

A Tribute to Ron Bowles

4th July 1921 – 13th August 2010

**Founder, former Coach, Secretary and President of Failand
Table Tennis Club and an outstanding player for Club,
Bristol and Somerset**

**Prepared by Brian Reeves President Failand Table Tennis Club in
consultation with cousin Barbara Bowles and son David Reeves**

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To Ron, in memory of a fantastic Uncle to me, my cousin Barbara Bowles and Great Uncle to David Reeves. He was a mentor, great coach, supporter and always there for us. He did so much for table tennis at Failand, Bristol and Somerset both as a player and Administrator. A kind, considerate, unassuming, wise gentleman and true sportsman in every way. We are privileged he was our Uncle.

1. Introduction

During the recent lockdown towards the end of 2020 due to the covid-19 pandemic I started to look through many pieces of paper, newspaper cuttings, photographs, table tennis magazines and notes that Ron had collected/saved over the years of him playing table tennis. As I delved through more and more material, I came to realise that he did not, in fact, learn to play table tennis until he was 18 years of age, so to become an excellent table tennis player, coach and administrator is even more notable. Given this tremendous contribution to local table tennis, I thought I should record the salient information that signified Ron's involvement in Failand, Bristol and Somerset table tennis.

2. The Beginning

Ron was born in 1921 and was the youngest of three children (brother Harold and sister Dorothy). The family lived in Bedminster, Bristol and moved to Failand when Ron was still a young child. He attended Failand Primary School and then at the age of 11 moved to Sexeys Grammar School at Blackford in Somerset. Here Ron was keen to learn all his subjects and took an avid interest in all sporting activities. He loved playing football and tennis although his real love was for cricket.

On leaving school, Ron joined the Gas Board in Bristol in 1937, and before long, he was commissioned into the Army as part of the second world war effort. He was eventually posted to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and spent several years there in the north east of the country. Whilst he was there and noting that the general climate was much warmer and calmer than back at home, he discovered table tennis. In Ceylon tables were sited outdoors and when not on duty Ron would pick up a bat and learnt to play. He was completely self taught and before long, became very skillful.

On his return home from the war in 1946, Ron returned to his job at the Gas Board in Bristol and following up on his newly found sport of table tennis, joined the 39 Club playing in Division 5 in the Bristol League. Whilst enjoying this new found sport, at which he was improving all the time, he still loved his football and cricket. He went on to play for Failand Football Team, Failand Cricket Team and Woodpeckers Cricket Team for a number of years – the sports he had always loved to play from a young age. As he developed his table tennis skills further, he found that in the village there were many young people who attended youth club and Saturday night entertainment at the village hall in Upper Failand, but there were no real sporting opportunities. It was then that he managed to acquire a table tennis table and set up a youth table tennis evening that would meet every week. He also enlisted the help of a well known Bristol lady, Nellie Mason, who was both an excellent and renowned table tennis and tennis player. This was the very beginning of Failand Table Tennis Club although it was a few years before it was to be formally created.

Ron's own table tennis skills developed swiftly and in the early 1950's he moved from the 39 club to Bristol Club where he played for many years helping them to progress through the Divisions of the Bristol League and finally to winning the Division 1 title (now Premier Division). Whilst playing for Bristol Club in the Bristol League he continued to provide coaching at Failand for many years. He later returned to Failand and helped to get the Club A Team into the Premier Division and put the Club on a sound recognised footing.

Ron also served a number of years on the Bristol and Somerset Executive Committees and also captained (non player captain) the Bristol Junior Team.

During the 1960's the Club relocated to the hall at Lower Failand, the site on which the Club is still located today.

Since those early days, the Club continued to thrive despite a few setbacks along the way. In early 70's a tree from next door fell across the

hall and it took several months to raise funds and get the remedial work done. Ron worked with many of the local community contacts to secure loans and finances to get the work done. Around this time the Club took over the full responsibility for the land and buildings and over the years has put the Club in a stable financial position. In the mid 80's, it was Ron who supported me in an opportunity to purchase and erect a new club building at our site in Lower Failand and was instrumental in securing a new lease with the then Lord Wraxall on whose ground the club is sited.

When Ron finally retired from playing he continued to be actively supporting younger players and regularly attended home games until poor health prevented him from doing so. Even then, he maintained his interest with what was happening with all the Failand teams and players. I regularly called in to his home to keep him up to date, he was always keen to stay in touch and continue to offer his advice.

