

Chapter 6

Newport Cricket Club's Professionals (1880 - 1940)



Newport Cricket Club's 3 Great Professionals
- Silverlock, Diver & Steeples



The 'Historic' Rodney Parade Ground



Professional Engagements By Newport Cricket Club Between 1880 - 1940

Newport Cricket Club Professionals

In the early 1880's Newport C.C. was fortunate to be part of a highly successful Athletic Club with other recreational sections, including Rugby. The victories of the rugby side enabled the club to engage some of the best professionals of the day – mainly bowlers. The earliest professionals were Kelly (1874 to 1875) and Murphy (1876 to 1877), but it was Herbert Beresford from Sheffield, who had two spells with the Club 1878 to 1880 and 1883 to 1884, whom about anything is known. Professionals of the day included :-

1880 - 1889

Beresford & Assistant (1880), Killick & Assistant (1881), Richardson (1882), Beresford (1883), Beresford & Jupp (1884), Jupp, Flowers & Moore (1885), Emmett (1886), Emmett & Scott (1887), Devey (1888 & 1889),

1890 - 1899

Mee (1890), Mee & Hucknall (1891), Silverlock (17 weeks @ 50s) & Webb (1892), Silverlock (18 weeks @ 55s and 25 weeks @ 20s) & Webb (1893), Silverlock (17 weeks @ 60s and 31 weeks @ 20s) & Barclay (1894), Silverlock (18 weeks @ 60s and 30 weeks @ 20s) Barclay & Jones 1895), Silverlock (19 weeks @ 60s and 33 weeks @ 30s), Steeples (19 weeks @ 35s) & Williams (1896), Silverlock (19 weeks @ 60s and 33 weeks @ 30s), Steeples (19 weeks @ 35s), Williams (1897), Silverlock (18 weeks @ 60s and 34 weeks @ 30s), Steeples (18 weeks @ 50s) & Hutchins (1898), Silverlock (18 weeks @ 60s and 34 weeks @ 30s), Steeples (18 weeks @ 50s), & Hutchins (1899).

1900 - 1909

Silverlock & Steeples (1900), Silverlock & Steeples (1901), Silverlock & Steeples (1902), Silverlock, Steeples & Diver (1903 - 1908). G. L. Robinson, F. Rainsford & Diver (1909),

1910 - 1914

Silverlock, Diver & F. Rainsford (1910 - 1911), Silverlock, Diver & Harold Taylor (1912), Silverlock, Diver & Sidney J. Corbett (1913), Silverlock, Diver & Brown (1914).

The club was also innovative in the sense that it was the first club to introduce retainers to its professionals – a perk which County sides had only just introduced, with Surrey offering winter payments from 1894 so that its players did not move elsewhere. In fact Silverlock's earnings of £3 a week were equivalent to what the established professionals at The Oval and Old Trafford could expect to earn, to say nothing of cash-in-hand bonuses for good performances, plus a winter retainer.

During the period of the 1st World War (1914 - 1918) very little cricket was played, but from 1920 Newport continued to engage professionals right up until the start of the Second World War in 1939, with professionals such as :- L.V. Vaughan (1920), A. Bavin (1921), A. Bavin & J. Paxton (1922), A. Bavin & J. Heap (1923), Harold Pickthall (1924 - 1927), T. Sadler (1927 - 1930), Norman Smith (1928 to 1930), William Allan (1931 to 1935), Kenneth Harris (1931), Harry Jarrett Pro/Groundsman (1936 to 1948).

All were distinguished names and top class cricketers of their generation, but few could match the performances and loyalty to Newport, of the three famous pros – Arthur Silverlock, Dick Steeples and Edwin Diver.





'Newport's Professionals'

Arthur Silverlock (1892 - 1914)

Arthur Silverlock



Arthur Silverlock

Born : December 1867, South Hackney, London, England

Died : 4th June 1949, Ardleigh, Colchester, Essex, England

Batting : Right-hand batsman

Bowling : Leg-break, Right-arm medium pace

Teams : Minor Counties Championship Monmouthshire (1897-1914)

Miscellaneous Monmouthshire (1892-1905)

Cardiff (1893), South Wales (1894-1911), Monmouthshire Club and Ground (1895-1896),

Players of Glamorgan (1899), Glamorgan (1900), Minor Counties (1901), Glamorgan and

Wiltshire (1902), Newport (1892-1908) & Newport (1909-1914)

In an extract taken from Newport Athletic Club '1875 – 1925' entitled 'Cricket In The NAC' written by H. Berrow, it was reported that 'In 1892 one of the most interesting events in the history of Newport Cricket Club took place – *'the engagement of Arthur John Silverlock as the Club's professional. He came as quite a youngster in the place of Mee the Notts professional who was regarded as one of the fastest bowlers ever to play for the Club. Silverlock came on the recommendation (we believe) of the old professional Devey.'*

