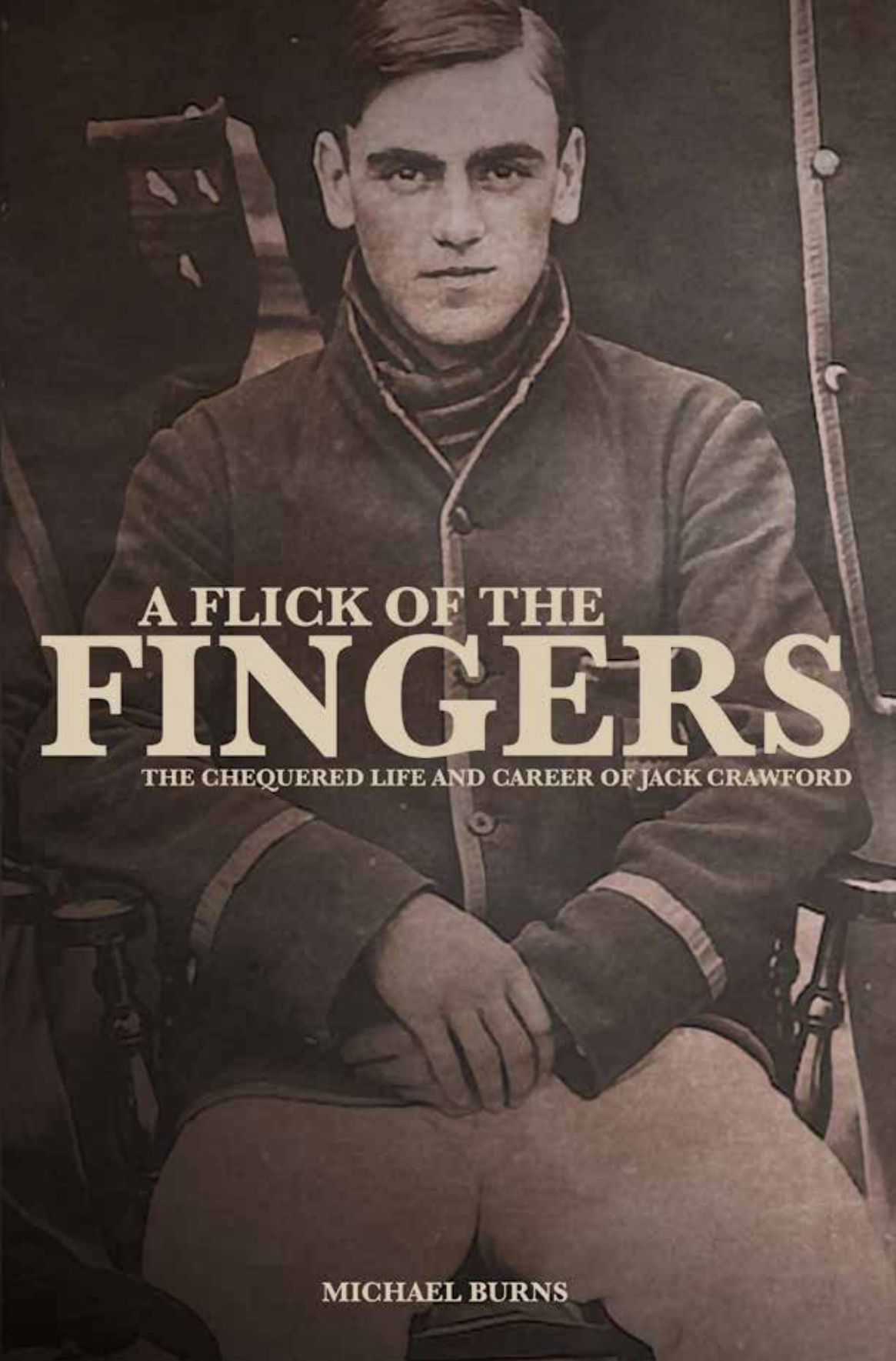

A FLICK OF THE FINGERS

THE CHEQUERED LIFE AND CAREER OF JACK CRAWFORD

MICHAEL BURNS

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pitch

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J.N.CRAWFORD

Prologue

RETURN OF A NATIVE

WHEN the sixth Surrey wicket fell after lunch on the first day of August 1919, J.N. (Jack) Crawford picked up his bat and gloves, checked his vital abdominal guard was in place, put on his chocolate-coloured cap emblazoned with the Prince of Wales feathers crest, gave his spectacles a last polish and made his way from the amateurs' dressing room, down the long flight of stairs, through the pavilion gate and out on to a sunlit Oval. The large Kennington crowd could scarcely believe their eyes when they caught sight of the pre-war hero who had last played for the county a decade ago. And in this game they certainly needed him – Surrey were in trouble.

