

Margaret Thomas (married to Owen Williams of Crossways), and Ranjisinhji.

This family tree was sent by **David Harris, Ontario, Canada** to Jeff Alden in 2000. Mr Harris's grandmother was descended, like Margaret Thomas, from John Prosser of Llangattock (1792 – 1860) and Gwenllian Parry of Tretower Court.

He enclosed the following information on Margaret Thomas and her family, and on the cricket player Ranjisinhji, with whom it is believed she had a close relationship:

(1) John Prosser of Nantyaen, pre 1757, m. Frances

Children: Thomas Prosser c 1757 – c 1799, ? Roger, and Frances.

Thomas Prosser m. Jane, daughter of John Jones or Abergavenny

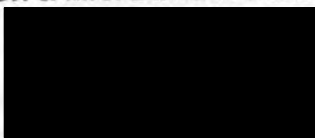
Their children were: John Prosser and Ann Prosser, who married John Prosser of Nantyaen (1752 – 1818)

(2.) The 13 children of Ann and John Prosser included : Elisabeth (1819 – 1910) who married David Thomas. Their son, David Prosser Thomas (1861 – 1956), who married Mary Ann Rees, had three children, the middle one being **Margaret, who married Owen Williams of Crossways.**

Another daughter of Ann and John Prosser was Gwenllian (1826 – 1905), who married David Roberts of Caelyrynys and Garth House, Llangynidr. Their son, William Thomas Roberts (1857 – 1945) married twice, his second wife being Mary Anne Phillips, and a daughter from this marriage, Mary Gwenllian Roberts, married John Harris of Ystradgynlais.

(2) The son of Mary and John Harris, David W Theodore Harris (1912 – 1993) and his wife Anne had a son, **David John Harris**, born 1944, who sent these details from Canada – *his wife Ceridwen later sent information on her ancestors, the James family of Cowbridge and Llandough.*

Dr. & Mrs. David J. Harris



27 March 2000

Jeff Alden
1 Mill Park
Cowbridge
CF1 7BG

Dear Jeff

Thank you for your letter. The book arrived today and my wife & I have briefly reviewed it with interest. My wife & I have done genealogy for many years. Ceri will send you some information on her James for bears shortly.

My interest in Cowbridge is somewhat more exotic-namely Margaret Thomas' marriage to Owen Williams of Crossways. My grandmother Mary Gwennlian Winifred Roberts BA 1882-1965 of Llangynidr (md John Harris PhC MPS 1874-1964 of Ystradgynlais) and Margaret Thomas are both descended from John Prosser gent (1792-1860) of Fro, Llangattock and his wife Gwennlian (1790-1858) Parry of Tretower Court

¹⁸²⁶⁻¹⁹⁰⁵
Gwennlian Prosser/ eloped with and married David Roberts (farmer & subsequent Reg of Births & Deaths & Tax Collector) of Llangynidr, Brecon, son of Rev David Roberts 1791-1872 [who was b Llanuwchllyn, Mer and ordained Llangynidr 1816. He was best known for his association with Trostnant, Pontypool in the 1820's and the 1850's onwards.] William Theodore Roberts 1857-1945 was my gt grandfather-Headmaster of Blaengwawr School, Aberdare. His children were my grandmother (see above) and Rev Prof Emeritus David Phillips Roberts MA BD, Prof of New Testament Greek & a Congregational Minister who taught at Carmarthen, Brecon and finally Swansea.

¹⁸¹⁹⁻¹⁹¹⁰
Elizabeth Prosser/ in 1842 was 'married' to one Russell Drye who turned out to be a bigamist. I have since traced his 1st wife's family in Oxford where her father was Coroner. Drye's first wife may have been mentally ill and divorce was difficult at that time. Bigamy was a not uncommon offence in the early 19c.. The Drye-Prosser " marriage " was conducted by the poet Carnhuanawc (Rev Thomas Price of Cwmdru-friend of Lady Llanover). Their son R Clifford Drye was a student at Normal College, Swansea and died young of T B.. Russell Drye was banished in 1842 when the bigamy was discovered needless to say. The son was raised by Elizabeth and his grandparents.