The magnitude of Silverlock's contribution to Newport Cricket Club was illustrated by author H. Berrow in the extract *'One cannot complete these notes without a special reference to Silverlock. It is no exaggeration to say that probably no other cricketer in South Wales, whether amateur or professional, enjoyed quite the reputation that Silverlock built up, alike for his play and for his unostentatious bearing. It was the old professional Devey who introduced him to the Club, and he commenced his career in 1892 and continued till 1908, when he severed his long connection for the purpose of launching out in business. But owing to his wife's ill health, he had to abandon the idea, and after playing for the Club as an amateur during 1909 he again took up professional cricket and remained with the Club until the outbreak of war. One has again to deplore the lack of accurate records, but there is no doubt that up until 1908 Silverlock, in the course of his career for Newport and Monmouthshire, made over 25,000 runs, and took over 1,800 wickets. During the remaining six years he played for the Club and County he was still in as good form as ever, both with the bat and the ball, but owing to the incompleteness of the records it is impossible to say the further number of runs he recorded and the wickets he took. Taking an average, however, he must have scored another 8,000 runs and taken another 600 wickets – a truly wonderful record..... It was a striking fact that when Silverlock did nothing excellent with the bat he almost invariably made up for it in bowling and fielding; he was a wonderful man at slip, and as a bowler he had a remarkable head and clever fingers'*

Next to S.F Barnes, Silverlock was regarded as the greatest Minor County player and very near to being the greatest player never to have played first class County cricket. He could, if he had chosen won every honour in the game but he remained faithful to Newport.

'In an age of underpaid club professionals wandering the country looking for better appointments it says much for both Newport and Silverlock that he stayed so long. To stay over 20 years with one club was rare. The only others of the period who come to mind were Megson at Ferguslie, Boyes at Arbroath and Tommy Toogood at Clifton, against whom Silverlock played many times'.

'Such was Arthur Silverlock – he could have played for England but preferred to be Newport pro'. (J. F. Burrell)



*Silverlock, Steeples & Diver
(1903 - 1908)*



'Newport's Professionals'

Dick Steeples (1896 - 1908)

Dick Steeples



Dick Steeples

Born : 30th April 1873, Somercotes, Derbyshire, England

Died : 2nd August 1946, Somercotes, Derbyshire, England

Bowling : Right Arm Fast/Medium

Teams : Main FC - Derbyshire (1897), Minor Counties Championship - Monmouthshire (1897-1908), Lancashire League - Todmorden (1910), County Championship - Derbyshire (1897), Miscellaneous Monmouthshire (1896-1905), Monmouthshire Club and Ground (1896), Players of Glamorgan (1899), Minor Counties (1901), South Wales (1905-1906), Newport (1896 - 1908)

In 1896, Silverlock was still engaged as a professional, but Barclay had gone, and in his place another man who made history for the Club took his place – Dick Steeples, who came as a 'stripling' from one of the Alfreton Collieries, Derbyshire (he worked underground). He sent down a fast ball with a wonderfully easy action.

The close of the 1908 season marked the severance of an engagement of 13 years standing with Dick Steeples, who had been with the Club for that period as a professional bowler. Owing to the incompleteness of the records, one is unable to give the number of wickets he took for the Club (he also did magnificent service for the County X1), but during his career for Newport he must have taken close on 900 wickets in Club matches.

He was a professional well-liked by all who came in touch with him, and one cannot do better than repeat the following remarks made concerning Steeples by a well-known Newport captain under whom he played for many years, *'Dick Steeples (called 'Dick the lion-hearted') will always be remembered by those who played with him as a man who was never beaten – undoubtedly the best fast bowler of his day in second class cricket. With Silverlock he was the foundation of the Newport side for many years; always cheerful, always ready, always a trier – the best stamp of professional I ever saw. He would bowl, just come on as change, and bowl again and again, always with the same good heart – an extraordinary character, such as is not to be found now. For a fast bowler he was the cleanest player I have ever known. I never knew him bump a ball at a man's body or try tricks that one has often seen first class amateur fast bowlers do. Dick Steeples was a gentleman pro. who played the game as it should be played'.*



*Silverlock, Steeples & Diner
(1903 - 1908)*



'Newport's Professionals'

Edwin Diver (1903 - 1914)

Edwin Diver



Edwin Diver

Born : 20th March 1861, Cambridge

Died : 27th December 1924, Pontardawe, Glamorgan, Wales (aged 63 years 282 days)

Batting : Right-hand bat & Wicket Keeper

Bowling : Right-arm medium

Teams : Main FC - Surrey (1883-1886) & Warwickshire (1894-1901)

Other FC : Gentlemen of England (1884), Gentlemen (1884), Gentlemen of the South (1885) South of England (1885-1892), Players (1886-1899), England XI (1886), Second Class Counties (1893), Midland Counties (1899), Minor Counties Championship - Monmouthshire (1905-1914), Surrey Club and Ground (1884-1886), FD Docker's XI (1891), Birmingham (1891), Warwickshire Club and Ground (1891-1895), England XI (1891), Birmingham Small Arms Company (1892), Moseley (1892-1896), Cambridgeshire (1892), Warwickshire (1893-1900), North of England (1894), Warwickshire XI (1894), Wednesbury (1900), Monmouthshire (1903-1905), Players of Glamorgan (1904), S. Wales (1905-1907), Newport (1903-1914)

