

Chapter 3: Historical Context

3.1 Introduction



What do they know of cricket, who only cricket know?

C. L. R. James

- 3.1.1 Cricket venerates both its history and its literary culture. English cricket's long period of development establishes cricket as a link to the nation's past. But insofar as all history is narrative, and historians are in the business of selecting topics and information out of which they fashion those narratives, our game is also highly selective in what it chooses to recall. Nostalgic visions of Lord's as the 'home of cricket', MCC as the originator and arbiter of the game's rules, and the English as the original cricket nation are symbols of prestige. They mix in the national imaginary with picture-postcards of cricket played in white flannels on pristine village greens; a link to an earlier and 'simpler' time.
- 3.1.2 Furthermore, when looking beyond England,⁴² to the fact that cricket is a global game played by a diverse range of people, we perhaps too easily trade on the notion that 'cricket brings people together'. The 'Spirit of Cricket' set out in the Preamble to the Laws of the game states that cricket "*brings together people from different nationalities, cultures and religions*."⁴³ Whilst undoubtedly true – cricket is a shared heritage and shared language that crosses boundaries of nation, religion and ethnicity – it is also too simplistic.
- 3.1.3 By way of example consider the Barbados Cricket Buckle, an engraved belt buckle from the 1780s that depicts a slave, unmistakably in bondage, with bat in hand, in front of a set of stumps.⁴⁴ The buckle was found in a riverbed in the north of England in the 1970s. How it got there is unknown, but the artefact reminds us – despite the overwhelming emphasis in public discourse still being on the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 – of Britain's long history as one of the world's biggest slave empires.⁴⁵ It is also a striking depiction of how cricket was passed on and adopted often in the most unequal of contexts. Cricket 'bringing people together' takes on a different meaning when looked at from this perspective.
- 3.1.4 As such, we believe that cricket needs to engage more frankly with the fact that, despite conjuring images of tradition, continuity, and togetherness, cricket's history is also replete with tensions and social conflicts, even histories of brutality and oppression.
- 3.1.5 Struggles have been waged between the rural and the urban; social classes; 'gentlemen' and 'players'; North and South; private and state educated; men and women; and between White colonisers and 'non-White'⁴⁶ peoples, dating from the age of the British slave trade and imperialism but resonating far beyond, into the postcolonial age.

⁴² This Chapter focuses primarily on the history of cricket in England, rather than England and Wales, because it considers concepts of 'Englishness' and the role of Empire in the development of the game.

⁴³ <https://www.lords.org/mcc/the-laws-of-cricket/preamble-to-the-laws-spirit-of-cricket>

⁴⁴ Clem Seecharan, *Muscular Learning: Cricket and Education in the Making of the British West Indies at the end of the 19th Century*. (Kingston Jm: Ian Randle, 2006).

⁴⁵ Scanlan, Padraic X. *Slave empire: How slavery built modern Britain*. Hachette UK, 2020.

⁴⁶ We would not ordinarily use the term 'non-White' because it centres whiteness, but have used it at appropriate points in the context of this Chapter to reflect – and highlight – the language and attitudes of the time.

- 3.1.6 Most often, these conflicts have revolved around questions of power and control by an elite group. In this respect, cricket has often operated on the basis of barriers to access. Historically-excluded groups have been forced to go to extraordinary lengths to gain admittance to the privileged spaces of the playing field, the club, the dressing room, and the management committee. Importantly, these problems are far from being isolated in a distant past. Stereotypes about ‘racial characteristics’, the ‘proper’ role of men and women in the game, as well as tropes about class and regional differences, have all been handed down over the generations.
- 3.1.7 We believe that it is vital for the game to develop a more critical and self-aware approach, to be more cognisant of the ways in which both its past and present are imbued with social, political, economic, and cultural dimensions.
- 3.1.8 We approach this task in the spirit of the great Trinidadian writer C. L. R. James, who famously prefaced his treatise on Caribbean cricket and colonialism – *Beyond a Boundary* (1963) – by asking “*What do they know of cricket, who only cricket know?*”⁴⁷ If we are to understand the nature and extent of (in)equity in cricket, our sense of what cricket history is must go beyond ‘the game’: dates, scorecards, names and numbers. Developing a better sense of cricket history reveals many of the unspoken assumptions, inherited from the past, that have enabled particular groups of people to dominate the game in terms of power and access to resources, whilst others have remained at the margins. It can also help everyone in the game gain a better understanding of where contemporary injustices have come from.
- 3.1.9 We offer a historical context for the key themes that underpin the Commission’s Terms of Reference, and in doing so develop three central arguments:
- Cricket has not simply ‘reflected’ conflicts in wider society, it has frequently been central to fostering or reproducing those conflicts.
 - Typically, elite social groups have commanded most of the power and control within cricket, and have resisted change.
 - Although cricket has a long history, the period after about 1860 up to World War I was pivotal in terms of establishing the idea that cricket exemplified a specific version of Englishness that was White, middle to upper class, and profoundly male-dominated. This image was exported throughout Britain’s empire.

3.2 Rural origins

- 3.2.1 The historical origins of cricket lie in rural southern England, where it was widely played by both peasantry and aristocracy in the 17th and 18th century, with vibrant local traditions and rivalries. The game rose in popularity through the 18th century, becoming a spectator sport drawing large crowds.
- 3.2.2 Rural cricket in the 18th century saw widespread female participation. One of the earliest recorded women’s matches took place in 1745 “*between 11 maids of Bramley and 11 maids of Hambleden.*” According to the Reading Mercury, there was “*of bothe sexes the greatest number that ever was seen on such an occasion. The girls involved, batted, ran and caught as well as most men could do in that game.*”⁴⁸
- 3.2.3 Broadly speaking, cricket in the 18th century was more of a recreation, less codified and regulated, more diverse, and – according to later Victorian sensibilities – more unruly. Money was a big factor in cricket from the start. In rural areas, charging ‘gate money’ was difficult since cricket was mostly played on open common land. The main sources of income were derived from selling food and beverages, but betting on the outcome of the game, or on players’ individual exploits, was central to the charm of cricket for English landed elites. Gambling was also the cause of violence at cricket matches, both rural and urban.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ C. L. R. James, *Beyond a Boundary* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1963), preface.

⁴⁸ Isabelle Duncan, *Skirting the Boundary: A History of Women’s Cricket* (London: Biteback, 2013).

⁴⁹ Dominic Malcolm, *Globalizing Cricket: Englishness, Empire and Identity* (London, 2014), p. 20.

- 3.2.4 Among the first to recognise the further commercial opportunities of cricket were pub landlords, men such as George Smith who charged admission to the Artillery Ground in Finsbury as early as the 1740s. This model would be copied by other cricket entrepreneurs like Thomas Lord, of the eponymous Lord's ground in London, opened on its present site in 1814.
- 3.2.5 The balance of cricket between urban and rural would ebb and flow during the 18th century, and the development of clubs was part of this process. The London Cricket Club was founded in 1722, a club for 'noblemen' and 'gentlemen', based out of the Star and Garter Inn in the centre of London. Most of their games were played at the Artillery Ground in Finsbury. The club was multi-functional, but both socialising and gambling cultures were key to its success.
- 3.2.6 Disbanded during the Seven Years' War (1756–63), many patrons retreated to the countryside and gathered around the renowned Hambledon cricket club in Hampshire. This became perhaps the main centre of cricket from about 1765 for the next 30 years. By the early 1780s, leading figures from the old London club were looking to relocate back to the city, commissioning Thomas Lord to find a private venue. He opened Lord's Old Ground in 1787 in Marylebone, where, in the same year, the London Cricket Club reinvented itself as Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC). It would become the most famous, and undoubtedly the most powerful, cricket club in the world.
- 3.2.7 By the late 18th century, the 'great aristocrats' and 'gentlemen' were threatening the vitality of the rural game by poaching the best players for urban matches, particularly for their new Marylebone club. Although the peasant and lower middle class game continued to be popular, by about 1815 the centre of gravity shifted decisively towards London and the emerging industrial cities in the English Midlands and the North. This North–South element in turn created a tension between geography and class, initiating a long-running battle with the aristocratic establishment at MCC.⁵⁰

3.3 The making of a national sport

- 3.3.1 Perhaps the most significant catalyst for the transformation of cricket as a rambunctious and diverse Georgian game into a Victorian national sport was the Industrial Revolution. Between roughly 1750 and 1900, technological and economic change had a big impact on leisure and games in England generally, particularly so for cricket.
- 3.3.2 The social impacts were multiple and complex, but industrialisation created significant new wealth for a growing middle class of industrialists who sat well above the peasantry and working classes in terms of wealth and power, yet below the aristocracy in terms of land ownership and political power. To ingratiate themselves with their social superiors and partly to displace them – no doubt also to enjoy themselves – newly-rich industrialists were keen to adopt the leisure pursuits of the aristocracy and benefit from the cultural and even political influence cricket provided.
- 3.3.3 Urbanisation also meant more clubs, games, and spectators, all of which added up to more money. Despite deep inequalities of wealth, in the second half of the 19th century increasing productivity did lead to an increase in working class incomes and hence greater demand for commercialised spectator sport, offering entrepreneurs new and concentrated markets. Between roughly 1840 and 1860 the number of county clubs almost doubled, and the number of county games tripled, although from a relatively low base. In the next 30 years those numbers tripled again; and between 1869 and 1896 MCC, by that stage *the* club of English cricket, quadrupled its number of fixtures.⁵¹

⁵⁰ David Underdown, *Start of Play: Cricket and Culture in 18th-century England* (London: Allen Lane, 2000).

