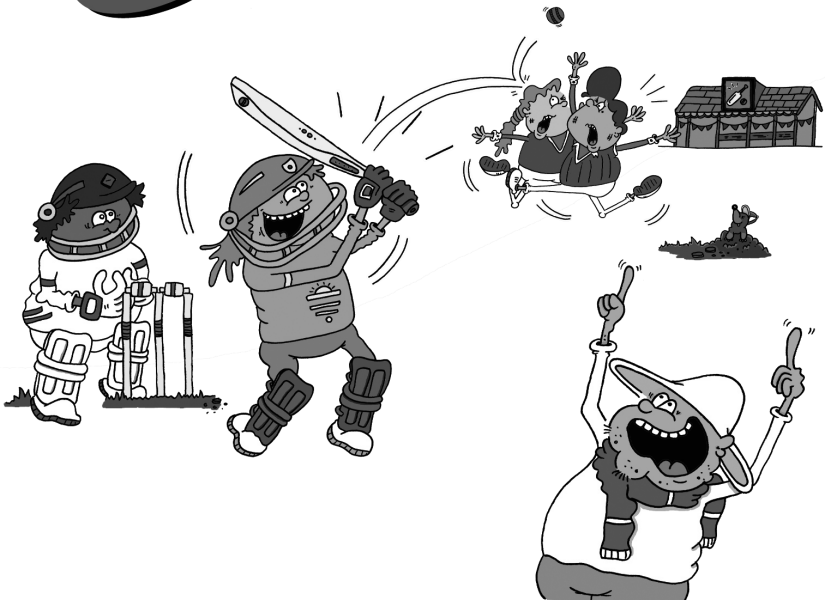




# STUPENDOUS SPORTS

# CRACKING CRICKET





## **Robin Bennett**

Robin is an author and entrepreneur who has written several books for children.

When Robin grew up he thought he wanted to be a cavalry officer until everyone else realised that putting him in charge of a tank was a very bad idea. He then became an assistant gravedigger in London. After that he had a career frantically starting businesses (everything from dog-sitting to sandwich making, tuition to translation)... until finally settling down to write improbable stories to keep his children from killing each other on long car journeys.

Robin plays most sports. Poorly.

## **Matt Cherry**

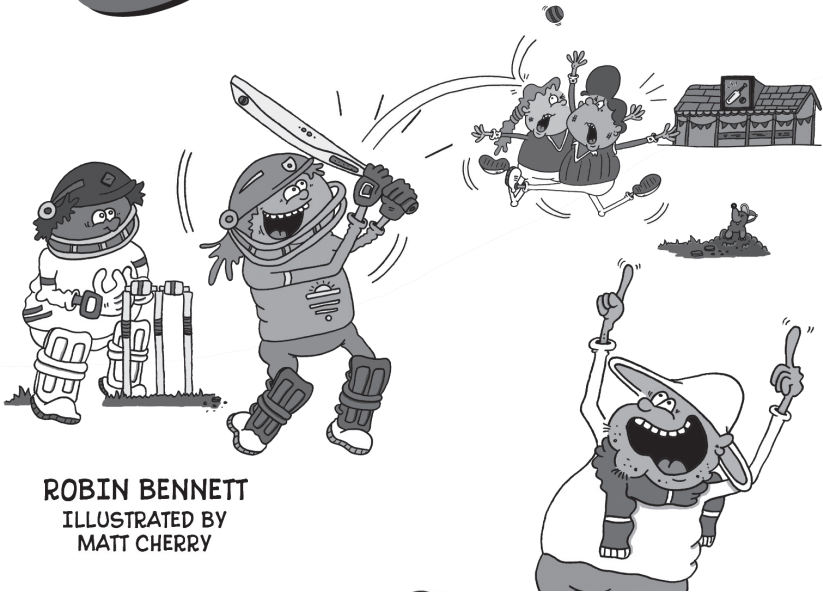
Matt grew up on the Kent coast, writing and drawing, where he still lives today with his wife and two children. He still loves to write and draw every day, so he hasn't changed much really. He's just a lot taller.





# STUPENDOUS SPORTS

# CRACKING CRICKET



ROBIN BENNETT  
ILLUSTRATED BY  
MATT CHERRY





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# FOREWORD

May I begin by saying cricket is such a wonderful sport. It's provided me with life experiences, friendships and memories that I will forever be grateful for.