The first post-war season was in full swing and Neville Cardus was one of the many cricket writers whose heart had been lifted by the sight of young men in white flannels, 'The prisoner of Reading Gaol getting a sight of the sky

did not suffer emotions more poignant than mine when, in May 1919, I saw again the green circle of Old Trafford's grass after years in the confinement of Manchester, with apparently cricket dead for ever in my heart.'

The game's authorities, realising the important role that cricket could play in helping the nation return to some sort of normality after four years of war, fashioned a hastily-arranged County Championship of two-day games, and invited an Australian Imperial Forces team to play a summer-long series of matches around the country. The AIF party was made up of players who would in 1920/21 form the core of the mighty team that won eight consecutive Tests against England. The 1919 tourists, picked from the thousands of Australian servicemen dotted around Europe at the end of the war, included Herbie Collins, J.M. Gregory, J.M. Taylor, Bertie Oldfield, Charlie Kelleway and C.E. Pellew. Jack Crawford's first game back for Surrey after spending nearly ten years in Australia and New Zealand was against this AIF XI.

On the last day of July, in front of an overflowing Oval, the tourists' captain Herbie Collins – holding the rank of lance corporal – won the toss and chose to bat, not surprisingly on this warm day in high summer. The Australians finished the day on 369/6, with Collins himself making 96; there were also fifties from the New South Walean Bill Trenerry, and from two Victorians, Carl Willis and Allie Lampard. Crawford took just the one wicket with his medium-paced off-spinners, having the rugby and cricket international Johnny Taylor caught by Jack Hobbs for 19. Despite Collins and Trenerry putting on 141 in 80 minutes, *The Times*'s verdict was that the AIF team had 'hardly made the most of

their opportunities on a fast, true wicket, the batting being strangely cautious at certain periods during the afternoon'.

The Australians batted on at the start of the second day and were finally dismissed for 436, the 38-year-old fast bowler Tom Rushby finishing with remarkable figures of 6-77 off 39.3 overs. Surrey then batted for five minutes before lunch and lost the amateur D. J. Knight for nought – clean bowled by the first ball he received from the fast-bowling discovery Jack Gregory. After lunch Jack Hobbs, facing the slow left-arm spinners of Collins, miscued a hit to leg and was caught in the slips for nine. Gregory, bowling with tremendous pace, then dismissed two more of Surrey's amateurs – Miles Howell caught at slip by Clarence Pellew off a rising ball for one; and Frank Naumann, hit on the glove and pouched by wicketkeeper Bert Oldfield for two.

When former bricklayer Harry Harrison pushed forward and was bowled by Collins for a duck, Surrey, on a perfect batting wicket, found themselves in deep trouble at 26/5. Captain Cyril Wilkinson and the future double international Andy Ducat 'first stopped the rot', reported the *Daily Express,* 'and then began to collect runs. Neither was happy with Gregory, who made the ball rear at all sorts of angles. Both batsmen were hit on the body, but they hung on, and both had the satisfaction of getting Gregory taken off.' The bruised pair put on 57 for the sixth wicket, before the Aston Villa and England footballer was dismissed by leg-spinner Lampard for 33, with the score a dismal 83/6.

The fall of Ducat saw the appearance, to a huge ovation from the Oval faithful, of their former idol – the tall and still-athletic 32-year-old Jack Crawford. He started slowly

but got going by hitting medium-pacer Charlie Winning for six on to the scoreboard in front of the ground's famous gasometers. Released from his early-innings nervousness, Crawford was soon driving with his customary strength and timing – one of his on-drives sent the ball into the seats in front of the pavilion. With Gregory rested, Wilkinson at the other end began hitting with power unsurprising in an international hockey player (the Surrey captain would win an Olympic gold at the Antwerp Games the following year), and together with Crawford put on a stand of 107 in an hour before tea was taken at 4.30pm.