⁵¹ Keith A. P. Sandiford, *Cricket and the Victorians* (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1994), p. 53.

- 3.3.4 Cricket enjoyed a dramatic expansion after about 1860 as it was elevated to its position as a national sport, for reasons that were as much to do with ideas and culture as economics. Among many changes, one would have a long-lasting legacy for the culture of cricket: the game began to embody and epitomise an idealised version of middle and upper class, ‘manly’ Englishness.
- 3.3.5 The Victorian cult of athleticism and ‘muscular Christianity’, with its link between physical and moral improvement, became central to this ideal. Building on the Duke of Wellington’s supposed claim that the battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton, in 1841, by General Order, army barracks were required to have their own cricket pitches.⁵² The ‘public schools’⁵³ – nursery for national and imperial ruling elites – were at the vanguard of promoting this as an ideology. By the 1860s, cricket had become an essential part of the curriculum, “*a primary device used by the guardians of England’s public schools to write a cultural code upon their youthful charges.*”⁵⁴
- 3.3.6 The wildly successful Tom Brown’s Schooldays – an 1857 novel by Thomas Hughes, himself a cricketer who played at Lord’s for Oxford University – chronicled life at Rugby School during the years of Dr Thomas Arnold’s headmastership; having cricket as one its central themes, it helped to popularise the culture and mores of the English public school across England and Empire.
- 3.3.7 Ironically, W. G. Grace, English cricket’s most iconic figure and successful populariser, did not attend public school. He was, though, undoubtedly England’s first properly national sporting hero. Throughout his extraordinarily long career, Grace was the best batter and a leading bowler in England. His physical presence – tall, bearded, profoundly robust – made him one of the most recognisable and popular of all 19th century Victorians, perhaps only behind Queen Victoria herself.
- 3.3.8 Alongside the ascendancy of Grace, by the 1890s a prominent cult of ‘amateurism’ had developed: men who did not play cricket in order to make a living, in theory at least. Grace himself was nominally an ‘amateur’, having qualified as a professional medical doctor, but he is widely believed to have made far more money from cricket (typically paid as ‘expenses’) than medical practice.
- 3.3.9 The amateur cricketer was supposed to know instinctively how to play the game, not just to the letter but to the spirit of the law, ‘walking’ from the wicket, never questioning the umpire’s decision, acting with magnanimity in victory and defeat, and playing in an entertaining style. Amateurs of course had to be independently wealthy, floating above the grubby business of money, and they elevated the cult of cricket further, “*combining older notions of honour and chivalry with an evangelical belief in the purity of moral purpose of competition and physical endeavour.*”⁵⁵
- 3.3.10 Alongside the development of local and county clubs and the inaugural county championship in 1890, cricket was propagated within voluntary organisations, church societies, old boys’ associations, and in the workplace, from coalmines to factories. Yet the centre of financial power had moved towards the big cities, and the rules of the game were made by one small section of the elite in London: MCC. By the end of the 19th century, cricket had become ‘national’, but in deeply hierarchical form, dominated by a wealthy elite.

⁵² Hew Strachan, ‘The early Victorian army and the nineteenth-century revolution in government,’ *The English Historical Review*, xcvi, ccclxxvii (1980), p. 783.

⁵³ ‘Public school’ originally refers to a small number of fee-paying schools, ‘public’ only insofar as they differed to private, at home tuition, the preferred method of education for the old aristocracy. They are not to be confused with state-provided, public education. The seven schools identified in the 1868 Public Schools Act were: Charterhouse, Eton, Harrow, Rugby, Shrewsbury, Westminster, and Winchester.

⁵⁴ Ian Baucom, *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire, and the locations of identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 147.

⁵⁵ Richard Holt, ‘Cricket and Englishness: the batsmen as hero,’ *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 13, 1 (1996), pp. 53–54.

3.4 An imperial game

- 3.4.1 Sport generally was inextricably linked with the racial ideology of imperialism. As the Bishop of Calcutta – J. E. C. Weldone, schooled at Eton, ex-headmaster of Harrow – put it in 1906: *“The qualities associated with sport had produced a characteristic of the British race – the power of government; for it is a quality which the race has exhibited in relation to subject peoples at many periods of English history in the many regions of the world where the flag of England flies.”*⁵⁶
- 3.4.2 Particularly in the *“final, and robustly imperial, decades of the 19th century”*, it was above all on the cricket field that public school boys were *“taught the virtues of loyalty, obedience, discipline, and conformity which were held to be the characteristic virtues of the English ‘gentleman.’”* And in acquiring these virtues, the boys *“were also quite consciously being outfitted for the responsibilities of imperial rule.”*⁵⁷
- 3.4.3 Although it was and remains a private club, as is widely known, since 1787 MCC has assumed sole authority for making the official laws of cricket. As the 19th century progressed and cricket became increasingly embedded in the social and cultural fabric of Empire, MCC’s role added ever more to the prestige and cultural power of England and English cricket.
- 3.4.4 MCC leadership was typically drawn from the aristocratic and upper middle class public schools. A good example is the 1895 MCC President, Lord Harris. An accomplished amateur cricketer, Lord Harris – born in Trinidad in the Caribbean where his father had been governor – later followed in his father’s colonial administrative footsteps by becoming governor of Bombay (now Mumbai) in India. He played for Eton, Oxford University, MCC, Kent, and England.
- 3.4.5 MCC had the power to make the rules of the game but also used its location at Lord’s – the self-styled ‘home of cricket’ – as a tool of imperial prestige. The authority of MCC and English cricket was circulated across the Empire through endless newspaper and magazine column inches, the pages of Wisden, children’s books, artist’s impressions, cigarette cards and so on. By 1914, Lord Harris claimed that MCC was *“perhaps the most venerated institution in the British Empire”*, reflecting the commonplace view that enjoyment of ‘our’ games by ‘our’ people *“wherever they were, was a wholesome expression of the naturalness of Empire.”*⁵⁸
- 3.4.6 MCC also projected its power through imperial institutions. In 1909 the first meeting of the *Imperial Cricket Conference* (ICC) was held at Lord’s, comprising three members: England, Australia and South Africa. At a second meeting a month later, rules governing Test Matches were agreed. Regular meetings took place from the 1920s onwards; during this decade, the West Indies, New Zealand and India were added. But as the membership grew, England’s dominance of the institution, with the support of its White settler colony allies, remained unquestioned.
- 3.4.7 South Africa introduced Apartheid in 1948. When it became a republic in 1961 and left the Commonwealth, it also had to withdraw from the ICC, because membership was limited only to Commonwealth countries. After this point, England and Australia enjoyed the status of ‘Foundation Members’, which meant little could be achieved unless those countries agreed. It was not until 1991 that all Test playing countries achieved equal standing within the ICC.
- 3.4.8 The ICC was in fact, as MCC’s own website makes clear, an ‘adjunct of MCC’. The President of MCC was automatically the Chairman of the ICC until that tradition was abolished in 1989, and the Secretary of MCC performed the same function for the ICC until 1993. The change of name to *International Cricket Conference* came in as late as 1965, and a meeting did not take place outside England until 1991. The re-branded International Cricket Council finally left Lord’s for its new home in Dubai in 2005.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Quoted in James A. Mangan, *The Games Ethic and Imperialism: Aspects of the Diffusion of an Ideal* (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 21–43.

⁵⁷ Ian Baucom, *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire, and the locations of identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 147.

⁵⁸ G. R. C Harris and F. S. Ashley-Cooper, *Lord’s and The MCC* (London: London and Counties Press Association, 1914), p. 209; Richard Holt, *Sport and the British: A Modern History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 227.

