



**THE BIG BAT AFFAIR**  
**By Paul Smith**

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# THE BIG BAT AFFAIR

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## CHARACTERS

### **The Commentators;**

Mr Henry Slip  
Mr Jonathan Point

### **The Chertsey Team;**

Mr Thomas White  
Mr Edward 'Lumpy' Stevens  
Mr John Wood  
Mr Thomas Quiddington  
Mr John Edmeads

### **The Hambledon Team;**

Mr Richard Nyren  
Mr Thomas Brett  
Mr John Small  
Mr Tom Sueter  
Mr William Hogsflesh

### **The Umpire;**

Mr Bird

### **The Star and Garter Club;**

The Duke of Dorset  
Sir Horace Mann  
Mr Henry Rowett

***A sublimely English scene. A field with trees. An area of short grass. A coloured tent on each side of the stage. A wooden bench between. Music plays as the lights come up. William Boyce maybe.***

***This is a field in Laleham Burway, by the River Thames in Chertsey, Surrey.***

***The year is 1771. September.***

***A man in period cricket attire appears from one of the tents and addresses the audience as the music fades. This is THOMAS WHITE.***

WHITE Good morrow friends. My name is Thomas White and I have a tale to tell. It is a tale of dering-do. Of David against Goliath. A tale of The Summer Game.

The year is 1771 and the game of cricket is still in it's formative years. The Dilshan Scoop has yet to be seen and the Jos Buttler ramp shot is the faintest of glimmers in the distance. We have never heard of KP and as for the Big Bash, well.....

Now, as with any story which takes place in the mists of time, this one cannot be guaranteed as far as full accuracy is concerned. What you may see is fiction. Characters have been created and the story interpreted and adjusted for dramatic effect.

Please, we seek not to offend any descendants of those who actually took part in these events, myself included. What is important is that the main thread of the tale is based on contemporary reports and subsequent writings. So please, indulge us and we will do our best to entertain.

A word to the wise, if you are not interested and intrigued by the game of gentlemen, please do not leave your seats (particularly during an over) and seek the sanctuary of the nearest hostelry. Sit back and witness one of the biggest controversies in the history of cricket.

The Big Bat Affair!

***The lights change. WHITE re-enters the tent he came from. From either side of the stage, two men enter, wearing period day wear. They walk towards each other, shake hands and stand in front of the central bench. These gentlemen are HENRY SLIP and JONATHAN POINT.***

SLIP Well good morning everyone. My name is Henry Slip and...

POINT ... my name is Jonathan Point. We are your commentary team here at the splendid cricket ground at Laleham Burway in the County of Surrey.

- SLIP It is 23 September 1771 and we are here to witness a tussle between Chertsey, the home team and the team from Hambledon in Hampshire. Looks like the weather is going to stay fine, doesn't it Jonathan?
- POINT It certainly does Henry and this is an important match with a rather attractive prize for the winners.
- SLIP Yes, indeed. £50 will be awarded to the winning team and that is certainly not something to be sneezed at.
- POINT Goodness me no.
- SLIP Indeed not. But before the players take to the field, we have a few moments just to give the viewers and listeners a little background to this great game of ours.
- POINT One question I am continually asked is where the game of cricket came originated.
- SLIP Well Jonathan, as you know, that's not a very easy question to answer and we only have a short while before play gets underway, but many people think it first saw the light of day in Anglo-Saxon times when shepherd's played with a crook and a ball made of wool. The crook was called a 'crice'.
- POINT Ah, but then you have the game played on continental Europe with a small, three-legged stool called a 'krickstoel' – that's Flemish by the way.
- SLIP Or what about the game called 'cricquet'?
- POINT Is that you actual French?
- SLIP Yes, French cricket!
- POINT It's alright ladies and gentlemen, we can assure you that cricket is not French.
- SLIP Except the version one plays in the garden or at the seaside with the bat held in front of your legs.
- POINT Indeed. But cricket is English. Make no mistake! Not Dutch, French or, God forbid, American!
- SLIP Where?
- POINT Good question.
- SLIP America won't be discovered for another five years, so it can't be there.

POINT Well as long as we are clear about that we can continue with the story.

SLIP The game has come a long way in a short time.

POINT A game for gentlemen of course and always played in a gentlemanly spirit.

SLIP But there were still only two stumps and one bail.

POINT The ball was red though.

SLIP Not white or pink.

POINT Or even blue as seen in ladies cricket in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

SLIP But that's all for the future.

POINT The ball was still bowled underarm.

SLIP Overarm bowling not becoming legal until, well, what was it? 1835?

POINT Indeed. That was the end of the grasscutter.

SLIP Until Trevor Chappell revived its use in 1981.

POINT Of course. But time now to visit the teams as they prepare for the match.

SLIP The Chertsey team made up of workers, labourers, gardeners and innkeepers.

POINT And the Hambledon players made up of Gentlemen of London. Posh.

SLIP Very posh!

***Lights change and there is a seamless link between scenes with music as the Chertsey Team come into one of the tents. They are THOMAS WHITE, EDWARD 'LUMPY' STEVENS, JOHN WOOD, THOMAS QUIDDINGTON and JOHN EDMEADS. They are preparing their kit and drinking beer and smoking pipes etc.***

WHITE Well, here we are again.

STEVENS We need this win.

QUID           Against Hambledon? We haven't got a chance. They win everything. Too close to the powers that be in the game. Know what I mean?

EDMEADS      But there's £50 riding on this one.

WHITE         Bet you'd spend your share all at once. But we won't won.

WOOD          It's not totally hopeless is it?

WHITE         All summer they have dominated.

STEVENS      Well we must be able to get a few more notches than them.

QUID          They beat everyone.

EDMEADS      We may as well go home now then. I just wish there wasn't money on the game. Spoils it somehow.

WHITE         There's money on every game. We just don't see much of it. How do you think the Duke of Dorset makes his fortune?

QUID          Oh, undoubtedly there's big money to be made gambling on cricket.

STEVENS      It's a problem and it's open to abuse.

EDMEADS      Don't take it too seriously Lumpy, it's only a game.

WOOD          Which brings us back to the original point. How to beat Hambledon. They are only human.

QUID          You can't come to a match and express radical views like that!

WHITE         Well, this is Hambledon we're talking about. Not some minor county or associate cricketing nation. They have the ear and the support of the Star and Garter Club.

WOOD          So we have to come up with some strategy. Bowl quicker?

STEVENS      I can't bowl much quicker than I do already.

QUID          Won't make any difference. They smash it around..Boom...Boom!

EDMEADS      What about trying to get them drunk before the match.

WHITE         Well you will have to hurry up, the match is starting shortly. Anyway, I'm not sure they'll be happy downing tankards of ale at this time of day. They'll only just have had breakfast.