3. The Establishment of Failand Table Tennis Club

In the early days, Ron and Nellie's effort went into encouraging young people to come along, provide coaching and run informal competitions. Very quickly, around a dozen young people attended regular weekly sessions and it wasn't long before they were becoming quite skillful. By the mid fifties, the Failand players had developed sufficient skills to get involved in more regular competition and it was decided to enter a team in the bottom division (Division 13) of the Bristol league in the 1956/57 season. The team of Vernon Adams, Glyn Hollaway, Graham James and Bruce Goodridge started what was to become an ever growing and successful Club thanks entirely to Ron and Nellie's coaching and support. During these early days, Ron would take the team to away matches and oversee home games. After just two seasons, there was a need to add another team in the Bristol League. Sadly, the Club only had the use of the Village Hall on one night a week. As a result, Ron arranged that a team would take over the Bristol Club D team position in Division 3D. This was the start of a long relationship with Bristol Club as Ron

himself, Vernon Adams and Brian Reeves all went on to spend some spells in the Club's A Team in the Premier Division.

For many years to come, Ron and Nellie continued with their coaching efforts. Before long, the Club enlisted many Failand adult villagers as well as continuing to expand the number of younger players. By the mid 1960's the Club had 5 teams competing in the Bristol League and several Club players started to represent Bristol and Somerset at both junior and senior level. This was all down to Ron and Nellie giving their own time to coaching, running Club events and transporting players to various matches and tournaments. I can well remember one occasion when he took me, cousin Barbara, Barry Brady, Dick Bowden and John Wise to the Swansea Open. This was long before the Severn Bridge was built and we had to make the notorious journey across the River Severn by ferry (quite a scary experience with all the strong currents!!!!) Stopping at Taylors Garage (a renowned stop off point) just outside Newport for sausage sandwiches and staying in B&B in Swansea (being locked out by Barry Brady as a joke) and then making the long journey back home the next day.



Photograph taken of trip to North East of England Open – The photograph shows from left to right – John Wise, Ron, Barry Brady, Morley Mordecai and Dave Snook

At the end of this document, is a list of all those players who represented the Club that Ron (and Nellie) had an involvement in coaching.

The Highlight of the Club's Team successes include the following:

Bristol League (Premier Division) Champions – 1978/79, 2001/02, 2003/04, 2005/06, 2009/10, 2015/16, 2016/17, 2017/18

Belsten Cup Winners – 1977/78, 1978/79, 1992/93, 1999/2000, 2017/18

Morley Mordecai Cup Winners – 1966/67, 1968/69, 1970/71, 1971/72

Somerset Inter Town League Champions – 1963/64, 1970/71

The full details of the Club's successes are documented later in this document

4. Ron's Legacy

Ron leaves an incredible legacy especially given the very small beginning back in the 1950's. The club buildings that were purchased and erected in the 1980's are still there today and ongoing home of the club. Despite the growth of other sports over the years, we still manage to field 4 teams in the Bristol League, have several players representing county sides at senior and veterans level, have players representing England veterans and winning national veterans titles. We also now have a number of very experienced coaches based/using the Club's facilities for coaching players of all ages and standards. We have a great management team and once the current covid restrictions are lifted, we look forward to continuing to take the club forward and extend our membership, coaching activities and improve our playing facilities. I am sure Ron would be very proud of this ongoing success that he started all those years ago!!

5. Ron's Personal Achievements

Bristol Closed Championships

- 1955/56 Mens Doubles Runners Up with Keith Howse
- 1958/59 Division 4/7 Singles Winner
- 1960/61 Mens Doubles Runners Up with Vernon Adams
- 1962/63 Mens Singles Runner Up
- 1965/66 Mens Doubles Winner with John Wise
- 1966/67 Mens Doubles Runners Up with John Wise
- 1967/68 Mens Doubles Runners Up with John Wise

- 1968/69 Mens Doubles Runners Up with John Wise
- 1970/71 Mens Doubles Runners Up with John Wise
- 1971/72 Mens Doubles Runners Up with John Wise
- 1973/74 Mens Doubles Winner with Brian Reeves
- 1974/75 Mens Doubles Runners Up with Brian Reeves

Somerset Closed championships

- 1959/60 Mens Doubles Runners Up with Vernon Adams
- 1959/60 Mens Singles Runner Up
- 1960/61 Mens Doubles Runners Up with Vernon Adams
- 1960/61 Mens Singles Runner Up
- 1961/62 Mens Doubles Runners Up with Vernon Adams
- 1961/62 Mens Singles Runner Up
- 1962/63 Mens Doubles Winner with Vernon Adams
- 1963/64 Mens Doubles Runners Up with Vernon Adams
- 1964/65 Mens Doubles Runners Up with Vernon Adams
- 1965/66 Mens Doubles Runners Up with Vernon Adams
- 1966/67 Mens Doubles Runners Up with Vernon Adams
- 1967/68 Mens Doubles Runners Up with Vernon Adams
- 1968/69 Mens Doubles Winner with Vernon Adams
- 1970/71 Mens Doubles Runners Up with Vernon Adams