⁵⁹ MCC, ‘The Imperial Cricket Conference is Founded at Lord’s’:

<https://www.lords.org/lords/our-history/father-time-wall/1909-the-imperial-cricket-conference-now-known-as>

- 3.4.9 International governance was a key facet of English imperial control of the game. But cricket is perhaps first and foremost a social, cultural and leisure activity, and throughout England's – later Britain's – empire, colonisers would cut a 'square' upon which to prepare a wicket, mark out boundaries for the field, and establish the cricket club, both as a reminder of home and as part of a 'civilising mission': to demonstrate the English way of life to the 'natives'.
- 3.4.10 This is evidenced by the settler colonies in North America before and after the American Revolution, in Canada, in the slave empire that Britain established in the Caribbean from the 16th century, and in later colonies of 'conquest' beyond. One of the oldest cricket clubs established in Britain's empire was the Calcutta Club of 1792, only five years younger than MCC itself. Cricket was introduced to South Africa by colonial settlers from around 1795, and the Melbourne Cricket Club was founded by colonisers in 1838.
- 3.4.11 Clubs, generally, were spaces that enabled colonisers to gather socially, and to exclude the local 'non-White' population.⁶⁰ Controlling access to the club and the land upon which the game was played was integral to the exercise of colonial power and the establishment of a racialised, segregated social order in colonial societies.
- 3.4.12 Even if the club itself was a private space, the cricket field was both a place of exclusion and public performance. Colonised people were not allowed to play against or alongside Whites, but they could observe the game from a distance, and unsurprisingly elites in colonial societies followed a similar pattern to the English middle classes, adopting the habits and leisure pursuits of their social superiors.
- 3.4.13 A tiny number of the most privileged colonial subjects were, after much opposition, allowed to enter these spaces of White privilege. The Indian prince K. S. Ranjitsinhji made his way to Cambridge University and represented Sussex and England at cricket between 1896 and 1902. He often professed great loyalty to the Empire and freely reinforced existing racial prejudice: "*It is not at all the fact that the Indian is too lazy to play the game*", he said, responding to an interviewer's question in 1895, but it was true that "*constitutionally*" the Indian cricketer "*may not be so energetic as the Englishman*."⁶¹
- 3.4.14 In India, the Parsi community were among the first to establish elite cricket clubs for Indians, and tours were arranged to England, which provoked positive responses, for example that "*they came nearer to us in sympathy and feeling through that game than through anything else*", but also anxieties about the political implications of 'natives' adopting the imperial game.⁶² Overall, the exception tended to reinforce the rule: colonised 'non-Whites' should not play a sport that was integral both to middle and upper class English identity and to the imperial ethos.⁶³
- 3.4.15 Here, the history of cricket points to the multiple internal contradictions and longer-term 'instability' of the imperial mission. Cricket provided an accessible and demonstrable example of English 'superiority': manliness, physical prowess, and adherence to the rules of the game. But Empire was also supposed to be about a 'civilising mission', helping to improve the lot of 'backward people'. And if that mission succeeded in a cricketing sense, colonised people would take up the game, which they did, with enthusiasm and skill.⁶⁴ So, what would happen if – when – the 'natives' learned the game so well that they beat the colonial master at it?⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Mrinalini Sinha, 'Britishness, clubbability, and the colonial public sphere: the genealogy of an imperial institution in colonial India,' *Journal of British Studies*, 40, 4 (2001), pp. 489–521.

⁶¹ Interview with Ranjitsinhji, Cricket, 18 July 1895, quoted in Jack Williams, *Cricket and Race* (London: Bloomsbury, 2001), p. 20.

⁶² Cricket, 11 June 1885. Cf. Prashant Kidambi, *Cricket Country: An Indian Odyssey in the Age of Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

⁶³ Satadru Sen, *Migrant Races: Empire, Identity, and K.S. Ranjitsinhji* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004).

⁶⁴ Ramachandra Guha, *Corner of a Foreign Field: The Indian History of the British Sport* (London: Picador, 2002); Hilary Beckles, *The Development of West Indies Cricket*, Vol. 1 (London: Pluto Press, 1998).

⁶⁵ For a fictional but nonetheless powerful and engaging depiction of this dynamic, see the 2001 film *Lagaan: Once Upon a Time in India*, directed by Ashutosh Gowariker.

- 3.4.16 On the field, the imperial dimensions of cricket developed significantly in the late 19th and into the 20th century. The first ‘test’ match was played between England and Australia in 1877 in Melbourne, formalising the fraternal sense of competition between England – at the Empire’s core – and its White settler colonies overseas. South Africa joined this elite group of three ‘test’ playing nations in 1889, and for the next 39 years no others were admitted.
- 3.4.17 In 1928, a West Indies team played their first Test Matches in England, but they were captained by White men for 32 years. When a White cricketer – Cambridge educated Gerry Alexander – who was widely regarded as an inferior player to his Black peers, took over the captaincy in 1958, “*Alexander Must Go*” became an anticolonial rallying cry. C. L. R. James, then the editor of The Nation newspaper in Trinidad, wrote: “*The idea of Alexander captaining a side on which Frank Worrell is playing ...is to me quite revolting.*” It was only in 1960–61 that Worrell became the first Black man to captain the West Indies through an entire Test series.
- 3.4.18 The Test Match playing club grew again in 1930, when New Zealand was able to raise a competitive team. India was added in 1932, and Pakistan in 1952. Commentary and press reports on the early Test Matches typically expressed racism, condescension and stereotypes. According to Neville Cardus, the Black Trinidadian cricketer Learie Constantine’s game grew from “*impulses born in the sun.*” During the summer of that year, Cardus suggested it would “*be a pity if Constantine allows his crowd to endow him with the irresponsibility of a ‘Jazz’ coon cricketer.*”⁶⁶ The West Indies were stereotyped as ‘calypso’ cricketers, entertaining but prone to lose control, and commentary on South Asian cricketers tended to emphasise style over substance.

3.5 War and social change

- 3.5.1 As noted earlier, despite traditionally being seen as a ‘male’ sport, cricket had been played by women for just as long as men. Not only did the first recorded women’s match take place in 1745, but the first World Cup in 1973 was played by women, not men. However, even if women did play cricket relatively freely in the 18th century, dates and facts such as these can be misleading. By the early 1890s, whilst cricket was still played in certain private girls’ schools, Victorian male chauvinism meant female participation in sports was disparaged:⁶⁷ alongside ‘muscular Christianity’ went the ideal of the passive, childbearing woman.
- 3.5.2 In 1890, entrepreneurs set up two teams known as ‘The Original English Lady Cricketers’, playing exhibition games at county grounds. Upon encountering them, W. G. Grace declared: “*They might be original and English, but they are neither cricketers nor ladies.*”⁶⁸ Some employers offered cricket for their female workers, such as Cadburys and Boots. But much of this cricket was played secretly, behind closed doors. By 1914, there were perhaps no more than 50 women’s cricket clubs and for the most part women cricketers “*were laughed at, scoffed out of existence.*”⁶⁹
- 3.5.3 As part of the fight for political, social, and cultural emancipation, women’s suffrage campaigners began attacking bastions of male power and privilege including golf clubs, racecourses, rugby grandstands, and cricket clubs: in April 1913, the pavilions at clubs in Kent, Perthshire and Middlesex were set on fire, and in March 1914, Smethwick Cricket Club was torched, with suffrage literature left scattered on the ground.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Quoted in Duncan Hamilton, *The Great Romantic: Cricket and the Golden Age of Neville Cardus* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2019), p. 144.

⁶⁷ Nancy Joy, *Maiden Over: A Short History of Women’s Cricket* (London: Sporting Handbooks, 1950).

⁶⁸ Marcus Williams (ed), *Double Century: Cricket in The Times: Vol. I* (London: Pavilion Books, 1989), p. 100.

⁶⁹ Richard Holt, *Sport and the British: A Modern History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 128.

⁷⁰ Adam McKie, ‘Women’s sport and the feminism conundrum: the case of interwar English cricket’, *Sport in History*, 40.4 (2020), p. 505.