After the interval, a further 39 runs had been added when Wilkinson gave a simple return catch to the persevering Gregory. He had made 103 in two hours and, according to the *Manchester Guardian,* had 'rarely or never played so finely'. The Surrey captain's 146-run partnership with Crawford had taken their side's score to 229/7. Bill Hitch and Herbert Strudwick soon fell to the wiles of Collins, and when his old team-mate Tom Rushby joined Crawford at the crease 47 runs were still required to save the follow-on.

What followed was described as 'sensational' by the *Daily Graphic*, 'astonishing' by *The Observer* and 'terrific' by the *Daily Express.* Jack Gregory was brought back to polish off the Surrey innings, but Rushby 'scarcely had to face the music at all', wrote Neville Cardus. 'Crawford took charge in the manner of a captain of cricket born and bred, [his] driving was beautiful and tremendous. He drove one or two of Gregory's fastest (designed as Yorkers) on to the top of the awning in front of the pavilion. He hooked him on to the adjacent tramlines.'

The whirlwind last-wicket partnership of 80, to which Rushby contributed just two, was made in a breathtaking 35 minutes, and Surrey were finally dismissed for a respectable 322. The huge Oval crowd stood to greet Crawford as he returned to the pavilion with a score of 144 not out. The *Daily Express* man watched as 'the crowd cheered Crawford even more than they cheered him in the old days'. For the *Manchester Guardian,* it was 'a triumphant reappearance for Surrey after an interval of ten years'. 'People who talk of cricket as a dull game should have been at The Oval during those magical thirty-five minutes: the experience would have given them food for thought,' was *The Observer*'s view. 'To see him pull himself up and force the fastest balls from Gregory – and they were fast – to the boundary, was a liberal education. Those strokes were even finer than his big drives.'

After Crawford's heart-stopping innings, the rest of the game was almost inevitably an anti-climax. On the third day the Australians batted with extreme caution in their second innings, an approach that so vexed one south Londoner that he made a personal protest, 'He came to the middle with hasty strides [reported the *Daily News*] to ask the umpire when the Colonials would declare their innings. Eventually Herbert Thompson the umpire and C.T.A. Wilkinson, the Surrey captain, persuaded him to return to the benches below the gangway. On the way back he turned a somersault.' The Australians eventually declared at 4.30pm with their score at 260/4, with Jack Crawford having taken 2-84 in a 22-over spell, clean bowling both Collins and Taylor. On a mellow early-August evening, Surrey, left a mere two hours to score 335 to win the match,

finished on 121/1, Jack Hobbs entertaining the crowd with a graceful 68 not out.

The 1919 encounter between Surrey and the Australian Imperial Forces XI would always be remembered as the match in which Jack Crawford, ten years after his acrimonious dispute and departure from Surrey, played the innings of his life. Australian captain Herbie Collins, upon seeing his star fast bowler Jack Gregory hit as he had never been hit before or ever would be again, said simply of Crawford's assault, 'It took your eyesight away.' The tragedy was that his home county and England had needlessly missed the best years of a unique cricketer's career.

1

BORN IN THE ASYLUM

JOHN Neville Crawford was born at Cane Hill Asylum on 1 December 1886. He was the youngest son of Alice and the Reverend John Crawford, the first chaplain of the newly-opened mental hospital at Coulsdon five miles outside Croydon. The cricket-loving, Oxford-educated parson, who had played for Kent and Leicestershire, was a noted right-arm fast bowler and slow left-arm spinner. Previously the vicar at St Mary's de Castro in Leicester, he was no doubt attracted to Cane Hill by the large family house, free food and heating that came with the job, in addition to the £250 a year salary. But above all, being more interested in the crease than the cross, this new living gave the Rev. Crawford the opportunity to create his own cricket pitch and XI in the 150-acre grounds of the asylum. Records show that cricket equipment and a 'cricket shed' were soon ordered.

Over 300 patients were employed working on the grounds, gardens and farm, carrying out tasks which included picking flints from the stony ground and painting the cricket pavilion. 'Pa' Crawford, as he was widely known, and his wife Alice, between 1876 and 1882 produced three daughters, Edith, Beatrice and Audrey, and two sons, Vivian and Reginald, before John Neville came along in 1886. A final daughter, Marjorie, born in 1897, completed the Crawford clan.