I started my love for the game the same place that the majority of children do, in my parents' back garden. I recall long days spent with my two brothers with our imaginary test match scenarios: each pretending to be one of our heroes of the game. I was always Alan Donald trying to tear in from the bottom of the garden, through the flower beds and letting rip at whichever of my brothers was batting. They were the best days. I finished my career having played for eighteen years professionally, representing three counties and being part of an England side that won an Ashes series in 2005.

Cricket is a game which can be played by anyone; it's a game which I think produces critical thinking, concentration, discipline and courage. These are all values that can be transferred into the rest of life, so when I see men, women



and children all playing and enjoying cricket, it does bring an enormous smile to my face!

To be asked to provide a brief foreword for this book was an offer I was delighted to accept. Promoting cricket in a positive, fun and educational way is hugely important for the game's development and for current and future generations of boys and girls. And this is something I will support with all the enthusiasm and energy I have.

Simon

SIMON JONES MBE,  
GLAMORGAN, WORCESTERSHIRE.  
HAMPSHIRE AND ENGLAND



# CONTENTS



**1. HISTORY OF THE GAME – PAGE 9**

**2. MEET THE PLAYERS – PAGE 22**

*Top Stumps*

**3. THE MATCH – PAGE 41**

*The Pitch, Equipment, Duration, Scoring,  
Getting Out, Fielding Positions, Rules*

**4. SKILLS AND TACTICS – PAGE 63**

*Bowling, Batting, Fielding, Wicket Keeping*

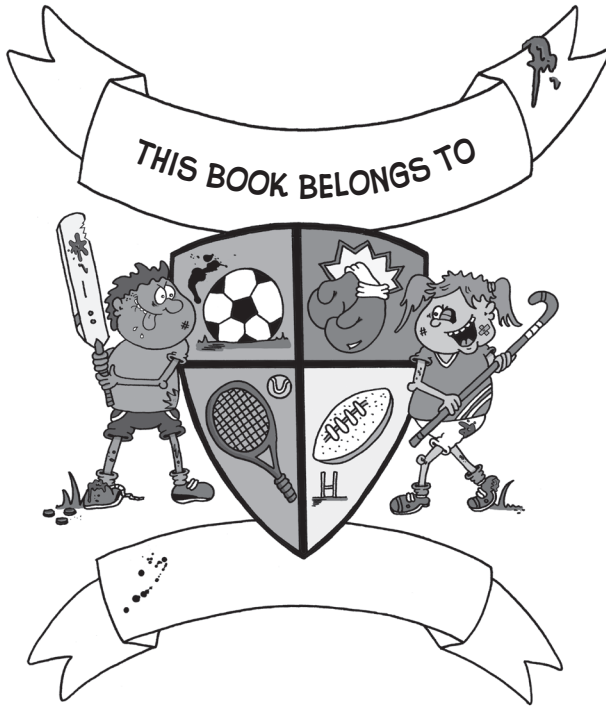
**5. FUTURE OF THE GAME – PAGE 91**

*Variations, Diversity, The Eternal Spirit of Cricket*

**FASCINATING STATS – PAGE 105**

**KEYWORDS AND WHAT THEY MEAN –  
PAGE 119**

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS – PAGE 143**







# CHAPTER 1: HISTORY OF THE GAME

*What is cricket, who invented it and what's it got to do with killer robots?*

Cricket is probably the most puzzling game ever invented.

Just read this old summary of the rules for the men's game if you don't believe me:

*You have two sides: one out in the field and one in. Each man that's in the side that's in goes out, and when he's out he comes in and the next man goes in until he's out. When they are all out, the side that's out comes in and the side that's been in goes out and tries to get those coming in, out.*

See?

To make matters worse, some people claim that it's not even a sport. Instead, they'll tell you (while putting on their serious face) that 'cricket is a way of life', or, even 'THE MEANING OF LIFE'.



So, it's either a bonkers *in when you're out, out when you're in* game or some kind of eccentric religion in which everyone plays outside and enjoys a good tea afterwards.