In 1859 Elizabeth-still in law a spinster-married David Thomas, Mining Engineer son of Morgan Thomas also a Mining Engineer. Morgan's other sons were John Thomas ME later Chief Coal

Viewer to the Govt of the State of Victoria and Rev William Thomas-the poet Islwyn. David Thomas' son David Prosser Thomas ME lived into his nineties and had several children one of whom was Margaret who at 17 married Owen Williams. There was a 40 year age gap and things did not work out. The shipping business also declined as you will know. The ship the "Margretian" was an expensive mistake. I have the Sale of Contents catalogue when Crossways was broken up.

Margaret went off to India where she lived with the Maharajah Ranjitsinghji in great style at Nawanagar. I came across a reference to Ranji in Jeremy Paxman's "The English" pub 1999- "it used to be said of the great Sussex and England batsman Ranjitsinghji (the first man to make 3000 runs in a season) that he was the person who put India on the map for the ordinary Englishman. But he belonged to a small and very privileged class who in their manners and speech were Englishmen."

Margaret's two brothers went out to India. Rufus Thomas later a very distinguished gynaecologist and obstetrician in England (advised when my brother was born) significantly reduced the maternal mortality rate in the State of Nawanagar. Prosser-later a well known dermatologist did general practice in India except when Ranji wanted him back at the palace to play cards. Prosser cared for Ranji when he was dying. (Ref "Ranji" by Alan Ross (-Collins 1983- isbn 0 00 217075 2)) When he died they all returned to UK and resumed their British careers. Their sister Elizabeth Thomas BA was a historian-married Idris Phillips MOH for Caerleon. Her book Pioneers of the Welsh Coalfield by Elizabeth Phillips was published in 1925 and details the loss of the Prosser inheritance in the 1860's in the Rhondda by the Thomas brothers in an unsuccessful attempt to locate coal. W T Lewis who had more capital at his disposal sank a shaft the other side of the river and went deeper-that was the pit known for a century as Lewis' Merthyr!!! Incidentally Margaret's mother was a relative of the Monmouth historian Sir Joseph Bradney.

I knew Margaret and Prosser (also known as Bill) well in their old age-I met them through genealogy and met them several times even after they moved from London to the South coast and we ourselves left London to emigrate to Canada in 1976. Margaret after her return to UK married a lawyer by the name of Clarke-of whom she spoke little-Ranji was the love of her life!! We had a memorial to Ranji in the Leeds Infirmary where he was treated for the gunshot wound where he lost his eye whilst grouse shooting on the Yorkshire moors..

Margaret and Prosser (and Prosser's widow) are now sadly gone. They all lived in Seaford in Sussex in their last years-Prosser in a 15th century fisherman's cottage which had been his seaside summer cottage for years. Both he and Margaret were very bright and fascinating individuals. Margaret retained her dignity until the end (...as in -please speak up for I am a little deaf today). The BBC wanted her to talk on Ranji but she would not do so in public. Prosser after a successful hospital career in London and a private practice in Wimpole Street continued to do locums till he was 80 and kept up his medical knowledge till the end.

I have a copy of the small booklet on the South Wales Shipowners published some years ago-also

somewhere in my library a booklet on Cowbridge with an interior shot of Crossways in its heyday. We have viewed Crossways from the road and wondered what life was like there in the 20's.!!

I assume that Ranji was a member of the cricketing group I Zingari. My father's 1st cousin Brig Lewis John Harris aged 89 who is in very poor health in the USA is a member (also played rugby for the Army and reserve for Wales-friend of Wilf Wooler &c)

In real life when I am not doing history, genealogy and archaeology (did 6 seasons digging when I was young including a short stint at Whitton Roman Villa 1965) I am an Associate Professor of Geriatric Psychiatry and direct an outpatient and outreach programme from a large teaching hospital here in London Ontario. I have an extensive library on Welsh history and continue my reading and researches as and when time allows. We sent a copy of your book to my father in law Alfred Stuart Leslie James in Bristol which he is enjoying reading.

Other related Prosser references include the Cwmdu Deeds (presented by me to The National Library of Wales in 1976) and articles in the journal Brycheiniog by my distant cousin and fellow genealogist the solicitor Roy Davies of Crickhowell on the Parry family of Tretower Court (his manuscripts are lodged at the Powys Record Office)

If you do have any local information of interest do let me know. I only know the basics of Owen Williams genealogy from the South Wales Shipowners booklet mentioned earlier. After the failure in the Rhondda David Thomas went back to managing mines-as did his son David Prosser Thomas.