- 3.5.4 World War I had a significant impact in terms of women's political rights. In 1918 the Representation of the People Act allowed women over the age of 30 to vote, provided they met a specific property-ownership qualification. It was not until the Equal Franchise Act of 1928 that women achieved the same voting rights as men. Women's participation in wartime work amplified already established calls for equal political rights, but also had implications for social and cultural power. For example, women formed sports teams, including cricket, in army barracks, training depots, munitions factories and other workplaces.
- 3.5.5 From this point, cricket was again subjected to scrutiny as to its suitability as a sport for women. As women's roles in public life grew after the war, they were able to establish a more formal, albeit limited, presence in the game, although this was no 'natural' development and came in the context of much struggle and considerable opposition from cricket's male establishment.
- 3.5.6 In 1926, the Women's Cricket Association (WCA) was formed. The WCA's purpose was *"to encourage the formation of Cricket Clubs throughout the country and to provide facilities for, and bring together [...] those women and girls who previously have had little opportunity of playing cricket after leaving School and College."*⁷¹
- 3.5.7 In the 1927 season 49 matches were played by WCA-affiliated teams; by 1929, 37 clubs and 39 schools were affiliated members and a public women's cricket match was played on Beckenham Cricket Ground between London District and the Rest of England. In 1933, County Associations were formed in Middlesex, Lancashire, Kent, Nottinghamshire and Surrey along the same organisational lines as the men's counties. In late 1934 an England team travelled to Australia and New Zealand for the first ever international women's cricket matches. The WCA's affiliation figures for 1938 listed 105 clubs, 18 colleges and 85 schools.⁷²
- 3.5.8 Although difficult to document, it is likely that up to 1939 and into the post-war decades, the majority of participants were middle and upper class: generally, the sport required financial independence to purchase equipment, pay subscriptions, and travel. The 1934-5 overseas tour was self-funded, preventing any working class women from participating; local education authorities took the view that cricket for state school girls was *"not worth attempting"* due to the lack of suitable facilities.⁷³
- 3.5.9 As with male cricketers in the colonial context, control of resources significantly hampered the development of women's cricket. Since cricket grounds are almost always owned by men, finding places to play has traditionally been a challenge for women cricketers and, as the evidence we have gathered demonstrates, remains so to this day. The first match on a 'first class' ground took place in 1932. In 1929, the WCA wrote to MCC asking to play at Lord's, but the MCC Committee refused. They only changed their minds 47 years later, after the success of the women's World Cup in 1973 led to the first women's one day international at Lord's in 1976. To this day, the England Women's national cricket team has never been given the opportunity to play a Test Match at Lord's.
- 3.5.10 Perhaps as a consequence of its domination by middle and upper class women, from the outset the WCA adopted the rules of the equally middle and upper class-dominated governing body of men's cricket, MCC, and also, arguably, their conservatism: they dictated how their players dressed, and how they behaved on and off the pitch. Marjorie Pollard, one of the founders of the WCA, wrote in 1930 that it was necessary *"to play in something that is above criticism"* and argued that it was important that women were not seen to be trying to *"play like men."*⁷⁴

⁷¹ <https://womenscrickethistory.org>

⁷² Rafaëlle Nicholson, 'Cricket Has Given Me Everything', *Women's Sport and the Women's Movement in Twentieth-century Britain*, *French Journal of British Studies*, 23, 1 (2018), p. 89.

⁷³ Rafaëlle Nicholson, 'Cricket Has Given Me Everything', *Women's Sport and the Women's Movement in Twentieth-century Britain* *French Journal of British Studies*, 23, 1 (2018), p. 90.

⁷⁴ Marjorie Pollard, *Cricket for Women and Girls* (London: Hutchinson, 1933), p. 17, quoted in Rafaëlle Nicholson and Matthew Taylor, 'Women, sport and the people's war in Britain, 1939-45', *Sport in History*, 40, 4 (2020), p. 562

- 3.5.11 But public cricket matches from the 1920s onwards made women's cricket more visible, and the antagonists *"more vociferous."*⁷⁵ In the 1930s, the argument that women had no place in the masculine domain of cricket was fairly common, as was the criticism that the average female had no genuine interest in cricket but merely *"goes to the ground to eat strawberries and be admired."*⁷⁶ By 1950, the editor of the Sportswoman's Manual summarised the situation as follows: *"It has been established that a woman may play games if she chooses, just as she may go into Law, Medicine or the House of Commons... But now that we need no longer struggle we must take stock. Some people look with alarm at women playing strenuous games. It is unladylike, it is unattractive, it stops them having children, and the rest of the century-old arguments are still with us."*⁷⁷
- 3.5.12 In 1952 the England cricketer Walter Hammond claimed that *"there are some games women can play, in general, actually better than men, but the muscular differences of the sexes prohibits cricket from being one of them."*⁷⁸ In 1963, England captain Len Hutton said, during a charity match against a women's side, that *"women playing cricket was quite absurd, like a man trying to knit."*⁷⁹ As it happens, the women won the match.
- 3.5.13 In the face of such obvious sexism, the WCA actively advocated placing the right to leisure above domestic commitments. Playing cricket was a powerful statement, part of an evolving women's movement across the 20th century making claims to women's rights to control their own bodies, rejecting traditional models of domesticity, and placing their own leisure needs above servicing the needs of their husbands.⁸⁰
- 3.5.14 Despite obvious progress, opposition from established elites continued. Women were barred from becoming members of MCC until 1998, after a campaign led by the former England Captain, Rachael Heyhoe-Flint. In 1999, ten women were granted honorary life membership of the club, although most future women members had to join the 20-year waiting list along with the male applicants for membership.
- 3.5.15 The profile of the women's game has grown significantly in recent years, with the introduction of the Women's Super league in 2016, the Women's Regional Structure in 2020, and The Hundred competition for women's and men's teams in 2021. Women's cricket received a significant boost when England won the World Cup in 2017, playing in front of a full house at Lord's.
- 3.5.16 A recent MCC exhibition about the evolution of women's cricket rightly points out the lack of ethnically diverse women, which is *"obviously problematic, and reflects that women's cricket in England has historically been a very white (and middle class) sport."*⁸¹ Ebony Rainford-Brent was the first Black woman to represent England at cricket, in 2007, and remains one of only two Black women, along with Sophia Dunkley, to have done so. On the first day of the opening England Men's Test Match against West Indies in 2020, Rainford-Brent spoke publicly about the extent of the racism she had experienced in cricket.⁸²
- 3.5.17 As noted, class distinctions and conflicts have been integral to the development of the game since its inception. By the end of the 19th century, class was structurally embedded by the 'amateurs' and 'professionals' categories, so rigidly bounded that the different groups changed in separate dressing rooms and entered the field through different gates. Their names were recorded in different formats on match scoresheets.
- 3.5.18 Class-based divisions were reflected even in the physical construction of the cricket ground. Members' pavilions and balconies, requiring not just money but also social connections to access, prevented the cricket watching elite from having to mix with the hoi polloi. Different gates, seating areas, entrance fees and usage terms all combined to maintain distinctions between social status.

⁷⁵ Jennifer Hargreaves, *Sporting Females: Critical Issues in the History and Sociology of Women's Sports* (London, Routledge, 1994), p.124, quoted in Nicholson, 'Cricket Has Given Me Everything', p. 91.

⁷⁶ Nicholson, 'Cricket Has Given Me Everything', p. 91.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 91.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 92.

⁷⁹ Jim White, 'The untold story of the women's game,' *The Daily Telegraph*, 3 March, 2022.

⁸⁰ Nicholson, 'Cricket Has Given Me Everything', p. 99.

⁸¹ <https://www.lords.org/lords/news-stories/women-s-cricket-evolution>.

⁸² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MaJif0Dq8QI>.

- 3.5.19 During the 19th century there was a growth in the number of paid professionals playing for local clubs throughout the country, which some of the old elites saw as a threat to the ‘amateur’ spirit in which they believed cricket ought to be played, and which had been so heavily promoted during cricket’s ‘golden age’ in the years leading up to 1914.
- 3.5.20 The belief that cricket remained “*the sport for the amateur, or the man who played for the love of the greatest game the world has ever seen*” was perceived as being under threat from the rise of commercialism, the paying customer, and above all the rise of professionalism, which was likened to a kind of cancer: “*The knife has to be applied first of all to the professional. He must be cut away from the cricket system.*”⁸³
- 3.5.21 Conversely, by the 1940s the amateur ethos was held responsible by many for the poor sporting performance of England cricket teams. The Daily Herald published a series of lengthy articles in 1947 asking “*What’s wrong with British Sport?*.” In the article on cricket, MCC was said to be “*too much concerned with amateurism, with Eton and Harrow cricket and University stuff.*”⁸⁴
- 3.5.22 The amateur/professional distinction was also connected to differences in how the game was played, and who played it, in different parts of the country. The 1950s were ‘boom years’ for league cricket in the North with big name professionals and even larger crowds.⁸⁵ The professional Lancashire and Yorkshire Leagues were highly competitive and popular with spectators, whereas for many years, participation in leagues and knock out competitions was actively discouraged in the South.
- 3.5.23 After the 1948 defeat to Donald Bradman’s Australia, the Evening Standard suggested, despite the danger of “*talking heresy*”, that “*if London followed the lead of the North the Southern clubs would be a fuller reservoir of talent for our county and England elevens.*”⁸⁶ Some cricket associations in the South saw a need for change, including the Surrey Association, which established a knock out cup competition in the 1940s. Towards the end of the 1960s, the London Club Cricket Conference also recognised the need for change, dropping an old rule forbidding members from competing in league cricket.
- 3.5.24 The technical distinction between the professional, paid cricketer and his noble unpaid counterparts had always been less straightforward than some had assumed. Amateurs used an arcane system of claiming ‘expenses’ that could amount to very significant sums, and this even acquired a name in the press: ‘shamateurism’. An article from The Observer in 1958 mocked cricket for creating a situation in which the only thing that amateur cricketers may not receive money for was playing cricket itself.⁸⁷
- 3.5.25 But the debate about amateurs and professionals was not simply about money; it reflected and influenced wider political debates about amateurism and leadership in British politics and society. As with many of those debates, the impact of the war on attitudes towards amateur and professional status in cricket was marked. Wisden called for its abolition in 1943 and Len Hutton – England’s first professional captain – argued that “*those who had received the King’s commission in battle were worthy of the honour of leading England in cricket.*”⁸⁸
- 3.5.26 In a cultural sense, the post-war years saw a drift towards professionalism, and a further widening of the scope of debate. Hutton stated that “*we don’t play cricket for fun*”, and The Observer described Peter May’s “*formative education among the uncompromising and unforthcoming Surrey professionals [which] has given him their attributes to a marked degree.*”⁸⁹

