

At his feet were the glittering streams of the Itchen, that small magic river of silver and dry-flies and trout. Beyond them were the playing fields with their white dots of cricketers, and beyond them the tower of the College Chapel, and beyond that the slumbering leviathan, Wykeham's House of God. The air was filled with little sounds, the tinkling of sheep-bells across the vales of the chalkland, the click of cricket-bat, the whispers of the fitful puffs of wind in the trees behind him, the megaphoned shouts of the coaches as the racing-fours went up the stream with flashing blades, and from across the valley the bells of the Cathedral, deep and far, like the strong clang of Thor's anvil in Valhalla.^{cxxxii}

Significantly, Macdonell mentions the trench that the Britons dug as a defence against the invading Romans, and the school motto, which emphasises the 'softer' qualities of the English character. He recognises that England has been subject to a number of foreign invaders, and juxtaposes this with an echo of Orwell's sentiment that the dominant characteristic of the English is their kindness:

Twenty or thirty feet below the grassy deck-chair on which Donald was by now half dozing ran the circular trench which the Britons dug as a defence against the Legions. The line of the Roman road was clear, a chalky arrow, as far as the blue horizon. Saxon Alfred's statue might have been as visible through a field-glass as the pale-yellow Norman transept of the Cathedral was to the eye. The English school, whose motto puts kindness above flourishment or learning, lay among its water-meads, and all around was the creator, the inheritor, the ancestor, and the descendant of it all, the green and kindly land of England.^{cxxxiii}

- ⁱ Seabrook, M. 1993. *Cricket Lore*, 14.
- ⁱⁱ Ibid.
- ⁱⁱⁱ See, for example, Mme de Scudéry's *Le Grand Cyrus* (1649–53), *Clélie* (1656–60) and *La Bruyère's Caractères* (1688). The identities of the persons upon whose lives these novels' characters are based were revealed on a later occasion.
- ^{iv} Mrs Manley's *The New Atalantis* (1709), for example, was published with the actual personalities revealed. Thomas Love Peacock's *Nightmare Abbey* (1818) contains caricatures of the poets Coleridge, Byron and Shelley.
- ^v This book was published by the Book Guild and is also available at www.singwillow.co.uk.
- ^{vi} Cited in Paul, J. *Sing Willow*. Lewes: Book Guild, 171.
- ^{vii} Sutton, M. England, whose England? Class, gender and national identity in the 20th century folklore revival.
- ^{viii} Orwell, G. *England, your England*. Internet article.
- ^{ix} Ibid.
- ^x Ibid.
- ^{xi} Ibid.
- ^{xii} Ibid.
- ^{xiii} Macdonell, A G. 1933. *England, their England.*, Macmillan. Published in 1949, London: Pan, back cover.
- ^{xiv} Deedes, 2004. Macdonell, Archibald Gordon (1895–1941). Rev. C L Taylor. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Archibald Gordon Macdonell Series I. Works. Available at <http://www.hrc.utexas.edu/research/fa/macdonell.html> . Archibald Gordon Macdonell. Available at <http://encyclopedia.farlex.com/Macdonell,+Archibald+Gordon>.
- ^{xv} Picture credit Elliot and Fry.
- ^{xvi} Macdonell, A G. *Autobiography of a Cad*. xiii.
- ^{xvii} Howarth, P. *Squire: Most Generous of Men*. 205.
- ^{xviii} Ibid.
- ^{xix} Ibid, 141.
- ^{xx} Ibid].
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- ^{xxiv} Ibid, 31.
- ^{xxv} *Squire*, 11.
- ^{xxvi} Ibid, 21.
- ^{xxvii} *Squire: Most Generous of Men* by Patrick Howarth.
- ^{xxviii} Ibid, 29.
- ^{xxix} Ibid, 33.
- ^{xxx} Ibid, 39.
- ^{xxxi} Ibid, 44.
- ^{xxxii} Ibid, 35.
- ^{xxxiii} *Sing Willow*, 7.
- ^{xxxiv} *Sing Willow* cover.
- ^{xxxv} *Squire*, xi.
- ^{xxxvi} *Squire*, 101.
- ^{xxxvii} *Sing Willow*, 7.
- ^{xxxviii} Ibid.
- ^{xxxix} *England, their England*, 10.
- ^{xl} Ibid, 5.
- ^{xli} Ibid, 8.
- ^{xlii} Ibid, 9.
- ^{xliiii} Ibid, 12–13.
- ^{xliiv} Ibid, 192.
- ^{xliv} Ibid, 13.
- ^{xlvi} Ibid, 17.
- ^{xlvii} Seabrook, 14.

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xix *Sing Willow*, 8.
I *Squire*, 143.
II Seabrook 14.
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