

Gerald Howat, *Walter Hammond*, George Allen & Unwin, London and Sydney 1984, Illus., bibliog., index, pp.160, \$19.95.

Gerald Howat's excellent new biography of Walter Hammond places the career of one of England's all-time-greats in a new realistic light. Hammond, idolised by thousands during the 1930s, was 'a reluctant star' who found it uncomfortable to face a crowd at close quarters. Howat is a perceptive writer who never fails to realise that a player like Hammond was more than the sum of the runs scored, the wickets taken and the catches held.

Hammond was one of the last generation of England cricketers whose personal circumstances identified them with the Empire. For example, the 1932-33 MCC party to Australia included Douglas Jardine, whose family were influential members of the Indian legal service; Gubby Allen, who was born in Sydney; Freddy Brown, whose father ran an import-export business in Peru; the Nawab of

Pataudi, and Hammond, whose father's army postings led the young Walter to be brought up in Hong Kong and Malta.

Major Hammond was killed during the First World War just as Walter began his school career at Cirencester Grammar. Howat does not evaluate the psychological impact of this death on Hammond but, in part, it could explain why he was considered, both at school and throughout his cricketing career, as 'remote' and 'rather lonely'. His fellow professionals at Gloucestershire remember Hammond as rarely praising their achievements and preferring a book to their company. 'An isolated genius' who when he became captain 'led by example rather than by guidance'.

Pelham Warner rightly called Hammond 'one of the immortals' and his playing record bears comparison. The career aggregate of 50,551 runs (average 56.10) places him behind Hobbs, Woolley, Hendren, Mead and Grace, while his 167 hundreds has only been surpassed by Hobbs and Hendren. In May 1927 he scored 1000 runs - a feat only otherwise achieved by W.G. Grace in 1895 and Charlie Hallows in 1928 (Hayward, Bradman - twice - Edrich and Turner all made 1000 runs before June but their totals included some runs scored in April). His first tour of Australia occurred in 1928-29 and he established a new test batting total of 905 runs (average 113.12) which has only been bettered by Don Bradman's 974 in 1930.

Comparisons with Bradman were inevitable as both were the batting mainstays of their respective sides. As an accumulator of runs per innings Bradman stands above Hammond. To his credit Howat avoids any pointless attempt to engage in a Bradman versus Hammond contest.

At times during his career Hammond could claim to be an all-rounder. He took 83 wickets in test matches and a total of 819 catches during his 31-year career.

Hammond was one of a select few professionals whose talent gained them access to social circles above their class position. Hobbs, Sutcliffe and Hammond were professionals who acted and occasionally batted like amateurs. All three had a reputation for immaculate dress and neat, oiled hair. Nonetheless the establishment's acceptance of this trio was a recognition of the changing status of the professionals.

Hammond's grammar school education and his family's military background divorced him from the other Gloucestershire professionals. According to Howat, Hammond stopped playing football for Bristol Rovers because it was 'more proletarian than he cared for' and rather than wash his own kit he paid the trainer's wife to do the work. His marriage into a Yorkshire textile family was a union of fame and fortune which eventually ended in divorce.

In 1936 the Gloucestershire committee asked Hammond to consider becoming an amateur and captain the county. As senior professional he was earning £450 per annum, The committee offered him the post of assistant secretary - Hammond refused - the money was insufficient. The following year he did turn amateur. He was given a directorship with Marsham Tyres, a Dunlop subsidiary, and various MCC members exerted pressure to ensure the appropriate offer was forthcoming. He accepted a salary of £2000 and was then free to captain England. At the time it was still unthinkable for the MCC to ask a professional to captain England.

Hammond emigrated to South Africa but, like so many of the century's leading professionals the business venture in which he was involved went bankrupt. Subsequently he was employed as the first sports administrator at Natal University.

After his death in 1965 from a heart attack, E.W. Swanton wrote that Hammond was 'the most majestic presence that ever graced a cricket field since W.G.'

Gerald Howat's biography does ample justice to the majesty of Hammond the player, but, importantly, takes the reader beyond the statistics to the mental and personal anguish of the man himself. As Howat concludes, Walter Hammond was 'a great public figure but a very private person'.

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