

## Book reviews of recent RRB publications

### **Chucked Out. The sad story of Jack Crossland**

Stuart Brodtkin

Published 5 October 2023

I have always maintained that the cause of my lifelong passion for cricket and cricket writing was Neville Cardus. Had I not, at an impressionable age, read his childhood memories of his Lancashire heroes my whole life may have been different.

Over the years my interest has been piqued by each and every aspect of the game's history throughout the world, albeit I keep on coming back to Lancashire. Oddly though with the county I have always followed I seldom go back from Cardus's time, so my knowledge of the county's cricket before the Golden Age is a little sketchy.

Which is not to say that the name of Jack Crossland is an unfamiliar one. I certainly recognise him as being a man whose name was caught up in a controversy about his bowling action, and that his county career had been a brief one, but until now the detail of his story had passed me by.

I now know that Crossland was a Nottinghamshire man, from the fertile cricket nursery of Sutton in Ashton. From playing professionally in the leagues he joined Lancashire in 1878 and, after a slow start to his county career, in 1882 his right arm fast bowling earned him a place at the head of the national averages after he took 112 wickets at just 10.06 runs each.

But the storm clouds were gathering and a divide opened up between Lancashire and most of the other counties over the fairness of Crossland's action, not assisted by similar mutterings

over teammates Alec Watson and George Nash, albeit none of the three were every actually no balled.

Lancashire stood up for their man, but they couldn't fight the irregularities that were found with Crossland's residential qualification and, courtesy of that, he was forced to leave county cricket at the, for those days, early age of 33.

Stuart Brodtkin's thoroughly researched booklet does tell the story of Crossland's life, but it is primarily concerned with investigating the controversy over his bowling action. Many contemporary observers are quoted as Brodtkin seeks an answer, but the inevitable absence of any film or photographic evidence makes a contemporary assessment extremely difficult.

Slightly to my surprise Brodtkin does ultimately feel able to reach a conclusion taking the view, on balance, that Crossland's action was illegal. My own take on that is that the most that can be said of Crossland was that his action appeared unusual, and of course recent experiences tell us that that is no guarantee of any illegality. But perhaps I have been a lawyer too long, and after all these years simply have too many splinters in my backside.

But whether his reader agrees with Brodtkin's conclusion or not is rather beside the point. What Brodtkin unarguably does is put the case for both sides, and at the same time tell what is ultimately a sad story. In doing so he adds an interesting contribution to the written history of Lancashire cricket and he and publisher Red Rose Books are to be congratulated for their continued commitment to that cause.

**Martin Chandler**

*CricketWeb*

Jack Crossland played 84 first-class matches between 1878 and 1885, 71 of which were for his adopted county Lancashire. He took a total of 322 wickets at 12.48: an excellent record for this fast right-hand bowler who might have passed into history unnoticed but for Lord Harris's claim that Crossland threw. As author Stuart Brodtkin asks, was Crossland an 'unwitting victim or a serial offender'? Despite his own allegiance to Lancashire, Brodtkin concludes that 'on balance, he was a chucker'. He is in good company: so did W.G. Grace. A.N. Hornby, the Lancashire captain, and Crossland's fellow-professionals thought his action was fair. It should be added that he was never no-balled for throwing.

Crossland was born in Sutton-in-Ashfield, Nottinghamshire, a prodigious nursery of cricketing talent. According to Brodtkin, 70 professionals were born in the town. His book includes a short section on a few of them. Inevitably, Crossland and Lancashire's success in 1882 led to problems which culminated at The Oval in August when the bowler was heckled relentlessly. Events moved with alacrity. Hornby threatened never to play with Lancashire at The Oval again, while Notts and Middlesex refused to play Lancashire. In a bizarre twist, in 1884 the Lancashire Committee selected Crossland and Harris for the Test against Australia at Old Trafford. In the end neither played. The following year, in Lancashire's first match of the season at Old Trafford against Kent, Crossland bowled Harris with his third ball. Brodtkin writes the crowd were 'besides themselves with delight.' Harris cancelled the return match.

