

E.W. Swanton, *Gubby Allen. Man of Cricket.* Hutchinson/Stanley Paul, London, 1985. pp.311. \$24.95.

Gubby Allen was born in Sydney 83 years ago but played his cricket in, and for, England. In the public mind he is most widely remembered as the fast bowler who refused Douglas Jardine's instructions to bowl bodyline during the 1932-33 test series. Four years later, partly because of his Australian connections, Allen captained the English tourists who were sent to restore amicable relations, and subsequently lost the Ashes.

Gubby Allen. Man of Cricket is a significant publication firstly because the author is 'Jim' Swanton, the most venerable of all contemporary cricket journalists, and secondly because the subject is and has been one of the pillars of the English (and hence international) cricket establishment. Gubby Allen stands on a par with Lord Harris, Lord Hawke and Sir Pelham Warner.

The Allen family has a distinguished colonial history in Australia dating from 1816. Gubby's great grandfather, George, became Mayor of Sydney and also founded the city's oldest firm of solicitors; while his grandfather, Wigram, was Speaker in the New South Wales legislature; but his father, Walter, returned to England when Gubby (or Obbie as he is known in the family) was only six. Gubby was educated at Eton - a cricket-conscious housemaster discovered 'a last minute vacancy' - and Trinity College, Cambridge from which he was rusticated after two years for doing 'no work'. He played for Middlesex from 1921-1950, captained England and after retiring from active participation became Chairman of the selectors for seven years. Within the Marylebone Cricket Club he was variously Committee member, President, Treasurer (the position of real power) and Trustee.

During his playing days Gubby had to work. Virtually all the latter-day amateurs, as compared to their brethren at the turn of the century, were forced by economic circumstances to plan a career off the cricket field. Obviously it was unthinkable for a man of Allen's class background to play as a professional. In 1933 Gubby was elected to the Stock Exchange.

Allen's rise of pre-eminence at Lord's in the post-war years reflects a significant social change within the power structures of

English cricket. When Gubby first became a member of the MCC Committee in 1935 the dominant figures emanated from the landed aristocracy and were men of considerable political influence via the Conservative Party. For example, at the time of bodyline the MCC Committee included Viscount Lewisham, Lord Hawke, Sir Stanley Jackson, Sir Kynaston Studd, Viscount Bridgeman, Lord Aberdare, Lord Hampden, the Earl of Lucan and Viscount Ullswater. Fifty years later there is hardly a title, let alone a 'noble' on the Committee. The middle class and men from the City have gained the ascendancy.

In E.W. Swanton, Gubby Allen has the ideal biographer, both are elder statesmen at Lord's: one in the Committee room, the other in the Press box. Swanton and Allen have been comrades-in-arms and close friends for many years and while this guarantees the subject's cooperation it also, understandably, can blinker the author. Swanton notes that one of their mutual friends considers Allen to be 'difficult, utterly independent, incorruptible, irascible, attractive'. But Swanton neither confirms nor denies the 'difficult' or 'irascible' traits in Gubby's personality. That, and the slightly overwritten style aside, this book does ample justice to one of England's best all-round cricketers; a meticulous administrator and the perfect city-gent, who as Swanton concludes, it would be 'difficult indeed to imagine Lord's and the game without'.

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