William Gladstone's 1886 Idiots Act, which divided the insane into lunatics, idiots and imbeciles, was intended to provide care, education and training for asylum inmates. The self-contained Cane Hill, described by a leading authority on asylums, Doctor Tuke of Hanwell, as 'the best hospital in England', was well-positioned to meet the demands of the new Act. Situated on the crown of a hill, it had an impressive set of buildings of red brick and Portland stone, and was overlooked by an imposing 107-feet water tower that could be seen for many miles around. In 1886 there was a community of 1,000 patients in various states of prescribed insanity, along with more than a hundred staff of doctors, nurses, cooks, clerks, carpenters and cleaners.

For the infant John, life at Cane Hill was akin to living in a close-knit English village. One of his earliest childhood obligations was to attend church services conducted by his father in the imposing asylum chapel. The congregation of patients and staff regularly numbered 800 for Sunday service, while 450 attended weekday matins. A secular delight for John, or Jack as he soon became known, was looking down from the top of Cane Hill, spotting the horse-

drawn coaches and frequent steam trains travelling between London and Brighton.

The male members of the Crawford family made sure that the young Jack Crawford always had a bat and ball close at hand. Among them his grandfather Andrew Crawford, a retired schoolmaster, was living nearby and had time on his hands to encourage his talented grandson. A classics teacher, Andrew had played for the Gentlemen of England in the days of top hats and buckled shoes. As well as introducing his charges to Virgil and Ovid, he tried to develop his pupils' cricket skills. Interviewed by the *Surrey Comet* in 1925 on the occasion of his 100th birthday, and recalling his time at Appleby Grammar School during the 1840s, he said, 'In those days the people in the north knew nothing about cricket.' When he later taught at Maidstone Grammar School, he was equally dismissive, remembering that 'children of the south knew little of the game'. Even so, during his time at the school he did coach four players who went on to play for Kent.

Jack's father, by giving his youngest son his own first name, perhaps saw him as the one who would achieve greatness on the cricket field. He kept detailed scrapbooks of Jack's achievements from his very first games of organised cricket. Jack also had in Vivian and Reginald two very good cricketing brothers who, as soon as Jack could stand, played endless games with him on the extensive grounds of Cane Hill. The oldest of the three brothers, Vivian attended Whitgift Grammar School and broke all school records with both bat and ball. Reginald, who was handicapped by what in his day was described as a club-foot, received no formal education but was a good enough boy cricketer to

captain Surrey Young Amateurs. Both Jack's older brothers were later to distinguish themselves in county cricket.

All the Crawford girls had been introduced to the summer game at an early age and proved to be talented cricketers; Beatrice Crawford once made 106 not out for Woodmansterne against Caterham. But, like most Victorian daughters, the Crawford sisters were not given the same privileged education that their three brothers enjoyed, instead being sent to small local schools that offered only basic education. The youngest daughter Marjorie attended the newly-opened Old Palace Yard School in Croydon. Run by nuns who had rescued the dilapidated former residence of the Archbishops of Canterbury, the only attendance fee was a bun and a cup of milk to sustain the pupils during the day. The same school, in the 21st century, is still using the now beautifully restored 500-year-old buildings, but has become a very exclusive private school for girls.

In the meticulously-kept black, leather-bound scrapbook dedicated to his son's cricketing feats, Pa Crawford notes Jack's first game of adult cricket for the Rev. J.C. Crawford's XI v Caterham Depot on 11 September 1898. The 11-year-old boy scored 11 and took four wickets. Two more performances are recorded that summer; a score of 11 against Norbury, and only a single for the Young Surrey Amateurs against the might of Brixton Wanderers.

The following year the scrapbook notes a host of matches, including a game at The Oval for 'Thirteen Surrey Colts (with Captain) v Sixteen Public Schoolboys'. It was remarkable that the 12-year-old Jack Crawford played for the Colts, a team of much older boys captained by coach W.T. Graburn and including the 17-year-old Tom Rushby,

the future Surrey fast bowler. The Colts made a paltry 21 (Rushby 1, Crawford 0, Graburn 0); the Public Schoolboys scored 296 (Rushby 1-38, Crawford 1-8). These matches in 1898 and 1899 were fitted in after Jack had broken up from Glengrove School in Eastbourne, where he had spent the first two years of his schooldays.