The MCC needed to take action but rather than addressing Crossland's peculiar action they found another way to drive him out of the game. They had evidence that Crossland had been

living in Nottinghamshire between October 1884 and April 1885 and breached his residential qualification for Lancashire. It has to be said that many a blind eye was turned to residential qualifications in this era. Crossland's county career was over and he returned to the leagues.

Crossland found work as a labourer, railway fish porter and even playing baseball, but poverty was ever-pressing. On two occasions, the Lancashire Committee gave him £5 to get by and when he died in September 1903 they paid for his funeral. Just another case of a cricket professional who died destitute in the so-called Golden Age – just not so golden for the hundreds of players, who were the workhorses of the game.

Brodkin also includes a section of 'Fascinating facts' about Crossland's career and 'Cricket's curse' about others accused of throwing. Although this is only a short book, Brodkin does justice to a fine player.

**Ric Sissons**

*The Cricket Statistician* [ASC&H Journal]

Possible chuckers have been around in these reviews. Roy Gilchrist (definitely not proven) and now Jack Crossland (probably proven). Stuart Brodkin has set aside his Lancashire affiliations and on the balance of probabilities, finds that Jack Crossland was likely the purveyor of an illegal action/ A handy little guide to those with dubious actions forms part of this very good little book.

Oddly, much in the way that Al Capone was finally jailed because of income tax irregularities, rather than the number of bodies that kept turning up in his near vicinity, Jack Crossland was forced out of cricket because of a problem with a residential

qualification. Lord Harris banged on about Crossland's 'unfair action' in 1885, not helped by a three-ball 'duck' at Crossland's hands and then by a remarkable coincidence, an MCC Committee decided that Crossland had been living in Nottinghamshire and was thus ineligible to play for Lancashire. Connoisseurs of the droll should at this point try and source a copy of Lord Harris's autobiography, *A Few Short Runs*, described accurately by Benny Green as 'unintentionally hilarious.' In this, Harris delights in telling the story of how he managed to get the south African amateur (of course) SS Schultz on the field as part of his team with no eligibility whatsoever. How Jack Crossland would have enjoyed the joke – or possibly not!

This is a really nice little offering, and I happily spent some time with it when the postie flipped it through the letter box today. I imagine that any member would similarly enjoy the book should they choose to purchase.

**John Symons**

*The Journal of The Cricket Society*

## **The Python and the Butterfly Net. Edward Long: The Last Lobster?**

Stephen Musk

Published 16 November 2023

We are all products of our formative years, which is no doubt why I have always delighted in the writing and commentary of John Arlott, for ever unable to decide whether my favourite description was of Clive Lloyd's batting (like a man knocking a thistle-top off with a walking stick), or Asif Masood's approach to the wicket (like Groucho Marx chasing a pretty waitress).

If it has done nothing else however Stephen Musk's latest monograph, on the subject of Edward Long, has introduced me to an even more appealing comparison, that of an anonymous writer in a 1911 edition of *The Barrow Herald and Advertiser* that, after another successful spell of bowling, the opposition batsmen's attempts to pay Long's lobbs were painfully suggestive of an old lady attempting to stop a squirming, wriggling python with a butterfly net.

That Musk was unable to resist the temptation to use that quote as a source for his title surprises me not one jot, and I can see then why the sub-title needed to be rather more prosaic, Edward Long: The Last Lobster.

There are a small and, as time passes probably dwindling, band of cricket lovers for whom the concept of underarm bowling, the art of the lobster, remains a fascinating one. Sadly as the technique is now banished by laws of the game rather than just by fashion we will probably die out altogether in a generation or two, but certainly for all of us that remain this book should be regarded as an essential purchase.

The bulk of the book is about Edward Long, a man who never played a First Class match but who did manage to cut a swathe through batsmen in club cricket in the north west of England in the Edwardian era and the years leading up to the Great War. After that conflict ended he moved to Norfolk and, in 1923 aged 46, appeared five times in the Minor Counties Championship for the county and both bowled and batted with some success.

Musk is an experienced and thorough researcher\* and it will come as no surprise to anyone who has read any of his numerous other contributions to the game that he has made an excellent job of reconstructing the life of his subject.