People can't even agree on how and when it started. The top five theories are that cricket was:

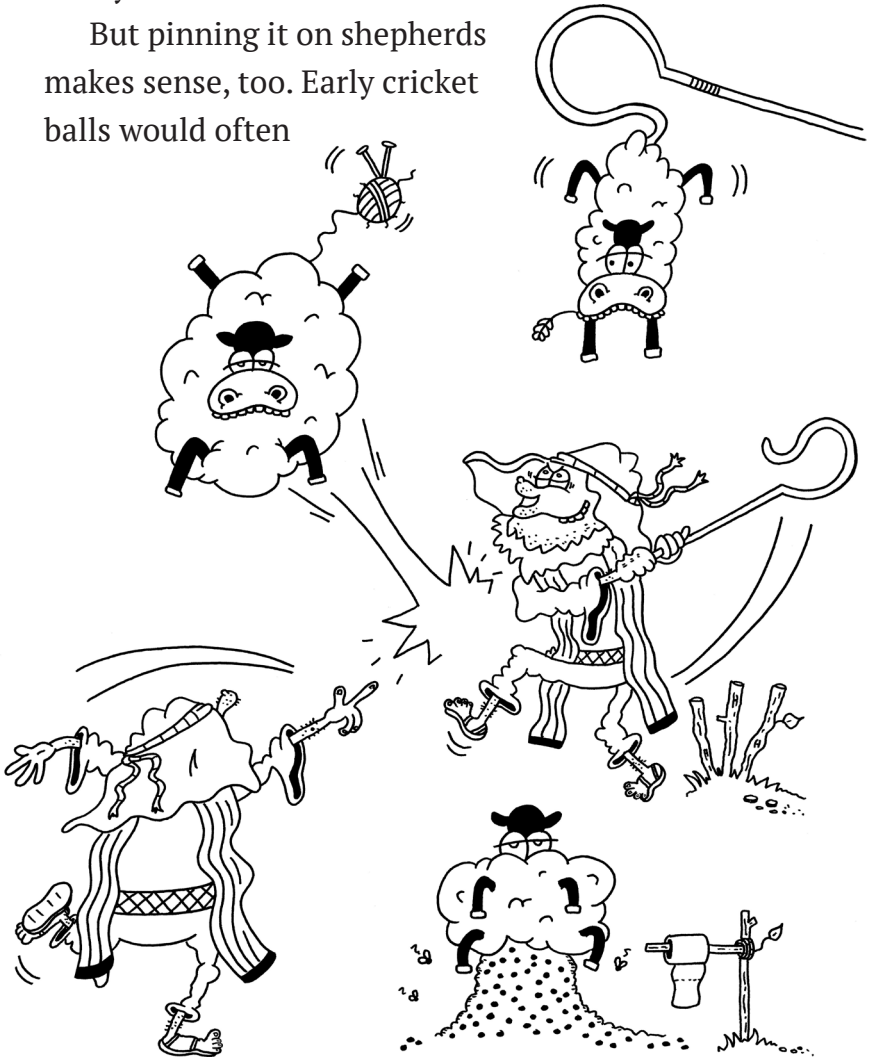
- Invented by people cheating at bowls.
- Played by kids in the south of England in the Middle Ages. (The Weald, to be precise, which is in Kent. How they know that, or why it should have been the Weald, no one seems keen to say.)
- Played by people in Flanders, or next door in France – and not just any old people: King Edward II was one of them apparently.
- Brought here by aliens – **Killer Robot Aliens**, to be precise.
- Made up by bored shepherds in England, anytime between about 1300 and 1600.

I'm going with the last one – those shepherds – because sheep can be hilarious and, as anyone who looks after them knows, when they're not trying to kill themselves sheep are pretty simple. They sort of look after themselves from sunrise to sunset, including all the eating and pooing in between.



This means that shepherds have a lot of time on their hands to invent a sport quite unlike any other and that, in itself, is quite funny.

But pinning it on shepherds makes sense, too. Early cricket balls would often





be made out of matted wool or from sheep's wool wrapped in leather; a shepherd carries a crook (stick) and players today stand in front of wickets (like a wicket gate that shepherds use when they are moving sheep around). As the ball was tossed to the batter, you can easily imagine someone shouting, 'Crook it!'

So, first prize for inventing cricket goes to bored shepherds with dozy sheep.