Attracted by the extensive cricket field that stretched out below the collection of school buildings, Pa Crawford in September 1899 then transferred his son to St Winifred's at nearby Kenley – a preparatory school that boasted of sending boys on to Eton, Marlborough and Charterhouse. The school's motto was 'haec olim meminisse juvabit', which roughly translates as 'it will be a pleasure to remember'. Jack Crawford is certainly one former pupil who would have had happy memories of his schooldays at St Winifred's, and especially of the summer terms when he was the star of the cricket XI. He was mentioned many times for athletic feats in the two St Winifred's School summer term magazines pasted into his father's scrapbook, but only once for academic achievement, 'Under the careful tuition of Mr Shepherd Smith, the Third Form has made steady progress which we have come to expect. J.N. Crawford though first in the term lost his place by a poor examination.'

In both years he won competitions for throwing the cricket ball and the high jump but did not feature in either the sprints or the middle-distance placings. A sentimental article written by 'An old Habitué' neatly captures the privileged cosiness of prep school life. Perhaps with the young Crawford in mind he describes a visit to the 1900 St Winifred's Sports Day, 'Yes it was a great day, over all too

soon. How I envied the small boy surrounded by admiring sisters, with a cricket bat in one hand, silver cup in the other, fishing rod, pair of pads, volume of "Chums" and sundry other articles under each arm – "the spoils of victory".'

It was, of course, in the reports of the school's First XI that Jack Crawford was most often mentioned. In his first season in 1900 he averaged 87.6 with the bat and took 65 wickets at a nugatory 2.6. Against Dulwich Preparatory he scored 133 not out, his first century, and in the same match took seven wickets, all clean bowled. In the 1901 season he was made captain of the St Winifred's XI. He scored two centuries and took two hat-tricks among a host of standout performances with bat and ball. The St Winifred's school magazine gives the first indication of how Jack Crawford played his cricket. In 1900 he was a 'hard hitting bat; with more patience should be first class'. In 1901, 'a strong punishing bat, excellent medium fast bowler, excellent field' while the final assessment in 'Characters of the Teams' called Crawford simply 'the best all round cricketer for his age we have ever seen'.

An article in the 1900 St Winifred's magazine offered a sobering and surprising note to the otherwise idyllic and celebratory tone of the publication. An old boy who had recently taken part in the attack on Spion Kop during the Boer War, writing as 'An Eye-witness', gives a cold-hearted picture of the realities of war, 'There was no standing back to back to sing "God save the Queen"; no exhorting one another to deeds of courage; there were no staff-officers and big wigs galloping about, exhorting men to fight bravely. Col. Thorneycroft did not, as is usually depicted, stand in front of his men giving them courage; like a wise man under

a ghastly hail of bullets crept and crawled from cover to cover on his face.'

In September 1901, now wearing spectacles, the spindly 14-year-old left home for the ancient public school in the Derbyshire village of Repton. Founded in the 16th century, the school had cultivated a number of eminent cricketers before Crawford's arrival, among them C.B. Fry and Lionel Palairet, the latter still in 2015 the co-holder with Herbie Hewett of Somerset's highest first-wicket partnership – 346 v Yorkshire in 1892. The decade before Crawford's arrival had been a poor one for Repton cricket, a decline that the new headmaster, the Rev. L.G.B.J. Ford, of the Reptonian cricket-playing dynasty, was determined to halt. He appointed two Oxford Harlequins, the forceful J.W. Stratton and the kindly K.A. Woodward, who along with the school's head professional, one-time Nottinghamshire medium-pace bowler Alick Handford, would transform the school's results.

In the 1902 First XI team photograph, Crawford is sitting on the lowest of the steps leading up to the old pavilion that overlooked the Repton cricket ground. Upon his arrival at the school, a year later than most new boys, he had gone straight into the XI and, in the first game of the season, showing maturity beyond his years, took 6-28 against a strong Wolverhampton club side, all his victims clean bowled. In the next match against Incogniti, with a remarkable bowling performance, the 15-year-old returned 5-10 in the first innings and 4-12 in the second – this time hitting the stumps eight times. In a sodden summer Crawford failed to shine with the bat, but his season's bowling tally was a remarkable 40 wickets at 12 apiece.

Returning to Coulsdon after the end of term, Crawford filled the rest of his summer with many more games, carefully chosen by his father. All the matches were recorded in Pa Crawford's scrapbook – especially notable were two of his first appearances for MCC, against Croydon and Whitgift School. In the Whitgift game Crawford scored 57 in a partnership of 128 with one of Surrey's finest, the Reigate-born W.W. Read, who, a quarter of a century earlier, had been a schoolboy prodigy. Playing for Surrey Young Amateurs against the Young Pros at The Oval on 7 and 8 August, Crawford scored 66 and took five wickets; later in the month he made 106 for the Young Amateurs against Teddington in Bushey Park.