⁸³ H. V. Dorey, The Official Handbook of the Club Cricketers Charity Fund (1913), which became the London Club Cricket Conference in 1915, quoted in Duncan Stone, Different Class: The Untold Story of English Cricket (London: Repeater Books, 2022), p. 99.

⁸⁴ Stone, Different Class, p. 147.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 180.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 149.

⁸⁷ The Observer, 23 February 1958, p. 23.

⁸⁸ Charles Williams, Gentlemen & Players: The Death of Amateurism in Cricket (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2012), p. 63.

⁸⁹ The Spectator, 21 June 1957, p. 9; The Observer, 4 January 1959, p. 21.

- 3.5.27 The ascendancy of professional culture in cricket coincided with a crisis of confidence in the sport. Only 1 million people paid to watch first class cricket in 1960 compared with 2.3 million people in 1947.⁹⁰ By 1962 The Guardian argued that “*county cricket as we know it today exists by kind permission of the football pools and other speculative ventures.*”⁹¹
- 3.5.28 Conservative reaction blamed this on professionalism. Amateurs – steeped in their public school education and unburdened by the pressures of making ends meet – were thought to play in a more entertaining and enjoyable way. Lord Trafford lamented in The Spectator that cricket had become “*so tedious to watch*” because it was played “*in a red brick manner by red brick characters with red brick outlooks.*” He criticised the sport for excluding “*personality*” in favour of “*technique*” and reminisced about a time when “*the England side of 1902 included a classical scholar ... a future Governor of Bengal, and an Indian ruler who was later to head his country’s delegation to the League of Nations.*”⁹²
- 3.5.29 Yet again, cricket’s history was marked by division and struggles that fed off but also contributed to wider conflicts in society at large. Change had been happening under the surface for some time, but it was not until 1963 that the formal distinction in cricket between amateurs and professionals, ‘Gentlemen’ and ‘Players’, was abolished.
- 3.5.30 Since then, the game has maintained many of its elitist connections, with the proportion of privately educated players far exceeding the proportion in the general population, and links between county cricket and private schools stretching throughout the country. In 2021, 58% of England Men’s players and 45% of the England Women’s team were privately educated, compared with 7% of the general population.⁹³

3.6 Decolonisation

- 3.6.1 England lost their first ever Test Match against Australia in 1877, and more famously lost again in 1882 when the so-called ‘Ashes’ of English cricket (two incinerated bails) were interred in a small, and now very famous, wooden urn. South Africa beat England in Johannesburg as early as 1906.
- 3.6.2 But such defeats by ‘kith and kin’ – bitterly resented on the field, of course, and by the wider cricket watching public – could be accommodated within the racial framework of the Empire. When Neville Cardus wrote in 1945 that “*none except the people of England or of the English-speaking countries has excelled at cricket*”, he was not immune to the brilliance of certain individuals from outside of what he undoubtedly saw as a ‘racial’ family.⁹⁴ What he meant was, in national terms, England and its scions in the White settler colonies reigned supreme.
- 3.6.3 But the historical evolution of cricket within the Empire, whereby the game was gradually adopted by the colonised themselves, put English cricket and Englishness in an awkward position. It was not until 1950 that the West Indies, still led by a White captain, won their first Test Match against England, at Lord’s. India beat England at Chennai in 1952. Pakistan beat England at The Oval in 1954. But from an English cricketing perspective, worse was to come. From 1969 to 2000, England failed to win a Test series against the West Indies, home or away.

⁹⁰ Williams, Gentlemen & Players, p. 91.

⁹¹ The Guardian, 28 December 1962, p. 8.

⁹² The Spectator, 21 June 1957, p. 9.

⁹³ Based on ICEC historical player research, calculated as percentages of the players for whom we found schooling data.

⁹⁴ Neville Cardus, English Cricket (London: Collins, 1945), p. 7.

- 3.6.4 The rise to pre-eminence of West Indian cricket – in the eyes of its leading protagonists on the field, and in terms of what the Barbadian historian Hilary Beckles referred to as the West Indian fans’ “*unfettered spectator responses*” – embodied widely recognised and deeply felt historical connections. The racial hierarchy of empire, expressed so profoundly through the game of cricket, was about to be upended. The success of the team from the 1970s onwards was a source of immense collective pride for Black people, in the Caribbean and for the diaspora in England.⁹⁵
- 3.6.5 Cricket as an elite, international spectacle – an expression of Black power and national consciousness – was of undoubted historical significance. According to Beckles, the English were “*thrown into panic*” by the sense that cricket matches between the West Indies and England were not just sport but “*the business of history and politics*.” The figure who embodied this new pre-eminence, perhaps above all others, was Sir Vivian Richards. For Beckles “[e]ach century, each double century, peeled away the optic scales accumulated over 400 years of inhuman subjection.”⁹⁶
- 3.6.6 The 1976 West Indies tour of England had begun with the South African-born England captain Tony Greig telling the media that he intended to make the West Indies team ‘grovel’ – particularly incendiary language in the circumstances, which helped incentivise the West Indian players to win the series 3–0.⁹⁷ The press portrayed the West Indies team – specifically on account of their very fast bowling – on a spectrum of “*unsporting*” to “*savage*”, conjuring colonial imagery of embattled Whites and unruly natives.⁹⁸ Earlier condescension and mockery in the British press had turned to outright hostility and racist stereotyping.
- 3.6.7 In 1987, animosity between Pakistan and England saw international cricket reach an unprecedented low, with the England captain Mike Gatting and the Pakistani umpire Shakoor Rana exchanging audible expletives on the field of play. The British press was almost unanimous that Pakistan was engaged in orchestrated cheating. When Pakistan toured England in 1992 and won the series on the basis of reverse swing, the South African-born England batsman Allan Lamb made public accusations of ball tampering, and much of the British press immediately assumed guilt. “*P**** cheats*”, screamed the Daily Mirror, and “*Pak off the cheats*”, shrieked The Sun.⁹⁹
- 3.6.8 Ironically, at the end of the previous summer’s cricket, John Holder, at that stage the only ever Black international umpire, claims that he wrote in his match report for the West Indies versus England Test Match at The Oval, 8–12 August 1991, that he had challenged the England captain Graham Gooch regarding what he believed to be ball tampering on the part of the England team. These charges were not acknowledged by the English cricket establishment, but were subsequently rejected by some of the England team members who were on the field of play that day. More recently, John Holder has publicly accused English cricket of conspiring to dismiss him as an umpire for his temerity in making such a claim,¹⁰⁰ a claim that was denied by the ECB.

⁹⁵ Hilary Beckles, *The Development of West Indies Cricket, Vol. 2: the age of nationalism* (1998); Babb, Colin, *They Gave the Crowd Plenty Fun*, (London: Hansib, 2015).

⁹⁶ Beckles, *The Development of West Indies Cricket, Vol. 2*, p. 87.

⁹⁷ Simon Lister, *Fire in Babylon: How the West Indies Cricket Team Brought a People to Its Feet* (London: Random House, 2016), p. 57.

⁹⁸ Stephen Wagg, ‘Calypso Kings, Dark Destroyers: England–West Indies Test Cricket and the English Press, 1950–1984’, *Cricket and National Identity in the Postcolonial Age* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 171.

⁹⁹ Cited in Neil Farrington, Daniel Kilvington, John Price, and Amir Saeed, *Race, Racism and Sports Journalism* (United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis, 2012), p. 103.

¹⁰⁰ Barney Ronay, ‘John Holder: “I rocked the boat and got punished for doing my job properly”’, *The Guardian*, 12 February 2021.