But there is a little more to *The Python and the Butterfly Net* than a simple biography. Reference is made more than once by Musk to Gerald Brodribb's excellent history of under arm bowling, *The Lost Art*. That book lacks just the one thing, as I observed in my review, that being an attempt to establish just what techniques lob bowling involved, and it is the interesting conclusions that Musk comes to in an attempt to analyse that really marks his latest book out.

**Martin Chandler**  
*CricketWeb*

Edward Long is not a name that will be familiar to many, but he has the distinction of being perhaps the last specialist underarm bowler to appear in important cricket (his name is found in local matches as late as 1948, when he was 71). While the bulk of his cricket was in league and club games in Lancashire and East Anglia, in 1923, following some effective performances for Norfolk Ramblers, he was selected to play for the Norfolk county

side at the age of 46 (he had previously appeared a couple of times for Lincolnshire, without much success). For the most part his record was unspectacular, but he was good enough to record figures of 4-25 against Surrey Second XI, and there are suggestions that he may have been under-bowled by his captain, Michael Falcon.

Stephen Musk, who now has a string of valuable books on Norfolk cricket to his credit, as well as one of the finest cricketing biographies of recent years, examines Long's career at both club and county level, and also considers the nature of 'lob' bowling, which is not quite as amiable and gentle as one might assume. The curious title, incidentally, comes from a somewhat poetic description of the effect Long's lob bowling had on hapless batsmen in 1921, their efforts being likened to 'an old lady attempting to stop a ... python with a butterfly net'.

**Richard Lawrence**

*The Cricket Statistician* [ASC&H Journal]



# **JT Tyldesley in Australia. The Heart and Hope of England**

Ric Sissons

Published 14 December 2023

In the past I have been known to bemoan, more than once, the absence of a full biography of the great Lancastrian batsman of the 'Golden Age', JT Tyldesley. It is something that I have generally done on those not infrequent occasions when the man behind Red Rose Books, Martin Tebay, has produced one of his short run limited editions dealing with a particular match in which JT was involved.

It is not something that I will be able to do for much longer however, as a project I was first told about some years ago is finally coming to fruition and the early months of 2024 should finally see that biography arrive, fittingly with Red Rose as the publisher. In the meantime we have, to whet our appetites, a book about JT from the pen of Ric Sissons, one of Australia's best known cricket historians, and therefore just the man to write this account of JT's two trips down under.

JT's first visit to Australia was in 1901/02, as a member of a side led by his county captain, Archie MacLaren. Two years later the MCC organised their first tour of Australia, and JT was a member of the successful side led by 'Plum' Warner that was responsible for reinventing the concept of 'The Ashes'.

The reputation that has come down the years for JT is of the one professional batsman of his era with the same stylish technique that the legendary amateurs like Ranji, MacLaren and Fry had. He is also renowned for his performances on poor wickets one of which, his 62 out of an all out total 103 in

England's second innings in the second Test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground in 1903/04 attracted universal praise.

Sissons' book, as it must be given its subject matter, covers the cricket played throughout both tours but, in truth, it is not so much about that as the social structure of cricket in England at the time and more particularly the respective roles of the gentlemen amateurs and professional players, an area thoroughly explored by Sissons in his groundbreaking *The Players: A Social History of the Professional Cricketer*, published in 1988.

What makes this book so interesting, apart from an account of two Test series that are not particularly well chronicled elsewhere, is the account of what went on behind the scenes. Tyldesley was a rather different man to most professionals in that he also had his own business, a sports outfitters, so he clearly had a business brain. The negotiations over his and other pro's fees for the tours, particularly the latter one, are fascinating. Let down badly in the end JT, unsurprisingly, declined the opportunity to tour Australia again in 1907/08.

Sissons' account draws heavily on contemporary sources, and in particular letters written by JT that were published at the time. They give an interesting flavour of the times and how, despite his reputation as a poor businessman, MacLaren's trip was, commercially if not in cricketing terms, considerable more successful than that organised by the MCC. Published in a signed limited edition of 62 copies, to coincide with that remarkable innings at the MCG, JT Tyldesley in Australia is an excellent read.

**Martin Chandler**

*CricketWeb*