On my father's side (Harris of Cadoxton juxta Neath -ref Glam FHS Journal 1987 vol 12, pp6-7) I have been in correspondence with Jeff Childs who you may know in Glamorgan on 17c & 18c estate issues. I am closely related to the American Ironmaster David Thomas of Catasauqua, Pa who was First President of the American Institute of Mining Engineers. By 1850 half of the iron production in the USA was by the technique perfected by David Thomas of Catasauqua in the 1830's at Ynyscedwyn. I have met my US relatives who are his descendents. I do not believe there is any direct link between the two Thomas families, even though they derive from the same area. I would never have known that Morgan Thomas was from Ystradgynlais except for it being mentioned in a biography of Islwyn. As a genealogist I find famous relatives useful stepping stones to fill parts of family trees that otherwise would have been lost totally. Like the old Welsh genealogists my interests have ranged widely over all my descent male and female which when backed up by reading social history brings these people alive. I began in 1960 from original records and continue today both through visits to Wales as well as microfiches, etc. Only in the last 18 months have I used the Mormon resources which have been helpful, to a limited degree eg access to the birth, marriage & death indexes which simplifies and reduces cost of accessing certificates if the full reference can be quoted when ordering. Thus my interests and activities are even wider than the contents of this letter! I have just noticed that Ystradgynlais and Islwyn are not recognised by the spelling checker on my computer which is not surprising. Before I learned to

type I used to torture my English-Canadian secretary with my Welsh correspondence. After 19 years she gave up on me and took a grateful retirement. My new secretary has not had to do any Welsh letters to speak of for which she is eternally thankful (she is Canadian born)

I have been a member of the Glam Family History Soc since its early days. (Also Glam Record Soc and Glam History Soc) I am a member of the Medical History group here at the University of Western Ontario. Needless to say we would be most interested in any local information that you may have on our links with Cowbridge both on my wife's side and my Welsh cousin linkages!

My family roots are almost entirely Welsh with a little bit of Somerset and the Welsh borders. My Phillips ancestors ex Cilycwm, Carms who settled in Aberdare produced two lines-the Baptist Rev Morgan Phillips of Gwawr Baptist Chapel (now demolished-name attached to another old chapel building) my gt gt grandfather-and the Anglican Rev David Phillips Rector of Radyr. He wore a wide hat like G K Chesterton-his photo is in the vestry ("Dai hat"). His descendents included J.L. Phillips (Headmaster Christ College Brecon/Dean of Monmouth), M H Phillips Headmaster of Ruthin, D Rupert Phillips Cardiff Docksman. His house became the official judges residence in Cardiff. His son the late Sir Raymond Phillips (QC & MC) a High Court Judge, as a young army officer was a defence counsel at the Belsen trial and edited the official history which makes fascinating if grim reading-and is often quoted in modern history texts of WW2

. My mother's family derived from North Wales and settled in Abertillery. My great uncle Capt Ted Gill MC was a Miners' Agent-at Ruskin College 1909. He died of his war wounds whilst electioneering in the N of England in 1923. His huge valley funeral was led by the industrialist Sir James German. His younger son John Gill is a character actor still working at 84-was touring in a Vanbrugh comedy last year. John Gill was in the first West End production of Under Milk Wood in the 1950's. Some of his recent small parts works have included being the old man victim in police "crimestoppers" videos.

Yours sincerely



David J Harris

reply to

forward

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file in..

Crossways-Owen Williams*Crossways
Owen Williams*

cc:

date/time: Sun, 23 Apr 2000 18:58:42 PDT

Thank you for the info re Ranji via Ceri.

I was not aware of the mortgage. We know that between 1923 & 1930 OW lost L.400,000. I must assume that Ranji bailed them out temporarily!

Margaret hid her age so I don't actually know her yr of birth. She was 17-Owen 58 when they married ??year. I guess she was born circa or before 1900-so the marriage would be just before or during WW1.

I tried to find Owen in the 1881 Census which I have at home on disc. I could not find him-I guess he and his father were probably away at sea? I did find his brother however.

