

Shannon has clearly used the missing seventeen years to immerse himself in the Gladstone papers, and is always ready with the apposite reference. Indeed, there are times when his own prose style takes on something of a Gladstonian hue. However, this is a work for those who have some familiarity with the period, as he does not spare time in painting the background to the issues. This is a pity because Shannon

does not provide any concluding passages that might balance the justified criticisms against the great reforms we owe to Gladstone. When writing on Joe Chamberlain, Enoch Powell pointed out the inevitability of political failure in any extended political career. Gladstone's was extended well beyond anything we are likely to experience today. Its failures were significant but its achievements great.

Waugh's grandfather. Add to all this his success as a journalist, and you have the full C. B. Fry legend.

Even in cricket, though, the cracks soon appear. Fry's bowling action was illegal and he was rarely able to reproduce his best batting form in tests. Then there are his bouts of mental illness. He suffered a first breakdown at university, and a more serious attack in 1929 which kept him out of public life for several years.

Nor can you ignore Fry's strange private life. In 1898 he married Beatrice Holme Sumner, ten years his senior. She had long been involved with Charles Hoare, a married banker, and the relationship had resulted in a scandalous society divorce. Her marriage to Fry has been seen by some as a business arrangement: Fry made an honest woman of her in return for Hoare financing his cricket career. Wilton rejects this theory, yet his revelation that the first child of the marriage was probably fathered by Hoare seems to support it.

Hoare had established the *Mercury*, a training establishment for boys wishing to go to sea. On Hoare's death in 1908 Fry became its nominal head, but the real power was Beatrice. Her rule became increasingly brutal, and the rigours of life under it proved fatal to one young inmate. That reliable arbiter of morals, *The Cricket Statistician*, has gone so far as to describe both Fry and his wife as psychopaths. Yet she remained in charge until her death in 1946. Fry followed her ten years later.

Ultimately this is a sad book — sadder than Wilton admits. Yet it contains many incidental pleasures. Try the accomplished poem on Indian independence which Fry wrote for *The Times* or the photograph of Boris Karloff keeping wicket. Above all, the fact that Fry opened for England with W. G. Grace and lived to be surprised by Eamonn Andrews for *This is Your Life* makes him one of the great men of this century.

*This review originally appeared in Liberal Democrat News 576 (27 August 1999) and is reprinted by kind permission of the Editor.*

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## Cricket, Albania and Liberals

Iain Wilton: *C. B. Fry: An English Hero*

(Richard Cohen Books, 1999)

*Reviewed by Jonathan Calder*

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As English cricket disappeared beneath the waves last month, many spectators found themselves remembering the heroes of happier seasons. But there is only one England captain who also fought three seats for the Liberals, served as a diplomat at the League of Nations and was offered the throne of Albania. In short, there is only one C. B. Fry.

Iain Wilton's new biography reveals some heavy feet of clay, but first it is important to appreciate just how compelling a figure Fry was in his prime. Born in 1872, his fame came originally from his extraordinary ability as a sportsman. He equalled the world long jump record while a student at Oxford, was reserve for an England rugby trial, won an England soccer cap and played for Southampton in the FA Cup final. Contemporaries likened him to a Greek god in appearance.

As a cricketer Fry was one of the giants of the golden years before the First World War. Batting for Sussex with Rankinsinhji, the silk-shirted Indian whose wristy stroke play ravished Edwardian crowds, he turned himself into the most remorselessly effective batsman in the country.

In 1907 Ranji acceded to the throne of Nawangar, an autonomous state under the Raj. When the League of Nations was formed in 1920, he became one of India's rep-

resentatives. He invited Fry to assist him and, aided by their cricketing fame and Ranji's lavish entertaining, they exerted considerable influence.

As a Liberal candidate Fry was defeated at Brighton in 1922, at Banbury in 1924 and at a by-election in Oxford later the same year. He was an unorthodox campaigner — he liked to address voters from the back of a white horse — but at Banbury he came within 224 votes of victory. Though his politics were idiosyncratic, his support for the League of Nations, which he called 'Liberalism internationalised', places him in the mainstream of party thinking.

The most famous story about Fry is that he was offered the throne of Albania. In later life Fry liked to embroider his tales, but Wilton concludes that this one is probably true. Certainly, the Albanians were seeking 'an English country gentleman with £10,000 a year', and one of the men they approached was Auber-