Anyway, whatever, after around the sixteenth century the history of cricket gets much clearer because people started to write about Cricket or 'Creckett'. A court case in 1550 mentions playing it at school, which is believed to be the first written reference to the game. Many believed it spent the next couple of hundred years being mainly played by kids (hurray!), until the adults decided it was far too much fun just to leave to kids and nicked it back (boo!).

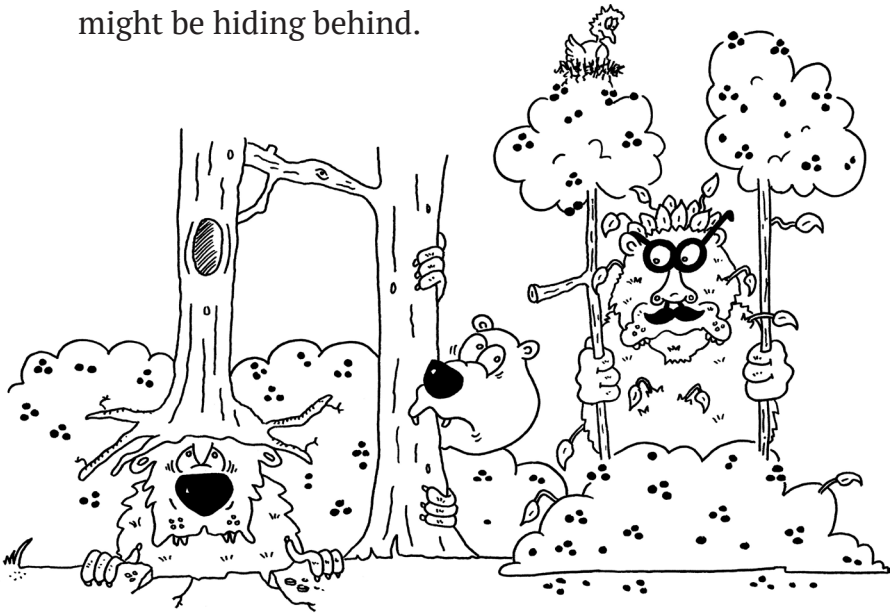
By 1700 it had become the most popular sport in London among men and women ... and it started to spread.

In fact, after taking over London and the south of England, cricket got pretty adventurous and decided to miss out the north of England for the time being and try its luck in America and the Middle East. A game in Aleppo in Syria was written



about in 1676! And the first-ever international match was played between the US and Canada in New York in 1844.

In spite of this, cricket never really caught on in Canada, presumably because Canada is often armour-plated in ice, and there doesn't seem to be any shortage of trees that bears might be hiding behind.



About this time (1800s), the bat was rapidly changing from what looked a bit like a hockey stick (or shepherd's crook – sorry to bang on about it) into something we might recognise today as a good, honest bat that knows its place. This was mainly because players had stopped rolling the ball along the ground in a nice safe way and were now trying



to knock the wickets over (or the batter's head off) by bowling the ball overarm. Some comedian did come up with a bat that was as wide as the wicket, until everyone else put a stop to this and decided that the bat couldn't be wider than 4 inches (10.16 cm).

While we're on the subject of rules, no one can remember who thought up the basics, but a code of practice was drawn up by the Duke of Richmond and someone called Alan Brodick, in 1728. Probably quite useful (and a pretty typical thing for a duke and a mate or two to do) but they did have to wait another 40 odd years until the rules became proper rules that most people stuck to.

This probably goes a long way to explaining why, even today, cricket has real rules and rules that are more like guidelines – sort of *we prefer it that way and we'll be disappointed if you do it another way but there's not much we can do about it* rules.

This has led to cricket having a reputation for being just as much about fair play (the right way to play) than fixed laws (i.e., 'The Laws of Cricket') and it's certainly why a great many people on planet Earth think cricket is much better and more noble than other sports.

And they may be right because nowadays it's



the second largest sport in the world after football. It's true that the British Empire helped spread it in the first place, but it's long since been a much-loved sport around the world. In fact, it is enjoyed by more than 2.5 billion fans in 180 countries.

India and Pakistan are considered the biggest rivals in international cricket. And the rivalry is good for viewership, because it makes it more interesting. It is estimated that around 300 million people will tune in to watch nail-biting matches between these two nations.