Pwll Park

Edeyrn, Caernarvon, Wales

Mary Williams-wife-head of household-Master Mariners Wife-married- age 47 female b Penllech, Caerns, Wales

Watkin Williams-son mariner-unmarried age 16 male b Edern, Caerns, Wales

Mary Williams dau scholar age 14 female b Edern &c

Marjery Williams dau scholar unnm age 12 b Edern &c

Jane Owen servant/domestic servant-unm 26 b Edern &c

Still 1881 here is Mgt's father

Llantwit House, Llantwit Vairdre (sic), Glam

Elizabeth Thomas head-widow age 61 b Carndu, Brecknock (ERROR CWMDU)

David Prosser Thomas son mining engineer unnm b Trevethin

John Prosser brother farmer rtd b Carndu (sic)

As you probably know there are frequent transcription errors in the census transcripts-nevertheless it is a remarkable effort!!

Margaret said she met Ranji on the P&O steamer going out to India. I did not know that Ranji had ever been to Crossways but my mother thought he had stayed there?

If you do learn more I would be interested.

Best wishes

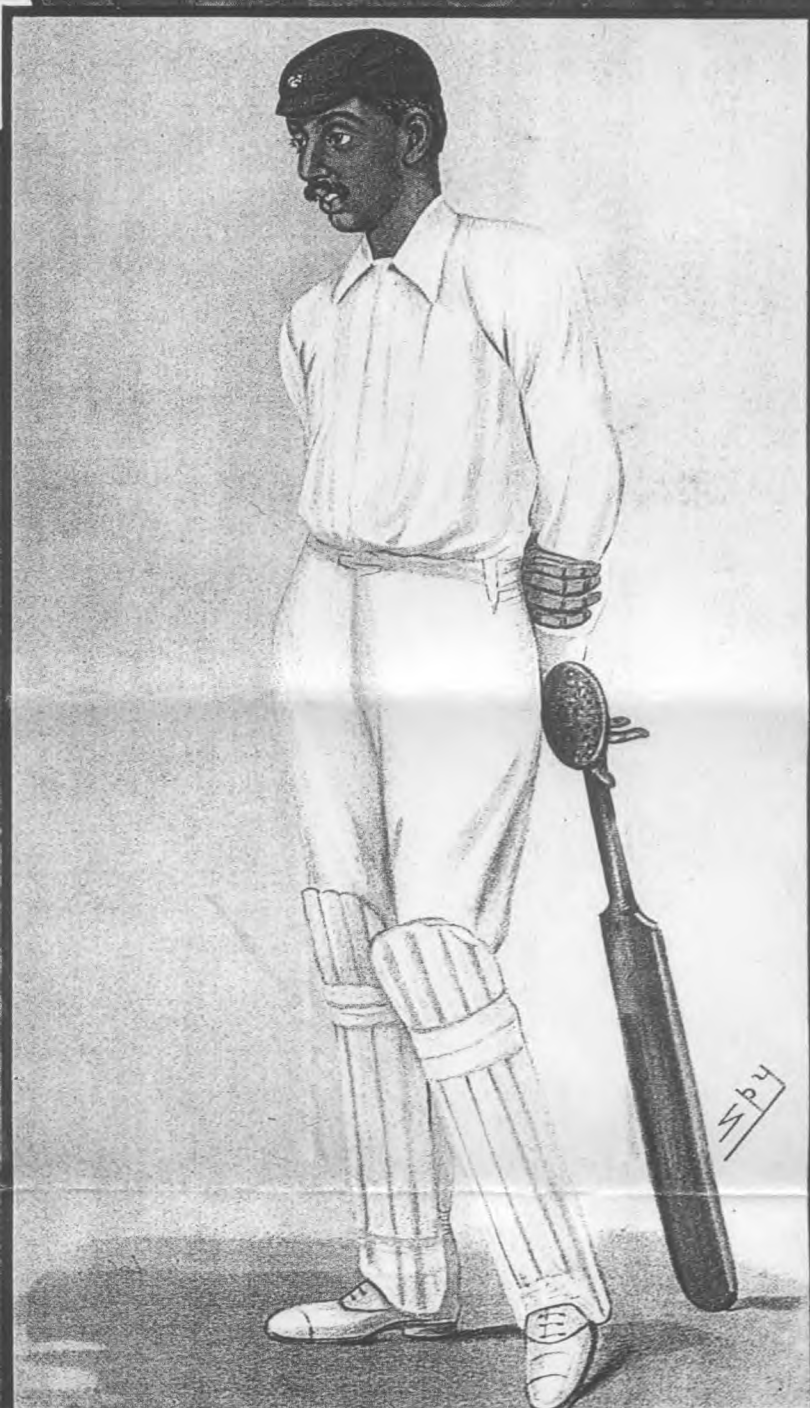
David J Harris

plus a pupil mining engineer & a servant

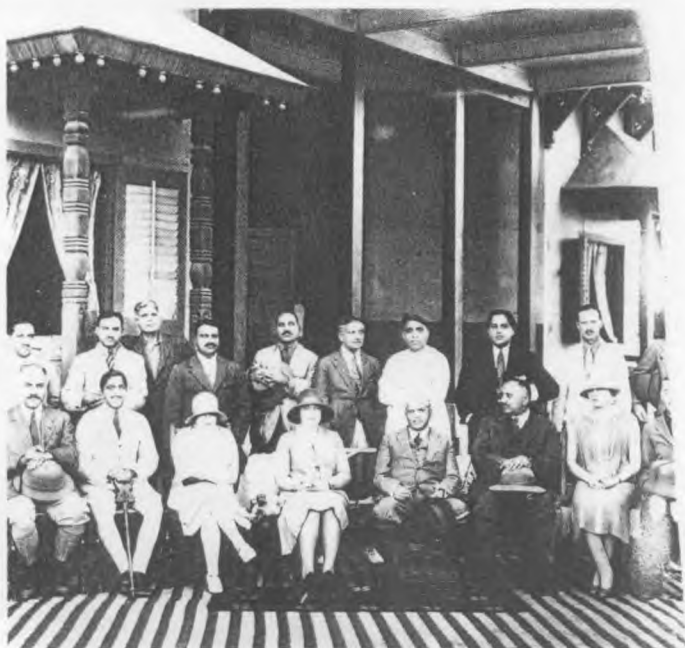
Alan Ross

RANJI

Prince of Cricketers



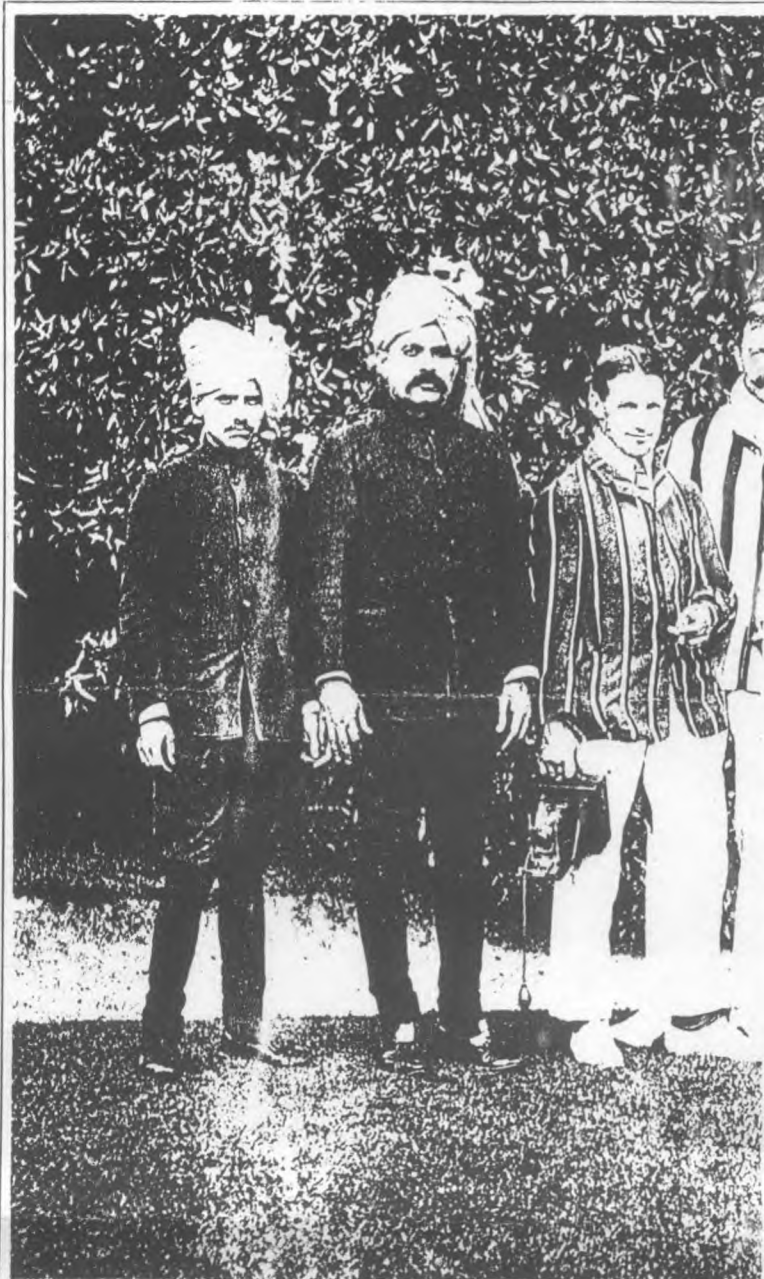
27 (right) Group taken at Ajwa during Ranji's visit to Baroda, 1926. Ranji, as in most photographs taken after the loss of his right eye, turns sideways to the camera.



