

Review of ARCHIE, in UK *Cricketer* Magazine

By PAUL EDWARDS

When I got back home on Saturday evening, I found something to hearten me. The kind folk at Slattery Media had sent me the revised and updated edition of David Frith's biography of the Australian batsman, Archie Jackson. If you're not sure who Jackson was, he played eight Tests for Australia, scoring 164 on his debut against England at Adelaide in February 1929. He was 19 years old.

Just over four years later Jackson died of pulmonary tuberculosis. People said his star would have outshone Bradman's. Years later you could find folk talking about the elegance of his strokes and the gentleness of his nature. David has written a classic biography of him; it is marked by shoe-leather research, piercing insight and fond affection. An earlier edition is subtitled: "The Keats of Cricket". The foreword is written by Harold Larwood.

In late June 1930 the touring Australians played Lancashire at Aigburth. Jackson made 52 and his mentor, the graceful Alan Kippax, made 120, both on a ground where I have covered many days of county cricket. Nobody dies as long as people remember them; the more detailed the recollection, the more vivid the life. To read about Jackson again on Saturday evening was to be touched by him - again.

Now some of you may be relatively young cricket followers or only beginning to read about the game. You may be wondering who David Frith is. (To be truthful I now feel a little like JRR Tolkien when he tried to describe Gandalf.) David is one of the finest historians the game of cricket has known.

Without his work we would know far less about Anglo-Australian cricket, the Bodyline tour and at least two other cricketers whose biographies he has written, including A E Stoddart. And we would have to get by without *Pageant of Cricket*, the best illustrated history of the game. David's work will last for as long as cricket is played, and men are charmed by the beauty of it all. His house in Guildford is a trove of books and cricket memorabilia and its owner is a benevolent guide to it all.

But don't take my assurance as gospel truth. This is what three other people have said, and please accept that I am as suspicious of book-cover blurb as anyone: "Thank goodness the cricket world has always thrown up men like David Frith, who seem to regard a contribution to cricket history as a duty to mankind," commented Sir Donald Bradman. "When I see the quality of writing by people like David Frith, I feel daunted. I can never write as well as they can. So, I don't try," added Rahul Dravid. "David Frith is cricket." said Gideon Haigh. David's supporters make up a decent top three in any author's side but they are nothing more than he deserves.

If I know David, he will be settling down to watch some Test cricket this weekend, but I also hopes he gets to see some of the four-day county matches that are being planned. Then he can join the rest of us in the vital acts of reclamation for which this summer will also be remembered.