



JAMES LANGRIDGE BY ALAN HILL

James Langridge, the first professional captain of Sussex in modern times, was a sickly-cast tuberculosis victim in his youth. He once collapsed in a village cricket match and it still seems astonishing that the slight, consumptive boy was able to emerge from the trough of illness to buttress many a Sussex innings and become one of the finest all-rounders of his day.

His benefactor in the sleepy Mid-Sussex village of Newick was country house cricket squire Mr. Baden Powell, a cousin of the first Chief Scout. From his farm, Baden Powell provided butter, eggs and cream to build up Jim's strength, and he made arrangements for his protege to accompany Ted Bowley for a recuperative holiday when the Sussex professional went on a coaching trip to New Zealand.

Langridge was one of a quartet of famous Sussex cricket brothers, who rose to prominence in the late 1920s under the leadership of Arthur Gilligan, whose own distinguished career as player, broadcaster and administrator ended with his death at the age of 81 in 1976.

"Here comes Jim, he'll stop the rot", was the exultant cry on Sussex grounds in moments of crisis. The faith of his supporters was a clear demonstration that Langridge boasted a tenacious defence and the inspiration of rallying batsmanship in a tight corner.

"Dad revelled in a crisis", says Jim's son Richard, who followed his father into the county ranks. "He used to hate going in when Sussex were 300 for 3 and much preferred a 13 for 3 situation. Then he would get his head down and really battle it out".

Jim Langridge was also a left-hand bowler of authentic class. He was unfortunate in that he played in the same era as the great Yorkshireman, Hedley Verity, a cricket rival whom he held in deep respect and always acknowledged as his superior. Verity's talents edged him ahead of the Sussex allrounder, but the meagre eight England appearances was a poor reward for Langridge's artistry.

Jim had a career aggregate of 1,530 wickets (1,416 for Sussex), and it was studded with dramatic figures. At Derby in 1939, the home side were 185 for 2 and needed only 23 runs for victory when rain halted play. Stan Worthington was easing his team to a seemingly comfortable win when the players sought the refuge of the pavilion.

Ten minutes of rain brought about an amazing transformation. The previously benign wicket suddenly became a spiteful monster and Jim, who was nursing an injured shoulder and had not intended to bowl, did not require any persuasion to enter the fray. The freshening shower had produced a bowler's paradise. Jim took five wickets, including the hat-trick, in eleven deliveries without conceding a run. Eight wickets fell for nine runs and

Derbyshire were all Out for 194.

The mantle of all-rounder pushed Jim ahead of his brother John, but both players would be near automatic selections in a Sussex team chosen from players of the last forty years. In the memorable summer of 1937, a year of toppling records, the Langridges became the first brothers ever to score more than 2,000 runs each for their county in one season.

Langridge captained Sussex for three years in the 1950s, gaining the respect of his young team-mates and conscientiously laying the foundations for the brilliant leadership of David Sheppard in 1953. The magnetism of the cricketing Reverend has tended to obscure the contribution of Langridge during his caretaker captaincy.

But the surge which carried Sussex to a runners-up place in championship in 1953 really started towards the end of the previous season. The old guard of George Cox, Charlie Qakes and John Langridge had linked up happily with the emerging talents of Jim Parks and Ian Thomson and another newcomer, off-spinner Robin Marlar, gathered in a late harvest of wickets.

Sussex has gloated in the spoils of the family fortune but successive committees have inexcusably betrayed the trust of their players and soured a lifetime of service. Jim Langridge, the dedicated professional, was abruptly dismissed as county coach in July, 1959.

Richard Langridge believes his father fretted over the sad conclusion to 36 years of county service and that the decision might have hastened Jim's death from cancer, at the age of 60, in 1966.

In the last three years of his life Jim was coach at Seaford College, and the tributes paid to him at his funeral helped to relieve the sorrow and heal the wounds of an embittered family.

Five former Sussex captains were at the funeral and in his address David Sheppard recalled how Langridge came into bat "looking up to see if the sun was still out and then setting about righting the ship".

Sheppard said: "I took over a side that had been built up for three years by Jim and none of us had a more loyal friend. We who knew him as younger men found him a friend who was always willing to help and encourage".

Jim Langridge was buried at St. Mary's Church, Chailey, less than a mile from the family cottage, where he and his brother John lived as boys and learned how to play cricket.