28 (below) The Cenotaph. Ranji, at the far end of the front row, with fellow Indian officers, King George V, The Prince of Wales, the Duke of York.







Photographs from Ranji's own collection: above, Ranji and W.G. Grace (in a turban)

Prince of the crease

In cricket's golden spring there was no more golden figure than K.S. Ranjitsinhji - Ranji (above) - 'prince of a little state but king of a great game'. On the eve of the Prudential World Cup, ALAN ROSS highlights his brilliant career

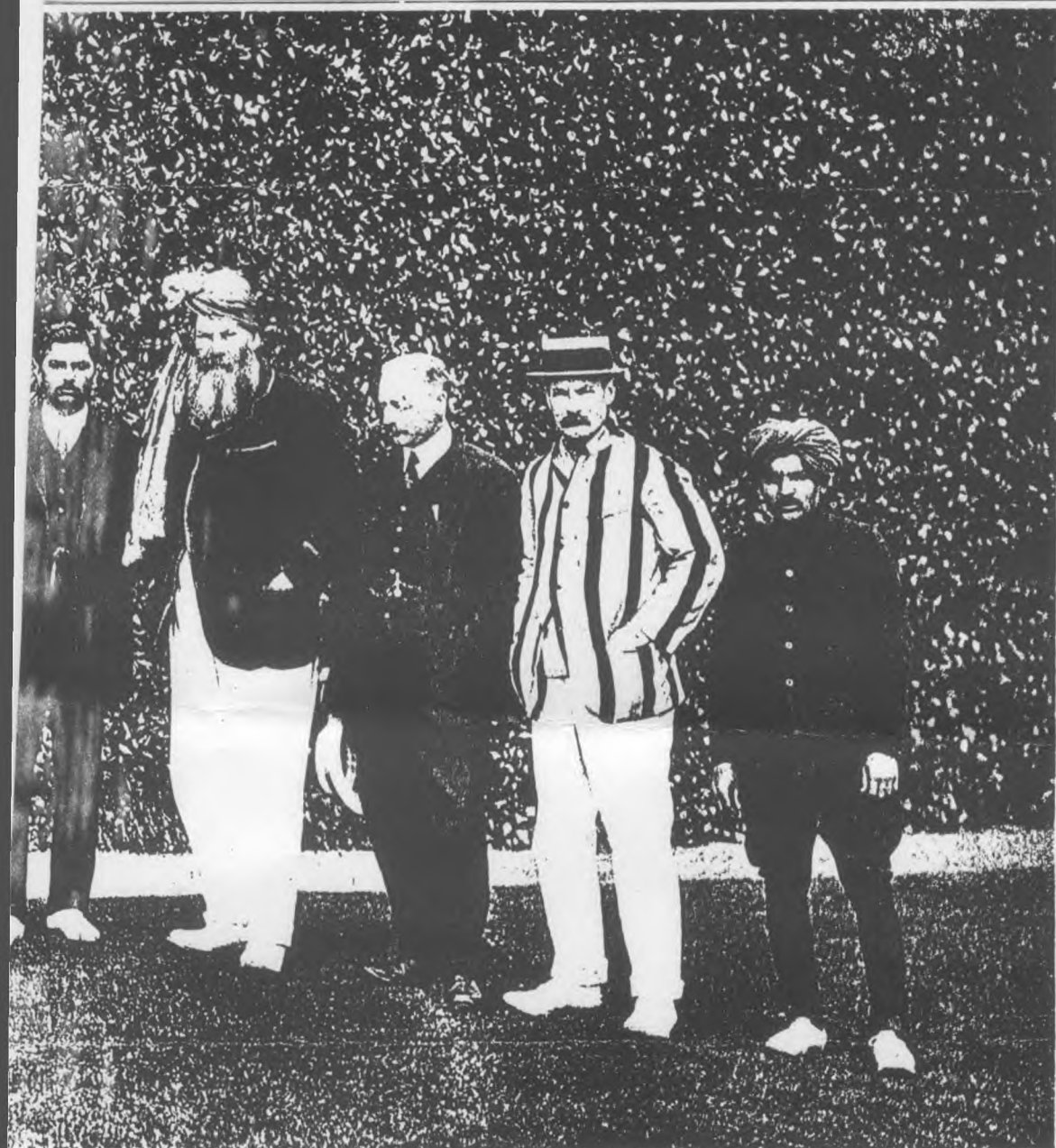
In 1897, when he was 25, Spy drew him for *Vanity Fair*. The previous year he had scored 10 centuries and 100 runs. G. Grace's record aggregate. Spy's cartoon shows him languid to the point of droopiness, leaning on his bat, clad in the silk shirt that became his trademark.

