



T.E.R. COOK (SUSSEX 1922-37)

Sometimes a cricketer has the misfortune to be born at the wrong time. With an England Eleven which included Hobbs, Sutcliffe, Hendren, Woolley and A.P.F. Chapman it was not easy for other batsmen to find a place. Any young cricketer, how ever good, had to stand in the wings, patiently waiting.

Thomas Edwin Reid Cook was born at Cuckfield on January 4th 1901. When he was only sixteen he joined the Royal Navy and saw service off Archangel in H.M.S. Glow-Worm. After the War he returned to civilian life and had several terms at the Crystal Palace School of Engineering. Unable to get a suitable job, Cook joined Brighton and Hove Albion F.C. in the autumn of 1921. When the summer came round he wanted to keep himself fit and gladly accepted the suggestion of Mr. E.B. Woollan, who represented Mid-Sussex District on the Sussex C.C.C. Committee, that he should have a trial with Sussex. Arthur Gilligan, captain of Sussex at the time, tells me that Cook had played only one game for Cuckfield 2nd XI and the following Saturday he found himself playing for his county! Gilligan required him to bowl. "But I don't bowl," said Cook. "You jolly wellwill bowl," said his skipper, and very shortly this young player was taking the first of 80 wickets which he captured for his club. But it is as a batsman that he will go down in Sussex cricket history.

Cook made 50 in his first away match, against Lancashire, mainly at the expense of Parkin on a wet and somewhat difficult wicket. This must have given him confidence, as from 1922 until 1935 he was never dropped for indifferent play. In Sussex Cricket, A.E.R. Gilligan writes of Cook: "He showed such promising form that he proved a valuable find. He was a typical Sussex batsman who preferred to have a good beat rather than play for keeps." Of him in 1926 Gilligan continues: "Tommy was the most improved player in our side, and his success was due to his intense keenness and a great willingness to listen to good advice. He would study various batsmen's methods, and he copied Patsy Hendren in his quickness on his feet in dealing with slow bowling."

In the winters Cook continued with the Albion and in the 1924-5 season he played at centre-forward for England against Wales, an unusual honour for a Third Division player. On March 5th 1927 he was awarded a benefit by the Albion and on March 14th 1928 he scored his 100th goal in League Football. In his eight years as an Albion player he scored 143 goals. Later, he played briefly for Bristol Rovers and Northfleet.

But Tommy Cook preferred cricket to football and said that he would play the former all the year round if possible. He explained the team feeling which had grown up in the Sussex side, and wrote: "We of Sussex, all Sussex born and bred, seem to have a county spirit that can never be quite so strong in teams of mixed counties and nationalities. This county spirit seems to give us a will to win stronger than the incentive of the £2 bonus." This is an interesting outlook when viewed in the context of the game today.

Cook may have been unlucky not to have played cricket for England, but he was part of a Sussex side which will never be forgotten. Arthur Gilligan and his brother, Harold, Duleepsinhji and Colonel Watson of the amateurs, Tate, Bowley, Wensley (whose best man Cook had been), George Cox senior, 'Tich'

Cornford, the Langridges and the Parks: the only surprising thing is that Sussex never won the Championship.

In the autumn of 1929 Cook accepted a coaching post at Western Province, South Africa, with headquarters at Cape Town. Later a Brighton man was quoted as saying: "There never was a centre-forward as good as Tommy. I only wish we had him back." But soon Cook's winters were regularly taken up with his coaching in South Africa and his wish to play cricket all the year round was being fulfilled.

He continued to improve as a batsman and he was also a fine fielder, particularly at third man; I recall him speeding round the boundary, picking up and throwing in without ever changing step. In 1934 an article by William Pollock was headed: 'SHOULD BE COOK'S TOUR - SUSSEX HINT TO ENGLAND.' Pollock wrote: "When they come to pick the England team for the West Indies this winter, I suggest that Cook should be given a show. Here is a very attractive cricketer, fast in the field and one of the quickest-footed batsmen playing." I remember with delight the sight of Cook dancing down the pitch to the slow bowling, making it whatever length he wished. But his ambition to play for England at cricket as well as football was not fulfilled.

Tommy Cook was a sportsman in the very best sense of the word. On two occasions he made catches which were 'not up'. On seeing the batsman departing for the pavilion he called him back: such was the nature of cricket in those days! One of these batsmen was Patsy Hendren, the other Len Creese who later, strangely enough, became head groundsman at the County Ground in Hove.

There were, however, many true catches in Tommy's career, one of which is described graphically by Dudley Carew in *England Over*. "Cook, fielding just in front of the screen, jumped to it, got both hands to it, pushed it up in the manner of a goal-keeper, and caught it again with his right arm outstretched. There are a few moments in cricket which stand out in the lens of memory, clear, tranquil and indestructible, and to whatever age I may happen to live, however far my life may stray from these broad, pleasant paths which wander through the English countryside and the sounds and activity of normal existence, I know that I shall, in whatsoever ultimate isle destiny may cast me up upon, have only to close my eyes to see again the almost comical look of anxiety upon Cook's face as he judged the flight of the ball before jumping for it." I witnessed this catch at Hastings and can say that Mr. Carew's description of it is at once poetic and accurate. The hitter of the near six was A.W. Carr.