### COOL QUOTES

**'I bowl so slowly that if I don't like a ball I can run after it and bring it back.'**

– J.M. Barrie (creator of *Peter Pan*, so a great writer but a very poor cricketer, apparently).



## FASCINATING FACTS



Among Australian players and fans, the score considered unlucky is 87. They call it the Devil's number (in frightened whispers) because 87 taken away from 100 is 13.

A score of 111 in cricket is often called a Nelson. It's called that because of Admiral Nelson who'd spent a career fighting at sea busily losing bits of himself to cannon fire. At the end of his life, he had only 'One eye, one arm and one leg' (one, one, one or 111).

**Note:** This isn't true – Admiral Nelson still had both his legs when he died.

## COOL QUOTES

Russell Crowe, New Zealand's famous Oscar-winning actor, who is a cousin of former Kiwi skippers Martin and Jeff Crowe, is a huge fan of the game, telling BBC cricket correspondent Jonathan Agnew on a visit to watch Australia play England in 2009 that it had

**'been my dream for thirty years'**

to go to the home of cricket – Lord's.





## Great dates

- **1550** First mention of cricket anywhere.
- **1745** First recorded women's match.
- **1751** First cricket match played in India (Calcutta Cricket Club).
- **1772** First-class cricket begins, played at Broadhalfpenny Down, England, on 24 and 25 June.
- **1787** Formation of Marylebone Cricket Club aka the MCC, at Lord's – perhaps the most famous cricket ground in the world and considered the home of cricket.
- **1877** First Ashes match played to mark the first time England had lost to Australia on a world stage (in 1882). The Ashes trophy is a tiny urn that contains the ashes of the burned English bails.
- **1900** Six-ball overs introduced (pretty important, take a look at the Appendix: 'Overs').
- **1973** First World Cup took place, which was won by the host – the England's women's cricket team against Australia. The men's World Cup started two years later.



## SPOTLIGHT ON PLAYERS

### W.G. GRACE

No opening chapter on the splendid and fantastically strange game of cricket would be complete without talking in a bit of detail about the father of the modern game, Mr W.G. Grace.

First up, if you are going to be considered a giant in any game, not just cricket, it certainly helps if you are actually a giant and if you've got a beard that looks like an otter is clinging to your chin for dear life. Luckily for him, William Gilbert Grace was huge and had a very large beard indeed.

But he was also a superhumanly talented cricketer who almost single-handedly - through skill and colossal sportsmanship - created the game we know today.

Plus, he was a doctor.

But that's beside the point.



## COOL QUOTES

**‘They came to see me bat,  
not you bowl.’**

– W.G. Grace, putting the bails back on his stumps after being bowled first ball.



W.G. Grace came from a family of cricketers, who loved winning the game as much as playing it. As a youth he'd been pretty good at other sports: as a hurdler at the National Olympian Games in 1866 and playing football for a London team, the Wanderers. By this time he had already started to play first-class cricket, at a time when the game was changing rapidly.

And no one else had a bigger hand in this change than W.G. Grace because it turned out he could bat, he could bowl, he could field and he was a brilliant tactician, all of which meant he captained most sides he played for. Other players said he hit the ball harder and straighter than anyone they had ever seen. And although he carried on bowling round arm (half way between underarm and overarm is the best way to describe it) when others were already bowling overarm, he still managed medium-fast pace and incredible accuracy. As a fielder, he could throw the ball like a trebuchet - once recording a 112-metre throw (the average adult can throw a ball a relatively



pathetic 35 m). He explained this by saying he used to throw stones at crows a lot when he was growing up in the country.

In 1873 he became the first-ever player to score a thousand first-class runs in a season and get a hundred wickets. People were amazed. Then he proceeded to do the same thing every year until 1886.

And that really did it.

Very soon after, Grace became a superstar and people flocked to see him play, even in Australia. Although he could be a tough competitor and an argumentative player - as much over money as the rules - outside sport, he had a reputation for kindness. As a doctor, he very rarely charged anyone who was poor and he was greatly upset by World War One from a humanitarian point of view. Knowing when to be soft and when to be strict is the mark of any great cricketer, or sportsperson, for that matter. When he died in 1915, he was mourned by millions.