The pose is deceptive. In the text we read: 'His famous leg-glance shows that he has a quick eye; and he can therefore play racquets, and would be very good at billiards if he played less to the gallery. He is also an excellent tennis player who can hit birds; and, being an all-round sportsman, he fishes and cycles. He is a slim, exceedingly lithe fellow, whose action in the field sometimes reminds you of a panther; and a genial and casual person, who generally forgets an uncricketing engagement. He may be known a mile off by the elasticity of his walk... The people idolise him.'

K.S. Ranjitsinhji was born on 10 September 1872 at Sarodar, now in Gujarat state. For half his life he was, according to 'Wisden', 'the most talked-of cricketer in the world'. He became, in the words of the essayist A.G. Gardiner, 'the prince of a little state but the king of a great game'. Yet he requested that his biographer should not be a famous cricketer. In the end what counted most to him were not his fabulous exploits on the cricket field ('Ranji was the most brilliant figure in what, I believe, was cricket's most brilliant period,' England cricketer G.L. Jessop observed), but his record as ruler and administrator: Jam Saheb (Maharajah) of Nawanagar 1907-33; Indian representative at the League of Nations Assembly; Chancellor of the Indian Chamber of Princes. He was proudest of his work for the people of his own state.

But it is for the cricket that his name is remembered. The son of a

continued on page 29



...sts and bearers; top right, Ranji, now one-eyed after a shooting accident, as a British officer; above right, the inimitable batsman, and (below right) his renowned leg-glance stro



Above: a shooting party at Jamnagar. The Englishwoman in the centre is Ranji's long-standing companion; he never married



The Doctor and the Prince: W.G. Grace and Ranji at Ranji's house in Staines, Surrey

Rajput landowner, Ranji was adopted as a boy by his father's cousin, the ruling, and then childless, Jam of Nawanagar. A few years later, he was disinherited in favour of an illegitimate heir.

He was educated at the Rajkumar College, Rajkot, an establishment founded for the sons of princes and run on English public school lines. When he was 16 he was shipped over to England, to prepare for Cambridge. His headmaster, aware of his potential as an outstanding natural athlete, travelled with him and saw that he met the right people and went to the right places.

It was not until 1893, when he was 21 – and had been an undergraduate for three years – that Ranji got his Blue. But although he became a useful member of a powerful Cambridge side, he was not exceptional and failed against Oxford at Lord's. He passed his Bar exams the following January, despite spending his evenings playing bridge and billiards, and running up large debts. More importantly, he decided to qualify for Sussex, taking rooms in Brighton and playing for MCC and various scratch sides during the wet summer of 1894. He spent hours at the nets, paying relays of the best bowlers available to bowl to him. Nothing could be falsier than the idea that Ranji was an untutored genius: a genius, certainly, but one who took immense pains over every aspect of the game and its techniques.

His conscientiousness paid off. The next summer saw him installed in the Sussex side and the great improvement in his play was evident. In his first match for the county, against MCC at Lord's, he made 150 and never looked back for the rest of the season. He scored four centuries altogether, finishing with 1,775 runs at an average of 49.30.