- 3.6.9 As the England cricketer Derek Pringle later wrote, “*once a feud is set up it is not easily diffused... it gets passed from one dressing room generation to the next, snowballing in significance until it manifests as “P*** cheat!” so beloved of headline makers, and now sadly part of the lingua franca where English is spoken.*”¹⁰¹ It seemed to many observers that English accusations of cheating were “*expressions of white English racism.*”¹⁰² Pakistani players were awarded a bonus for the 1992 tour for having to suffer the emotional stress from what was deemed to be a “*vicious English media*”, accusing them of cheating almost every day. The Pakistani perspective can be summed up by Omar Kureishi’s sardonic comment: “*there is no way an English team can be beaten fair and square. They are invincible. If, perchance, they should lose [...] it is always because they have been robbed.*”¹⁰³
- 3.6.10 In general, the deep suspicion that colonial racism still permeated the postcolonial game has created a profoundly political dimension to international cricket, and the English response – from players, cricket administrators, the media – stimulated yet further racism within postcolonial England itself.
- 3.6.11 Just as Black British people reported higher-than-normal levels of racism and violence following West Indies’ victories over England, one of the many consequences of this period was that it generated broad swathes of prejudice for the thousands of recreational and the (few) professional cricketers playing in England who had either been born in Pakistan or were identified with Pakistan in terms of their ethnic heritage.¹⁰⁴
- 3.6.12 Where the West Indies and Pakistan teams had come to be seen as a serious threat to English cricket’s prestige, other smaller cricketing nations were still treated with an old-fashioned disdain. Sri Lanka had won the World Cup in 1996, but when they toured England in the summer of 1998 England offered the South Africans five Test Matches and Sri Lanka only one. England were beaten easily, with spin bowler Muttiah Muralitharan taking 16 wickets.
- 3.6.13 Much tension and suspicion surrounded the debate over Muralitharan’s bowling action. Although his action was cleared in 1996 by the ICC after biomechanical analysis, a number of umpires – Australian and English – continued to call ‘no ball’ whilst he was bowling, on the basis that in their view he was ‘chucking’ the ball with a bent arm. The media frenzy saw Muralitharan cast as “*devilish*”, a “*freak*”, with “*something of the Orient*” about him.¹⁰⁵ On a number of occasions during his career he was excluded from the bowling attack on the basis of decisions about his bowling action taken by the umpires. He still ended his career as the leading wicket taker in Test Match history with 800 wickets, a record that will be hard to beat.
- 3.6.14 Wider attitudes towards English cricket were also tainted by the fact that men such as Graham Gooch and John Emburey went on the ‘rebel tour’ to apartheid South Africa in 1982 and after serving three year international bans, were later appointed as England captains. A player who had already been England captain, Mike Gatting, toured South Africa in the second English rebel tour in 1990, described as “*the most morally dubious of all [tours], since it took place as South Africa was going through a period of momentous change, before the release of Nelson Mandela*” and because the England players who went on the tour “*were being paid by the apartheid government rather than corporate sponsors*”, which had previously been the case.¹⁰⁶
- 3.6.15 As well as appointments to the England captaincy, some of those who went on the rebel tours achieved other posts of high status and influence in the game, such as MCC President, Chairman of England selectors and Chief Executive of the Professional Cricketers’ Association.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰¹ Derek Pringle, ‘The special tensions of England v Pakistan’, *The Independent*, 24 July 1996.

¹⁰² Jack Williams, *Cricket and Race* (London: Bloomsbury, 2001), p. 147.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Ben Carrington, and Ian McDonald. ‘Whose game is it anyway?: Racism in local league cricket’, *Race, sport and British society* (Routledge, 2002), pp. 71–91.

¹⁰⁵ Claire Westall and Neil Lazarus, ‘The pitch of the world: cricket and Chris Searle’, *Race & Class* 51, 2 (2009), p. 57.

¹⁰⁶ Paul Weaver, ‘English rebels who ignored apartheid cause still show a lack of shame’, *The Guardian*, 11 January, 2010.

¹⁰⁷ <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/cricket/article-10726813/Four-decades-England-Test-stars-reflect-tours-Apartheid-South-Africa.html>.

- 3.6.16 Such postcolonial tensions have also been very evident off the field, within the structures of international cricket governance. The rising financial power and hence political influence of Indian cricket has produced a number of flashpoints. For example, in 2001, during a series between India and South Africa, match referee Mike Denness, a former England captain, penalised an unprecedented six Indian players for various charges, including excessive appealing, inadequate control by India's captain Sourav Ganguly, and, most controversially, ball tampering by Sachin Tendulkar, probably India's most celebrated cricketer of all time.
- 3.6.17 The immediate fallout was one of intense polarisation. The Indian cricket authorities, and the Indian cricket public, were outraged. They refused to accept Mike Denness' judgements and saw it as *"the newest battle in an old colonial war."* Much of the Australian and English press complained about what they saw as India challenging the umpire's decision in the broadest sense. The head of Indian cricket's board of control, Jagmohan Dalmiya, was labelled as the *"central force behind the entire crisis"*, a *"ludicrous"* megalomaniac, and a *"strongman"* given to *"bullishness"* who had to be stopped.¹⁰⁸ The English interpretation seemed to be that such behaviour was simply 'not cricket'.
- 3.6.18 The strength of reaction was perhaps partly driven by the sense that England's very long-standing 'ownership' of the game of cricket was being challenged by India – and English indignity was only further enhanced by the dawning realisation that the ICC and world cricket simply could not operate without the financial power of India.
- 3.6.19 The postcolonial power struggle has thus been played for decades on and off the field. As Ashis Nandy has put it, the world now looks very different from the time long ago when English public schoolboys projected their power and authority around the world. For many in India today, *"cricket is an Indian game accidentally discovered by the English. Like chilli, which was discovered in South America and came to India only in mediaeval times to become an inescapable part of Indian cuisine, cricket, too, is now foreign to India only according to the historians and Indologists. To most Indians the game now looks more Indian than English."*¹⁰⁹

3.7 Immigration

- 3.7.1 Going back to the period immediately after World War II, even if British imperial ambitions to hold onto territories overseas were still alive, 'at home' some of the legacies of empire – namely 'non-White' immigration – were beginning to undermine racialised conceptions of Britishness.¹¹⁰ Yet again, cricket was a central part of this story.
- 3.7.2 Probably the most prominent Black cricketer in England in the early 20th century was Learie Constantine, later Lord Constantine, the UK's first Black peer. He played for Nelson CC in the Lancashire League between 1929 and 1937, where he was extremely successful, helping Nelson win the league in seven of his nine seasons. In the mid-1930s he was approached to play for Lancashire CCC but members of the Lancashire Board and, later, players in the team opposed the idea of a Black player for the County. In a 1975 interview, the Lancashire and England professional Len Hopwood recalled that the thought of a *"coloured chap playing for Lancashire was ludicrous."* He suggested that *"we Lancastrians were clannish in those less enlightened days,"* and that the reaction in the dressing room was *"electric,"* with the players wanting *"none of Constantine. We would refuse to play."*¹¹¹ The Lancashire League was popular with many West Indian and other overseas players, including some of the greatest Black cricketers including Everton Weekes, Clyde Walcott, Charlie Griffith and Wes Hall.

¹⁰⁸ Satadru Sen, 'The Peasants are Revolting: Race, Culture and Ownership in Cricket', *Subaltern Sports: Politics and Sport in South Asia* (2005), pp. 113–116.

¹⁰⁹ Ashis Nandy, *The Tao of Cricket* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 1.

¹¹⁰ Paul Ward, *Britishness since 1870* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 8.

¹¹¹ Jack Williams, *Cricket and Race* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), p. 39.

