

= Walter Gilbert (cricketer) =

Walter Raleigh Gilbert (16 September 1853 ? 26 July 1924) was an amateur English cricketer who played first @-@ class cricket for Middlesex and Gloucestershire between 1873 and 1886 . A cousin of W. G. Grace , he played for Gloucestershire when , dominated by the Grace family , it was the leading county . Gilbert 's best season was 1876 , when he scored 205 not out for the county , but he was subsequently less successful . Closely connected with the United South of England Eleven , a professional touring team of which he eventually became secretary , Gilbert was financially affected by a declining interest in such teams . With insufficient income to continue as an amateur he became a professional in 1886 , but played only one match before he was caught stealing from team @-@ mates in a minor match , ending his first @-@ class career . After serving a 28 @-@ day prison sentence Gilbert moved to Canada , where he worked for the Land Titles Office in Calgary while remaining a prominent cricketer . He died aged 70 in 1924 , but for nearly 60 years after his death , there seemed to be a conspiracy of silence over his fate .

= = Early life and career = =

Walter Gilbert was born in London on 16 September 1853 . He spent some time living in Downend with his maternal aunt , Martha Grace , the mother of W. G. Grace , as a result of which he became friendly with Grace and his brothers . Between 1869 and 1871 Gilbert made several appearances in minor cricket for teams representing Worcestershire and went on to play for the United South of England Eleven , one of several fully professional teams that toured the country playing mainly minor matches . In 1871 he made his first @-@ class debut , playing as an amateur in a team chosen by W. G. Grace for a match against Kent . He scored 13 and 1 , kept wicket in at least the first innings , held two catches , and achieved a stumping . By virtue of his London birth , Gilbert was qualified to play cricket for Middlesex . He made nine appearances for the county during the 1873 and 1874 seasons , achieving a highest score of 49 , averaging 17 @.@ 40 with the bat and taking two wickets . His first score of over fifty runs in first @-@ class matches came for the United South of England XI , for whom he continued to play regularly , against the United North of England XI in 1874 . He also achieved some success as a bowler , taking five wickets for W. G. Grace 's team against Kent in 1873 .

= = Achieving prominence = =

In the English winter of 1873 ? 74 , Gilbert was chosen by W. G. Grace to accompany his touring team to Australia . Gilbert had a string of single @-@ figure scores and a highest score of 33 not out . Nevertheless he and Grace got on well , and he was a popular member of the touring party . Grace enjoyed his company to the extent of hunting kangaroos with him . During the 1874 season Gilbert made a double century in minor cricket , scoring 254 not out for Thornbury against Sneyd Park . Later in the season he made a further representative appearance , playing for the Gentlemen against the Players at Prince 's Cricket Ground and opening the batting with W. G. Grace ; he scored 14 and 16 and took four wickets in the Players ' first innings . He also played in the corresponding fixture the following year .

By 1876 Gilbert had qualified to play for Gloucestershire , as he had lived in the county for the length of time required by the rules . In his first season for the club he finished fifth in the first @-@ class batting averages , scoring 907 runs at an average of 36 @.@ 28 . His highest score was 205 not out for an England XI against Cambridge University , the third @-@ highest score of the season after W. G. Grace 's two triple centuries . His innings lasted about seven hours , and he batted on each of the three days of the match . This was his maiden first @-@ class century ; he scored another hundred later in the season when he made 143 runs for a combined Kent and Gloucestershire side against a team representing England . In the same season he took 28 wickets at an average of 19 @.@ 64 , including seven wickets for 65 runs in the match between the United South of England XI and the United North of England XI .

= = Decline and disgrace = =

Over the next few seasons Gilbert was not as successful with the bat ; in 1877 he failed to exceed 47 in any innings , he scored about half the number of runs that he had during the previous year , and his average dropped to 15 @.@ 70 . His average remained below 20 in four of the next five seasons and never passed 23 . In six seasons , he scored only six fifties . On the other hand , he took 56 wickets in both 1877 and 1878 , averaging under 17 with the ball . He achieved some notable performances as a bowler , including bowling unchanged throughout a game in partnership with W. G. Grace . But from 1879 he bowled less frequently , and never passed 23 wickets in a season again . Even so , Gilbert represented the Gentlemen against the Players twice in 1877 , his final appearances in the fixture ; in four games , he scored just 43 runs and took 16 wickets .

By this time Gilbert faced financial difficulty as an amateur cricketer . Most amateurs were from privileged backgrounds , whereas professionals mainly came from the working class . It was almost unthinkable for an amateur to become a professional , although many did receive financial inducements such as generous expenses and sinecure positions within county organisations . Unlike the Grace brothers , Gilbert did not have a profession outside cricket to provide a supplementary income allowing him to live comfortably . A solution seemed to arrive in 1880 , when Fred Grace , the manager of the United South of England XI touring side and one of W. G. Grace 's brothers , died and Gilbert took over his paid job as secretary . But the popularity of professional touring teams was already in decline , and the increasing number of matches between county teams attracted more interest . An indication of trouble came in 1882 when a professional cricketer took Gilbert to court over unpaid fees for an appearance in a match .