This was the start of perhaps the most consistently brilliant batting sequence in the history of English cricket. In 1896 Ranji hit 10 centuries, two of them in one day against Yorkshire at Hove. In 1897 he made five centuries for England, in 1899 (he spent 1898 in India) eight, in 1900 11. In 1901 he averaged 70, scoring eight centuries and making 2,468 runs. In 1904 he hit eight more hundreds and averaged 74. In 1908 he scored 1,138 and in 1912 – aged 40 and stout – 1,113, a total which included four centuries.

But the statistics are the least of it. Ranji never hogged the crease and was quick to give his wicket away once the need was over. He scored at a terrific rate, seemingly effortlessly, and with never an unbeautiful stroke. 'He moves as if he had no bones,' observed C.B. Fry, his friend and partner on so many occasions.

Neville Cardus, who must have been very young when he saw Ranji, wrote: 'It was not in nature that there should be another Ranji. He was the midsummer night's dream of cricket. There is not a batsman today who would not be put into the shade if he were at the wicket with Ranji at the other end.' Bob Thomas, who umpired in a top hat during most of Grace's and Ranji's careers, remarked: 'The Prince was a greater player than the Doctor, because he had more strokes.'

Ranji's astonishing record for England and the glowing tributes to his very individual style of play fired the imagination of thousands back home in India. His fellow princes became involved, playing cricket in their states and introducing the game to everyone. Many of them sent for coaches from England, sparing no expense on facilities.

For five years (1899-1903) Ranji was a successful captain for Sussex, hauling them off the floor of the championship to second position. He broke down barriers between amateurs and professionals, was generous beyond his means. Then, in 1912, it was all over. He had played 11 full seasons for the county, batted 26 times against Australia. It was time to attend to affairs of state at home.

When Ranji, with full ceremony, ascended the throne of Nawanagar in 1907 he inherited a bankrupt, disease-ridden capital. Within a year he himself had nearly died of the typhoid that had carried off his predecessor. In the years that followed he created a new city, bulldozing the germ-infested slums, opening up hidden vistas of temple and lake. He saw to it that wells were dug in every village, so that the hideous succession of drought and famine was avoided. He developed ports and built railways.

continued

PRINCE OF THE CREASE *continued*

All this cost money and Ranji had, time and again, to go cap in hand to the Government of India for loans. He usually got them, though he resented having to account for expenditure. His hospitality to visiting princes or British dignitaries was extravagant by any standards. But as the years went by, despite occasional setbacks, the revenues increased and Nawanagar prospered.

In 1914, as soon as war was declared, Ranji offered his services to the British Government. He sailed immediately for France, serving as a staff officer on the Western Front, despite the appalling asthma that had afflicted him throughout his cricketing career. He equipped and paid for the upkeep of several squadrons of his own Lancers in France, and he gave his house at Staines for an officers' hospital.

On leave, in 1915, Ranji went shooting near Filey in Yorkshire. What the Germans failed to do, an erratic Yorkshire squire managed, wounding Ranji in the face so that his right eye had to be removed. Ranji declined to name the culprit, but ever afterwards turned his left profile to the camera.

Urged on by the King, Ranji returned briefly to first-class cricket. He played a handful of innings for Sussex in 1920, aged 48. 'I wanted to

write a treatise on the art of batting with one eye,' he remarked. The venture was not a success, and Ranji never played again. In 1933, the bronchial trouble that had dogged him all his life finally caught up with him. He struggled for breath for five days in his palace at Jamnagar, and died on 2 April.

Ranji never married, though he had a long-standing relationship with an English woman. His closest bond, it was drily observed, was with the parrot, Popsey, which he had acquired at Cambridge and which, bald and querulous, outlived him. He was by nature a host, not a guest, filling his palace at Jamnagar, his castle in Connemara, his house at Staines, with friends of both sexes.

'There can be no possible description of his batting,' wrote Lord Hawke, himself a cricketer of note, on Ranji's death, 'it must have been seen to be realised.' And the sculptor Eric Gill wrote in his autobiography, published seven years after Ranji's death: 'Even now, when I want to think of something wholly delightful and perfect, I think of Ranji on the county ground at Hove. There were many minor stars, each with his special and beloved technique, but nothing on earth could approach the special quality of Ranji's batting or fielding . . . such craftsmanship and grace entered into my very soul.' ■