

Peter Wynne-Thomas, *'Give Me Arthur': A Biography of Arthur Shrewsbury*. Arthur Barker, London, 1985. pp.163. \$32.95.

Arthur Shrewsbury's obituary in *Wisden* recognises that he was 'the greatest professional batsman of his day... On sticky wickets he was, by universal consent, without an equal.'

In the English summer of 1887 he amassed a record 1653 runs at an average of 78.71 (W.G. Grace trailed with 54.10) including eight centuries. The weekly publication *Cricket* praised Shrewsbury's innings in that year as 'without a parallel', 'truly remarkable' and 'chanceless'. Having topped the first-class batting averages in 1886 he repeated the feat in 1887, 1890, 1891, 1892 and 1902. As Robert Blatchford, the famous pioneering socialist and editor of the *Clarion*, remarked Arthur Shrewsbury was 'the Andrea del Sarto of cricket: the perfect batsman.'

But as Peter Wynne-Thomas explains Arthur was much more. Despite his batting prowess he never secured a permanent professional position, instead he occupied his time in running a large Nottingham sports manufacturer and retailer, organising four tours to Australia - including the first round-the-world tour by a group of English cricketers, the premier English rugby tour of Australia and managed to retain an interest in the family lace firm.

Arthur Shrewsbury made his debut for Nottinghamshire in 1875, although he also played for the All-England Eleven and the United South of England Eleven, two of the remaining itinerant, professional touring sides. Six years later Shrewsbury, with six other

senior notts professionals, took unprecedented strike action against the County Committee. The latter were led by the Club secretary 'Hell-fire' Jack Holden, who also happened to be Nottingham's Chief Constable.

Wynne-Thomas provides an excellent account of this significant dispute. Needless to say the cricket establishment roundly condemned the professionals' action and eventually they succumbed and apologised. The players' demands included engagement for the season rather than on a match-by-match basis and the automatic award of a benefit game after ten years service.

As a consequence of the seven's absence for most of 1881 a number of young players made their debuts - Nottinghamshire was the cricket nursery of England and there was no shortage of available professional talent in the weaving and mining villages. One such debutant was William Gunn, who later founded Gunn and Moore the famous sports manufacturers and outfitters. Prior to the Oval test against Australia, fifteen years later, Gunn and four other professionals demanded £20 instead of the customary £10 England match fee. They failed but as Basil Haynes and John Lucas point out in their excellent *The Trent Bridge Battery - The Story of the Sporting Gunns* (Collins, London, 1985), 'Gunn was not a greedy man. We have seen that by this stage in his career he did not need the money. What he did expect was proper recognition of his worth.'

Proper recognition of his worth is what Arthur Shrewsbury always sought. Like William Gunn he was a successful businessman; he had seen cricket develop into a major spectator sport; he knew about the hypocritical behaviour of certain so-called amateurs who received 'expenses' and salaries well in excess of the highest remunerations paid to the professionals and he resented the way that the Australian tourists were feted and treated as amateurs, when in fact they were effectively professionals and from the same social class as Shrewsbury himself. According to Arthur the Australians were making 'money under false pretences'.

In one of Shrewsbury's letters he comments that 'the expenses of each amateur member of Lord Harris's team were more than double those of any one of the professionals.' Wynne-Thomas quotes extensively from a remarkable collection of 300 Shrewsbury letters, which

arrived in the Trent Bridge library, where Wynne-Thomas is librarian, in a carrier bag under the arm of one of Arthur's surviving relatives.

The Shrewsbury correspondence settles once and for all that the 1888 rugby tour to Australia was a professional event. For example A.E. Stoddart, the Middlesex and England 'amateur' cricketer, who also played on that rugby tour, received £200 in 'expenses'.

Like a number of other notable pre-First War cricketers, such as Andrew Stoddart, Will Scotton (a school mate and fellow Notts professional with Shrewsbury) and Albert Trott, Arthur Shrewsbury committed suicide. He shot himself in May 1903. Despite some fine batting during the previous summer and being 'quite prosperous', Wynne-Thomas shows convincingly that Arthur was suffering from 'acute hypochondria' and thought mistakenly that he had an incurable disease.

'Give Me Arthur' is a splendid biography, meticulously researched and written - as you would expect from an historian who is a leading figure in the Association of Cricket Statisticians, the author of the award winning *Nottinghamshire Cricketers 1821-1914* and joint author of the invaluable reference work *Who's Who of Cricketers*.

Arthur Shrewsbury has had a long wait but now he has the biography his contribution to cricket so richly warranted.

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