Tommy Cook's mother was one of his greatest supporters. George Cox junior tells me of an occasion when his own father, Mrs. Joe Vine and Mrs. Cook were watching from the pavilion stand when Tommy made a spectacular catch on the boundary. Rising to her feet and addressing all within earshot Mrs. Cook called out, "I'm his mother!"

The sparrow that was killed at Lord's achieved immortality by being stuffed and preserved as a relic, but it is not generally known that an Oval sparrow suffered a similar fate, being killed, in 1937, by a drive from Cook. Strudwick, wicket-keeper turned scorer, is reported to have said: "It must have been a fledgling. The ground sparrows are used to dodging the ball." They doubtless still are, though there appear to be more pigeons than sparrows today.

Throughout his whole career he seems to have had an aversion to wicket-keepers. "At Leicester," he once said, "I became so frightened of Sidwell, the wicket-keeper, and so concerned about my wicket, that I spread-eagled the stumps when I was playing back to a ball from Geary." A look at Wisden will confirm this.

In 1933 Sussex were second to Yorkshire in the Championship Table: Cook made five centuries and headed the Sussex batting averages, but his best season was in 1934, when, again top of the county averages, he scored 2,132 runs for an average of 54.67. The highest score of his career had been made in 1930

when he scored 278. On this occasion the Rev. F.L. Staples of Brighton, wrote: "I noticed that Tommy Cook wore his sweater whilst scoring the first 241 runs of his innings v. Hampshire, and this on a moderately warm day! Surely this is at least a "Cricket Curiosity" if not a record."

In 1935 he experienced the first really bad patch in his batting and became very depressed. One of those who played with him at that time tells how Cook, after a small score, would return to the dressing-room, throw down his bat and sit moping in a corner and it was no good anyone trying to comfort him. The following season was not very much better, but his son tells me that his father always insisted that, even if you were not getting runs, you could at least look like a cricketer and that he was always very particular about being well turned out, both on and off the field.

In 1937, when he scored 1,598 runs, he received a well-earned benefit in the home game against Warwickshire: this brought him over £1,000 - a fair sum in those days. At a dinner at the end of the season, given by the President, Mr. Miller Hallett, it was announced that Cook had suggested earlier in the year that his contract should not be renewed as he wished to embark on a business career in South Africa. Mr. Miller Hallett wished him every possible prosperity and happiness in his new life, and Cook thanked everyone for all their kindness and comradeship during his fifteen or sixteen years with the Club. He said that it was not easy to leave them and he knew that he would feel "just a little heartache".

But before Tommy sailed for South Africa in the M.V. Stirling Castle the Sussex XI played several games against Sussex village sides to augment his benefit. These were at Rye, where Cook made 102; at Haywards Heath, where the home team beat the county; and on Mr. A.B. Home's beautiful ground at Ditton Place, Balcome, when Sussex took on the 'Ducks', who were captained by Mr. Home's actor son, David. The last match of all was against Lewes Priory on the Stanley Turner Recreation Ground, where Maurice Tate, Jim and Harry Parks, James and John Langridge all took part.

After playing a few games for N.E. Transvaal, including one against the M.C.C., Tommy Cook became 'mine host' at the Prince Alfred Hotel in Simons town. He wrote to me from there, sending me some South African stamps and telling me of the lovely countryside and wishing he had "a real posh camera" as he felt that his own did not do justice to all the beauty. But the heartache was obviously there. "I suppose the boys will soon be at practice again. I have not played cricket since November and really do not even feel I want to." He told of visits by 'Tich' Cornford and of E. Davies of Glamorgan and Len Hopwood of Lancashire: one can picture them going over old games and innings that had been played. In this letter Tommy stated that he hoped "to get home in about three years time, that is, of course, if war does not break out before then." But war did break out and Tommy Cook joined the South African Air Force, in which he served as a corporal. In 1943 there was a tragic accident at an Air School in which he saw several of his friends burned to death and he, himself, was badly injured and in hospital for six months.

After the war he returned to England and became manager of Brighton and Hove Albion for the season 1947-48. The Handbook for that year says: "His appointment is a popular one and we were delighted to secure his services, feeling confident he will prove a real acquisition to our Club." Sadly, and for reasons which I do not know, this was not a success. I only met Cook once again, on the County Cricket Ground, and I felt that his spirits were very low. One day, in 1950, I picked up a paper and read 'A GREAT SPORTSMAN DIES'. Tommy Cook, having suffered heart trouble and chronic bronchitis, had died in the Royal Sussex County Hospital at the age of 49.

I had met his son Roger, a few times, when, as a boy of about eleven he had been watching his father play for Sussex. Recently I met Roger again and was delighted that he, too, is an enthusiastic cricketer and a member of the Forty Club. Playing for Haywards Heath against Brighton and Hove in 1950 he took all 10 wickets for 11 runs. He told me that he was a fast bowler and had had a trial with Sussex. Maurice Tate and Bert Wensley were his godparents, so he

must have had plenty of encouragement.

On hearing that Tommy Cook is buried in Cuckfield Churchyard with his father I went there one day and thought how right it was that a fine Sussex cricketer should lie in the heart of the Sussex Weald, with the South Downs gazing across at him. In the winter of 1974-75, when England's batsmen were falling before Lillee and Thomson, Roger had been to look for his father's grave and an old gardener had asked if he could help. On being told who Roger's father was, he said, "Gor! Couldn't we do with him in Australia now!" If Tommy Cook could have heard, how pleased he would have been.