- 3.7.3 The number of recreational Black cricketers in England increased significantly with the arrival of the ‘Windrush generation’ in the 1950s and 1960s. They brought with them a passion for cricket and a style of play that reflected the original ‘English’ culture of cricket that had been exported through colonialism, then adapted to reflect the culture of the Caribbean. Some of those who arrived, particularly to do more ‘working class’ jobs, found it difficult to join local cricket clubs, experiencing overt racism and exclusion. As a result, many set up their own clubs, the first being Leeds Caribbean in 1948. An early London club was Carnegie CC, established in the Brixton area in 1955. Many large employers also ran their own teams and owned their own grounds. London Transport had many teams based around its depots, which provided a source of cricket for the many Caribbean migrants who worked in London’s public transport system.
- 3.7.4 The number of Caribbean clubs grew through the 1950s so that by the 1970s, there were hundreds of Caribbean cricket clubs playing across England, often to a very high standard. Specific leagues were created for Caribbean clubs, such as the Birmingham Commonwealth Cricket League, established in 1976. These clubs and leagues usually existed outside the cricketing ‘mainstream’ so were not under the control of the governing body. As well as the cricket itself, there was an important social aspect, with teams often being attached to African Caribbean cultural centres.¹¹²
- 3.7.5 There has been a decline in the participation of Black communities in cricket since the 1970s and 1980s, partly shown by the disappearance of a number of the Caribbean clubs and leagues. The exact reasons for this decline are complex, but are often explained by a combination of factors, such as the fall from pre-eminence of the West Indies cricket team by the mid-1990s, as well as greater interest in football on the part of British-born Black people of Caribbean origin. Other reasons include overzealous ground regulations on musical instruments, high ticket prices, the reduction in the amount of cricket in state schools, reduced numbers and quality of pitches in local authority parks, and the increasing generational distance from the ‘Windrush generation’ who had arrived with a love of the game that had been instilled in the Caribbean.¹¹³
- 3.7.6 Whilst some or all of these factors may have played a part, for many stakeholders the bigger issue is the extent of anti-Black racism in English cricket, particularly during the 1990s. The ECB itself acknowledged that there was, or at least could be, an issue of racism in cricket when it established a ‘Racism Study Group’ in 1999. The Group’s report (‘Clean Bowl Racism’) concluded that *“there is a need for positive action as soon as possible and practical against racism that exists in English cricket.”*¹¹⁴ However, the report often seemed to imply that the problem of racism in cricket was one of ‘perception’ and ‘belief’. The report refers to findings about racism that are *“generally believed [anecdotally]”*, with the authors consistently and strongly implying that this data may not be a representation of reality.¹¹⁵ The executive summary of the report stated that 58% of respondents to their Questionnaire Survey believed racism existed, with the word ‘believed’ underlined. In the following sentence, the report notes that *“a number of respondents commented that they thought racism in cricket was not a serious problem,”* and goes on to claim that *“it became evident that the ‘Race Card’ is often used to cloud the issue and sometimes, as a result, perpetuates racism.”*¹¹⁶
- 3.7.7 One way in which anti-Black racism in the sport manifested itself was through the lack of recognition and funding for Black cricket at grassroots and developmental levels. A prominent example is the story of the cricket college established at Haringey in 1984, a landmark achievement of the Black cricket community. Working in and around the deprived areas of Tottenham, north London, its remarkable success – producing more first-class cricketers than many of the most expensive, elite ‘cricket schools’ in England – brought national and international acclaim. Despite this, the College’s financial difficulties mounted in late 1996 and into 1997. Recent research has shown that the College’s trustees begged for financial support from cricket’s governing body, but, with no money forthcoming, the Haringey project was shut down by the summer of 1997.¹¹⁷

¹¹² Michael Collins, ‘The Windrush Project’
<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/history/research/research-projects/windrush-cricket>

¹¹³ Russell Holden, *Cricket and Contemporary Society in Britain: Crisis and Continuity* (London: Routledge, 2021), pp. 59–75.

¹¹⁴ ECB Racism Study Group Report ‘Going Forward Together’, Executive Summary, p. 8.

¹¹⁵ ECB Racism Study Group Report ‘Going Forward Together’, pp. 25–29.

¹¹⁶ ECB Racism Study Group Report ‘Going Forward Together’, Executive Summary, p. 8.

¹¹⁷ Michael Collins, ‘Black cricket, the College at Haringey and the England and Wales Cricket Board,’ *The Political Quarterly*, 94, 1 (2023).

- 3.7.8 The former editor of Wisden, Scyld Berry, has suggested that perhaps the most important single issue confronting cricket in terms of issues of equity is “*why Haringey Cricket College was closed [...] when it was producing so many Afro-Caribbean cricketers [...] [t]he college’s closure effectively killed Afro-Caribbean cricket in Britain.*”¹¹⁸ The College’s closure certainly had a serious material impact on the talent pool of Black British players coming through the ranks. For many, it also sent a signal that the cricket establishment did not see Black cricket as important.
- 3.7.9 From the first Test Match in 1877, it took 103 years before a Black player first represented the England national cricket team in 1980. From 1980 to 1997, 14 Black men (no women) made their debuts for the England national cricket team, only three of them born in England. They played a combined total of 251 Test Matches. In the 25 years since 1997, only six Black male players (plus two female players) have made their debuts. Four out of the six male players were born in England. They have only played a total of 37 Test Matches between them. The only two Black women players, Ebony Rainford-Brent and Sophia Dunkley, were both born in the UK. Throughout, the environment was often hostile for these cricketers, and the mid-1990s were notable for the general negativity – sometimes overt racism – directed towards some of England’s Black cricketers.
- 3.7.10 Devon Malcolm, who played 40 Test Matches, achieved some remarkable successes as a fast bowler for England, but was often portrayed as erratic and unpredictable. In July 1995, Malcolm was one of two Black players, along with Philip DeFreitas, accused in the pages of Wisden Cricket Monthly of being incapable of performing in the same way as his White counterparts because of their ‘race’, and their inability to be “*unequivocally*” English.¹¹⁹
- 3.7.11 Michael Carberry, the last Black, England-born cricketer to play for the men’s national team, played six Test Matches for England between 2010 and 2014. After the 2014 tour of Australia, Carberry was deselected, despite being the team’s second highest run scorer. In a June 2020 interview, Carberry went public with his account of racism in cricket. He alleged that “*cricket is rife with racism*”, and that “*the people running the game don’t care about Black people.*” “*Black people*”, he said, “*are not important to the structure of English cricket.*”¹²⁰ As well as the interpersonal racism that people tend to think of when discussing discrimination in the game, he argues that the very structure of English cricket means that Black people do not ‘count’ or ‘belong’.
- 3.7.12 The number of Black professional cricketers in England has dwindled by 75%.¹²¹ A 2020 report by Sport England found that whereas approximately 36% of adult involvement in recreational cricket is ‘non-White’, Black participation was so low as to be statistically irrelevant, apparently lower than golf and tennis.¹²² In the domestic women’s professional game, there were just two Black non-overseas players in 2021.¹²³
- 3.7.13 As we have seen, there were a small number of prominent South Asian cricketers in England in the late 19th and early 20th century, predominantly from wealthy Indian backgrounds who studied in England. In addition to Ranjitsinhji, K. S. Duleepsinhji and the Nawab of Pataudi, Iftikhar Ali Khan also played with notable success. Raman Subba Row, who was born in Streatham and went on to become Chair of Surrey CCC and Chair of the Test and County Cricket Board (one of the predecessor organisations to the ECB), was the only other South Asian cricketer to play for England before 1980. Basil D’Oliveira, born in South Africa of Mixed Indian and Portuguese ethnicity and so classed under apartheid rules as ‘Cape Coloured’, played for England between 1966 and 1972.

¹¹⁸ Scyld Berry, ‘Why game needs an independent view at watershed moment’, Daily Telegraph, 19 November, 2021, p. 7. Lonsdale Skinner, ‘ECB’s failures on Caribbean cricket in England’ The Guardian, 21 June, 2021 <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/blog/2021/jun/21/ecbs-failures-on-caribbean-cricket-in-england-are-worse-than-robinsons-tweets>.

¹¹⁹ John Henderson, ‘Is it in the blood?’ Wisden Cricket Monthly, 17 (2) July 1995, pp. 9–10; Robert Winder, ‘Sporting heroes, but on whose side?’ The Independent, 2 September, 1995, p. 13. Mike Marqusee, ‘In Search of the Unequivocal Englishman: The Conundrum of Race and Nation in English Cricket’, in Ben Carrington and Ian McDonald (eds.), ‘Race’, Sport and British Society (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 121–32.

¹²⁰ Wisden Staff, ‘Carberry, “The people running the game don’t care about the Black people in it”’, Wisden.com, 10 June 2020: <https://wisden.com/stories/news-stories/carberry-the-people-running-the-game-dont-care-about-the-black-people-in-it>

¹²¹ <https://aceprogramme.com/>

¹²² Sport England, Sport for All, January 2020: <https://www.sportengland.org/news/sport-for-all>

¹²³ Based on ICEC historical player research.