In three seasons between 1883 and 1885 Gilbert 's batting form improved somewhat . Appearing mainly for Gloucestershire , Gilbert increased his first @-@ class batting average beyond 20 , and in 1885 he hit his third first @-@ class century when he scored 102 against Yorkshire . At the start of the 1886 season Gilbert was featured in the popular biographical article in the weekly magazine Cricket , a significant accolade suggesting that he was highly regarded . A few days after the article 's appearance Gilbert announced that he would in future play for Gloucestershire as a professional , but after only one appearance for the county he disappeared from first @-@ class cricket . Official sources , including Cricket magazine in which Gilbert had recently been featured , James Lillywhite 's Cricketers ' Annual and Wisden Cricketers ' Almanack offered no explanation . Wisden ended its match report on Gilbert 's only professional appearance : " ... about [Gilbert 's] subsequent disappearance from cricket there is no need to speak " .

Gilbert had also been engaged by a club called East Gloucestershire , based in Cheltenham , which played minor cricket . The explanation for Gilbert 's disappearance was to be found in a match he played for the club on 4 and 5 June 1886 . Before the second day 's play , Gilbert arrived early at the ground and went into the pavilion . Because several sums of money had recently gone missing from the pavilion , a policeman was hidden in the team 's dressing room and he saw Gilbert searching clothes and stealing money . On being confronted , Gilbert produced the coins , one of which had been marked so that it could be identified . The East Gloucestershire match continued , but Gilbert 's name was omitted from the published scorecard ; the wickets he had taken on the first day were credited to " Smith " , and either only ten players were listed or Gilbert 's position in the batting order was taken by " Mr E. L. Even " , who did not bat . Gilbert had been selected for Gloucestershire 's first @-@ class match against Sussex on 7 June , but he was dropped from the side and his place taken by a player making his only appearance in the side . Gilbert was in Police Court while the match was taking place , charged with theft . He admitted stealing from two men and expressed remorse . According to the report in The Times , he stated that if he were forgiven , he would move to Australia ; his solicitor argued that Gilbert had been " harassed and worried " for some time and was suffering from erysipelas and could barely control his own behaviour . His solicitor requested that any punishment should allow Gilbert to go overseas , but Gilbert was sentenced to 28 days imprisonment . Gilbert 's family then arranged for him to move to Canada ; at the time it was common for families to send disgraced members to distant parts of the British Empire to minimise

scandal .

In first @-@ class cricket , Gilbert scored 5 @, @ 290 runs at an average of 19 @. @ 16 with three hundreds . With the ball , he took 295 wickets at an average of 17 @. @ 93 . His Wisden obituary stated : " His fielding at deep @-@ leg to W. G. Grace 's bowling was always excellent , for he covered much ground and was a sure catch . Although overshadowed by his famous cricketing cousins , he played a prominent part in the victories gained during Gloucestershire 's greatest years . "

= = Final years = =

In Canada Gilbert found employment with the Land Titles Office in Calgary , for whom he worked for 17 years . Cricket historian Benny Green wrote : " No breath of scandal or disgrace ever attached to Gilbert 's thirty @-@ eight years of exile , nor was there found to be even one square inch missing from the Land Titles Office when Gilbert finally retired from it . "

Gilbert had four children from his marriage to the daughter of cricketer James Lillywhite senior . His son was killed in the First World War , flying with the Royal Flying Corps , and his three daughters joined the Royal Army Medical Corps . He continued to play cricket and became one of Canada 's leading cricketers . Gilbert died in Calgary on 24 April 1924 , aged 70 .

= = Continued controversy = =

After Gilbert 's retirement , and even following his death , controversy remained attached to his name ; there seemed to be a conspiracy of silence surrounding his fate . Cricket historians rarely mentioned him , despite his varied career . W. G. Grace , although including Gilbert in an appendix of leading batsmen in his 1891 book Cricket , did not include him in the text at all , despite the book 's more than 400 pages ; in his Cricketers I Have Met , Grace described 121 cricketers but did not mention his cousin . Further evidence of Gilbert 's disgrace came in the pages of Wisden . Although Gilbert began as an amateur cricketer , which entitled him to have " Mr. " before his name in the " Births and Deaths " section , he was referred to until his death as " Gilbert , W. R. " , which denoted a professional . However , in his Wisden obituary he received the title " Mr. W. R. Gilbert " , even though the " Births and Deaths " still listed him as a professional , and in 1935 he was once again restored to amateur status in " Births and Deaths " , for reasons which are unclear . The same obituary glossed over Gilbert 's enforced retirement from cricket , simply observing : " At the beginning of 1886 he became a professional , and the season was not far advanced before his career in first @-@ class cricket ended abruptly . He then left England for Canada . " Even in 1970 , the silence continued ; historian Rowland Bowen wrote about the story but concluded by saying : " Another indication of the recurring instinct for suppression was a suggestion to me that if this story had not appeared in print before (it has not) it should not now . " It is not clear who made this suggestion , whether it was descendants of the Grace family , a cricket administrator or someone else . It was not until 1984 that the full story was published by historian Robert Brook . In reviewing what he considered to be the injustice of the case , and reflecting on Gilbert 's success in Canada , Green wrote : " No wonder that those responsible for this act of appalling cruelty went to such fatuous lengths to keep its details a secret . "