In 1903, in addition to Silverlock and Steeples, Edwin Diver, the well known Surrey and Warwickshire cricketer was engaged by the Club as coach and wicketkeeper/batsman. In 1905, Diver recorded a century for Newport (142) and averaged 33.75. During this year the heavy responsibility on John Butcher for the up-keep of the grounds led to a re-arrangement of the staff, under which Diver was given charge of the cricket ground. The success of this arrangement soon manifested itself in the improvement of the wickets. For the first few years the new ground gave a lot of trouble in the preparation of wickets suitable for first class cricket but it afterwards improved and became one of the finest provincial grounds in the Kingdom.

Diver continued as a professional with Newport up until World War 1 broke out on 4th August 1914. In an extract taken from Newport Athletic Club '1875 - 1925' entitled 'Cricket In The NAC' written by H. Berrow, the author commented *'Edwin James Diver came to the Club in the closing days of his career, but with much cricket still left in him. He had had a wonderful career, having played for the Counties of Surrey and Warwick, and he had the rare experience of playing for both sides in 'Gentlemen' v 'Players' matches. He was in the 'Gentleman's' team at the Oval in 1884 and assisted the 'Players' at the same ground in 1886 and 1889. He was still a magnificent bat when he came to us. He also kept wicket exceedingly well, especially for a man of his age, and his geniality and patience made him a really good coach. The Newport side, especially the younger players, improved under his tuition. He made numerous big scores while serving the Club, and was a most attractive batsman to watch. It was not in him to play slow cricket: indeed he always gloried in the pace of his run getting. Probably one of his best innings on the Grounds was one of 150 against the M.C.C., a side which included S. M. J. Woods, Tarrant, Rawlin, Pougher, and W. S. A. Brown. During the War period Silverlock and Diver severed their connection with the Club and were not re-engaged'*.



*Silverlock, Steeples & Diver
(1903 - 1908)*

'Legends of their Day'

L. Foster Stedman



In 1913, Leonard Foster Stedman relinquished the captaincy after a period of 11 consecutive seasons as 1st X1 captain. L. Foster Stedman came to Newport in the early nineties, from Lincolnshire, where he played Second Class County Cricket. He was 'a good, forceful bat, and could score fast when once he got going. He was also an excellent bowler, right arm medium to fast, and always bowled around the wicket, his most dangerous ball being one which got up and went away quickly, getting him a lot of wickets. He had a very cheery personality, was liked by everybody, and was one of the most popular captains the club has ever had. It

will not be out of place to state that Monmouthshire County Cricket Club has also benefitted by his knowledge and love of the game, as he captained the County X1, and was also secretary for many years'. No one has equalled his record of Captaincy in the club's history, captaining the 1st X1 from 1902 - 1912.

L. Foster Stedman - A Newport Cricket Club 'Legend'



E. S. Phillips



Edward Stone Phillips ended the 1914 season at the top of the batting averages, tragically it was his last season as he was killed in action early in the First World War. E. S. Phillips was a particularly fine player and won the Average Bat three times in his last four seasons (1911, 1913 and 1914).

In an extract taken from Newport Athletic Club '1875 - 1925' entitled 'Cricket In The NAC' written by H. Berrow, the author wrote :

'Many cricket members of the club gave their lives for their Country during the four years of War, but there is one whom we shall be forgiven for particularly mentioning - Lieut. E. S. Phillips, who did so much for Newport and Monmouthshire cricket. His death was probably the biggest blow ever sustained by cricket in the County. He came straight from Marlborough School X1 and afterwards went to Cambridge and secured his Cricket Blue. He was the best

amateur bat the club ever had - a really sound bat, slow at first, but he could score all round the wicket when he got going. He and Silverlock put up many fine first wicket partnerships worthy of First Class Cricket - one of the best was one of over 200 runs v Glamorgan at Cardiff, when each scored a Century and Monmouthshire won by innings. He was also a magnificent field at cover and extra cover point, and was delightful to watch. There is no doubt that he was the backbone of Monmouthshire cricket at one period. He captained the side for some years, and also acted as Secretary'.

E. S. Phillips - A Newport Cricket Club 'Legend'.



Frank Rees



In an extract taken from Newport Athletic Club '1875 - 1925' entitled 'Cricket In The NAC' written by H. Berrow, the author wrote,

'One cannot help stating that he played more cricket for Newport than any other man in it's history. He was a most attractive batsman, who topped the averages as far back as 1889, winning the Average Bat on no fewer than ten occasions, with the latest date he won it being in 1912 - a truly wonderful record. When he finished he was still batting in quite his old style'.

Frank Rees - A Newport Cricket Club 'Legend'