- 3.7.14 From the mid-to-late 1940s onwards, increased migration from South Asia, principally India and Pakistan, significantly increased the number of South Asian cricketers in England. As with the Black community, they often formed their own clubs and leagues because they were not welcomed by established ‘White’ clubs. Those Asian-specific clubs have been described as having several roles: they “*act as symbols of community and cultural resistance, facilitate contingent and cultural integration, provide spaces for resisting racism and circumventing the normalisation of ‘Whiteness’*” within mainstream sporting structures.¹²⁴
- 3.7.15 The Quaid-E-Azam league in Bradford is an example, being established in 1981 “*with the specific purpose of providing South Asian communities (mainly Pakistani), who had been unable to access White teams, with opportunities.*”¹²⁵ Another example was the Khalifa league, established by Indian Gujarati Muslims to connect other members of the diaspora dispersed through the UK.
- 3.7.16 Some clubs that are described as ‘Asian clubs’ were not set up solely for South Asian players, but have come to have a majority of South Asian members because of the changing demographic of the local area. One club in Sheffield with over 95% South Asian membership was formed in the middle of the 19th century and it was only in the 21st century that it started to attract a greater number of South Asian players than White players. The club plays in a high level ‘mainstream’ league and is known locally as an ‘Asian club’, although it welcomes White players.¹²⁶
- 3.7.17 The enthusiasm and passion for cricket in the South Asian community is reflected in the number of people who play the game. Despite comprising around 6.9% of the population of England and Wales (according to the 2021 Census), players of South Asian ethnicity make up 26–29% of the adult recreational playing base in England and Wales. Yet the level of participation is not reflected in progression into professional cricket: only c5% of First Class County cricketers were British South Asian in 2021.¹²⁷

3.8 Legacies

- 3.8.1 In 2004, MCC published its first anthology of cricket poetry, entitled *A Breathless Hush*, in which the editors included the following verses from *Lovely Cricket*, a poem written in 1999 by John Groves:



*Cricket is an English game...
It is not suited to hot-blooded races,
Although we export it to other places...
True cricket is a game
Of gentle English scenes,
For poets dozing on quaint village greens
And not the same
As cricket where there's so much dash and din
And people play it so they can win.*¹²⁸

¹²⁴ Thomas Fletcher, ‘Cricket, migration and diasporic communities’, *Identities*, 22, 2 (2014), 141–153.

¹²⁵ Thomas Fletcher and Spencer Swain, ‘Strangers of the north: South Asians, cricket and the culture of ‘Yorkshireness’, *Identities*, 20, 1 (2016), pp. 86–100.

¹²⁶ Thomas Fletcher and Thomas Walle, ‘Negotiating their right to play: Asian-specific cricket teams and leagues in the UK and Norway’, *Identities*, 22, 2 (2014), pp. 230–246.

¹²⁷ Based on ICEC historical player research.

¹²⁸ D.R. Allen and H. Doggart, *A Breathless Hush: The MCC Anthology of Cricket Verse* (London: Methuen, 2004), p. 207.

- 3.8.2 In just nine lines, some of the historical problems explored above are neatly summarised. In this vision, the game of cricket belongs to a special national group, with ‘racial’ dimensions. Even if euphemistically ‘exported’ elsewhere, there is a true essence of cricket, which is different to the noisy cricket played by others and those who play to win, a reference to the crass professionals of the interwar and post-war age, or the postcolonials who so often ended up beating England at their own game by the end of the 20th century, perhaps both.
- 3.8.3 Historians, sociologists, players and fans of cricket have identified the 1990s as a particularly problematic phase for English cricket.¹²⁹ As discussed above, roughly a hundred years before – in the 1890s – an intimate bond had been established between Englishness and cricket, which also cemented the dominance of an elite social group that was profoundly White, male and middle to upper class. The legacy of that period remains embedded in the idea of cricket as ‘the quintessential English game’, and the suspicion remains that the historical sense of ownership and entitlement developed during this period does not lie somewhere in a safely distant past.¹³⁰ As we examine in more detail in Chapter 7, Governance and Leadership, English cricket is still dominated by those from that elite social group, despite some recent signs of increasing diversity.
- 3.8.4 In 1991, the Conservative politician Norman Tebbit proffered his infamous ‘cricket test’, which questioned the loyalties of immigrants who were not White, asking who they cheered for when England played cricket against former colonies. Tebbit later explained that his remarks were not aimed at *“all immigrants”*, but particularly those *“second-generation British-Blacks”* who had *“split loyalties.”*¹³¹ Such thinking betrayed a profound discomfort with the idea that postcolonial identities could be multi-layered.
- 3.8.5 By the 1990s, the wider crises of identity that the loss of empire and postcolonial immigration had brought about remained unresolved, and were being expressed and played out on the cricket field, in the media and in cricket’s boardrooms. Players and lovers of the game of cricket often viewed cricket’s inability to reckon with its past and to embrace change as a tragedy, a missed opportunity. As Diran Adebayo has put it, with reference to the banning of musical instruments at Lord’s in the 1990s: *“faced with increasingly vocal supporters of Pakistan and the West Indies, who blew horns, whistles and banged drums at their teams’ triumphs, the English cricketing authorities had responded by banning these instruments from its grounds, treating its latest chance to broaden its appeal with the scorn and the blinkered vision I had come to expect.”*¹³²
- 3.8.6 Despite the racism scandals that plagued English cricket in the 1990s, when the ECB was formed in 1997, its first major statement – Raising the Standard – contained no recognition that there was a problem of racism in the game, nor an acknowledgement that cricket’s governing body had at its disposal a rich ecosystem of cricketing talent in ethnically diverse communities.¹³³
- 3.8.7 In 2005, the England cricket team finally regained the ‘Ashes’ from Australia, something they had failed to do for 19 years. The 2005 victory in that famous and historic series of matches produced an outpouring of English patriotic fervour and a certain ‘carnival’ atmosphere, prompting astute observers and sociologists of sport to wonder whether Englishness might be entering a more benign phase, leaving the overt racism of the earlier period behind.¹³⁴
- 3.8.8 However, after Azeem Rafiq’s testimony – and a much wider range of evidence regarding racism in cricket since the year 2000 – concerns remain about the presence of an exclusive and racialised form of Englishness permeating English cricket.

¹²⁹ Chris Searle et. al., *Hit Racism for Six* (London: Roehampton Centre for Sport Development Research, 1996); Mike Marqusee, *Anyone But England: Cricket, Race and Class* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

¹³⁰ Dominic Malcolm and Philippa Velija, ‘Cricket: The Quintessential English Game?’, in Tom Gibbons and Dominic Malcolm (eds.), *Sport and English National Identity in a ‘Disunited Kingdom’* (London: Routledge, 2017), p. 30.

¹³¹ Quoted in Michael Collins, ‘Cricket, Englishness and Racial Thinking,’ *The Political Quarterly*, 93, 1 (2022), p. 101.

¹³² Diran Adebayo, ‘Batting collapse,’ *Index on Censorship*, 29, 4 (2000), p. 163.

¹³³ England and Wales Cricket Board, *Raising the Standard: The MacLaurin Report* (London, ECB, 1997).

¹³⁴ Malcolm and Velija, ‘Cricket: The Quintessential English Game?’, p. 28.

- 3.8.9 The 2005 team did contain a majority of state school educated players, the most famous and successful being Andrew Flintoff. Flintoff has since very publicly shone a light on the increasing marginalisation of state school cricketers in the game, and the overwhelming dominance of privately educated players within the England setup.¹³⁵ In 2023, MCC has still been arguing about whether two of the most elite and privileged private schools in England – Eton and Harrow – should or should not continue to be the only schools that are guaranteed a fixture at Lord's. At the playing level, private school educated players are disproportionately represented, to a significant extent, in England's national teams, both men and women, compared with the general population. Diversity of ethnic background has also decreased in the men's professional game over the last 30 years, and has never been high in the women's game.
- 3.8.10 Women's cricket has undoubtedly made significant progress in the last decade. In particular, The Hundred competition, introduced by the ECB, has brought new crowds and media exposure for women cricketers. Yet women's cricket remains clearly subordinate to the men's game at grassroots level, in the talent pathway and in professional cricket, with pay equity occasionally discussed but not yet even close to being realised.
- 3.8.11 Historically, established elites have consistently limited access to the game for the working classes, for women and for players from ethnically diverse communities. Even so, the game has been capable of embracing, even leading, change. One-day and T20 cricket, and World Cup competitions, are evidence of that, even if the profile of decision-makers in England and Wales has remained largely the same.
- 3.8.12 Although cricket holds its traditions dear, it is important to recognise that the game has a complex history. While we may celebrate its ancient roots and modern popularity, we cannot ignore the ways in which cricket has reinforced social hierarchies based on race, gender and class. Discrimination has been an unfortunate part of cricket's history, and it is important that we acknowledge and address this fact. English cricket should take this opportunity to confront its past in order to move towards a more equitable future. As we celebrate the game's rich heritage, we must also be mindful of the social conflicts that have shaped it. By recognising and learning from the game's past, we can help create a brighter future for cricket and for those who play and enjoy it.

¹³⁵ 'Freddie Flintoff's Field of Dreams', South Shore Productions, BBC1 2022.