The 1903 Repton XI was considered by the school's cricket historian F.R.D'O. Monro to be one of the school's best-ever sides. Led by wicketkeeper R.A. Young, also a glasses-wearer, they won seven of their ten matches with Crawford scoring centuries against Free Foresters and Northern Nomads as well as taking five or more wickets on five occasions.

But in 1904, *Wisden* poured cold water on some of these schoolboy performances against adult sides. Two questions 'of a rather delicate nature' were raised by the writer the Repton head's brother W.J. Ford, 'There are innumerable grumbles, well-founded grumbles, I fear, in the air to the effect that the umpiring is so one-sided that it is not worth a man's while to play in matches against schools, as he is more likely to be got out by the umpire than the bowler, and can only get the boys out by bowling them clean. In many foreign matches the "cricket master" or an "old fellow" selects and captains the opposing side, and thinks he is

doing the best he can for his school if he coddles the boys to the last degree and arranges that the batsmen shall get runs and the bowlers wickets.'

In Crawford's case, the records show that when bowling for Repton against adult sides in 1903, the vast majority of his victims were bowled, so no help was needed from the school pro or any old fellows. At the end of the summer after he had returned to Cane Hill, he played a notable game at Gatton Park, the estate of Sir Jeremiah Colman. The two teams, Mr J. Colman Juniors XII and XII Young Surrey Amateurs, 'included some of the leading public school cricketers of the day'. Crawford, playing for the mustard magnate's team, in a low-scoring, two-innings game, took 18 wickets for 43 runs and scored 51 not out in his side's second innings – a performance that highlighted the gulf between the young Jack and his contemporaries.

With Crawford and Young still in attendance, 1904 could hardly be anything other than another successful season. Crawford scored 127 against Northern Nomads and a superb, chanceless 148 against Incogniti, a team that included George Shepstone and Reginald Schwarz, both members of the South African touring team. Crawford's season's return was 766 runs scored at an average of 85, and 51 wickets at 12 each. Repton's two traditional two-day matches against school teams resulted in handsome victories: Uppingham were beaten by 145 runs, (Crawford 12-115); and Malvern by eight wickets, (Crawford 13-112). After the Uppingham win, a local newspaper described the scenes that greeted the conquering heroes, 'The victorious team had a right royal reception on their return after the match. They were drawn home in triumph from the station

in a brake, and the exuberance of the admiring Reptonians went near to causing an accident. As it was, the pressure of those at the rear of the brake was at one time too much for the leaders and it was fortunate perhaps that what injuries there were were only slight, and that no great harm was done.'

That cricket was the chosen sport of the privileged was in no doubt. It was seen by such exclusive schools as Repton as playing a vital role in building the necessary character for those who would go on to run and defend the Empire. For the under-privileged, cricket was seen as being a tool for social engineering of a very different kind. An article in *Boy's Own Paper* in 1902, 'Our Young Poor Law champions of Cricket', describes a cricket match in London for 'waifs and strays' from Bethnal Green and Holborn who are introduced to cricket in order to keep them out of a life of petty crime.

After the 1904 Repton season but before the summer was over, Jack Crawford's character as a cricketer was tested in the adult world. His talents with both bat and ball had come early to his county's notice. The previous year, aged only 16, he had played in an early-season trial match, rubbing shoulders with such county greats as Hayward, Hayes, Lockwood and Brockwell, so it did not come as a complete surprise when he received a letter from Surrey's illustrious secretary:

> 3 August 1904
> Dear Crawford
>
> I wired your father last night that the Committee would be glad if you could play for Surrey v Kent

> at Canterbury tomorrow. I got the telegram enclosed in reply. Leveson-Gower and Raphael will be stopping at the Hotel Metropole Folkstone. Perhaps you could let me know at once whether you can play or not. Congratulate you on a brilliant season.
>
> Yours faithfully
> CW Alcock Sec

Highly ambitious for his son, Parson Crawford had already given permission for Jack to play in the game. The proud father would have recalled batting for Kent with his brother Major F.F. Crawford at Canterbury Week in 1872. Thirty-two years later, on 5 August 1904, the schoolboy prodigy would follow in his father's footsteps.