Gloucestershire Closed championships

- 1961/62 Mixed Doubles winner with Nellie Mason

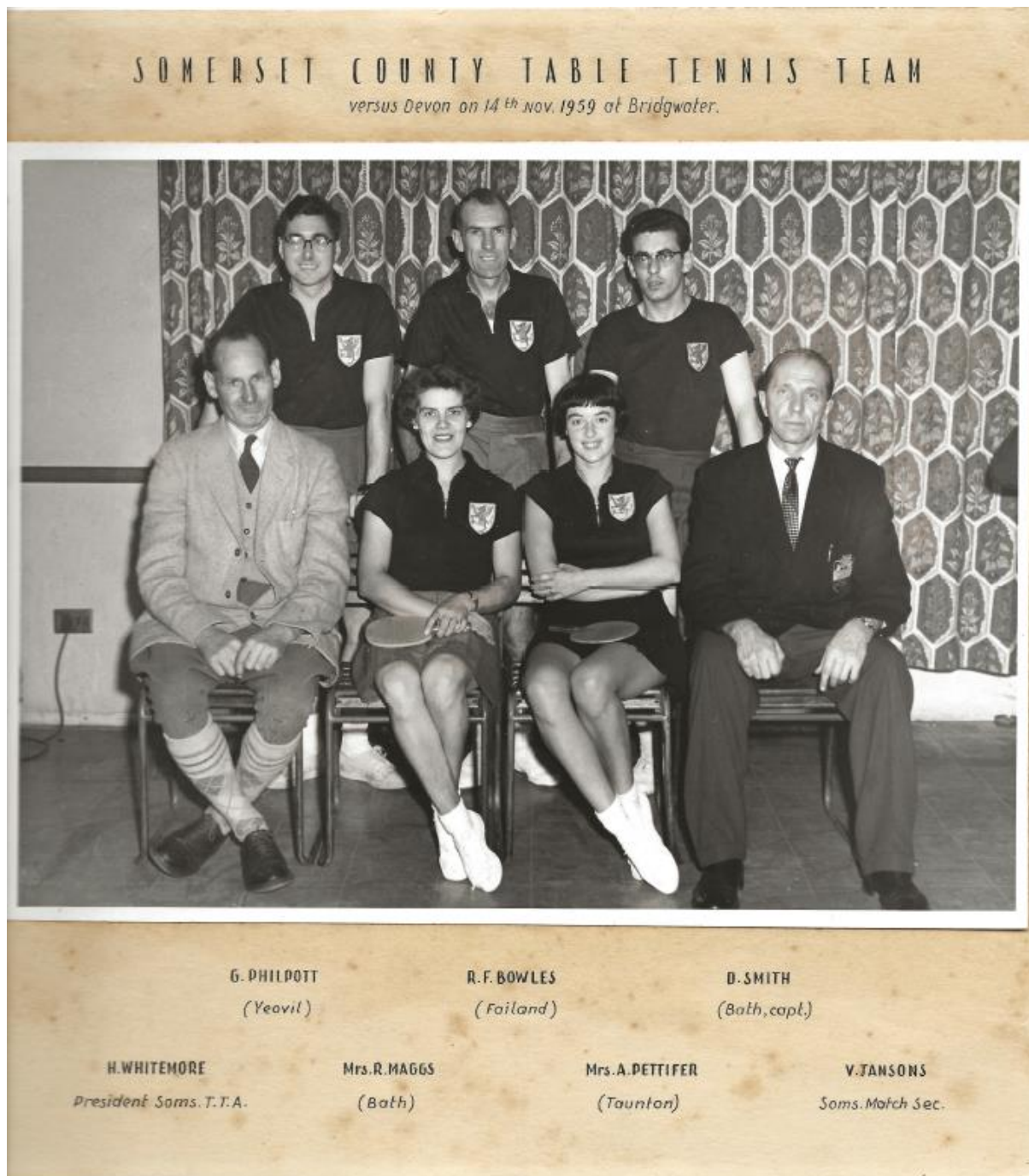
Open Tournaments

- 1957/58 North Bournemouth Mixed Doubles winner with Nellie Mason
- 1959/60 Castle Cary Invitation Mens Singles Winner
- 1962/63 North Bournemouth Mens Doubles Winner with Vernon Adams
- 1965/66 North East of England Veterans Singles Winner
- 1965/66 Bournemouth (Winton) Mens Doubles Winner with Vernon Adams
- 1966/67 North East of England Veterans Singles Winner
- 1968/69 Gwent Mens Doubles Runners Up with Vernon Adams
- 1969/70 Bristol Open Mens Doubles Winner with John Wise

Somerset County appearances

- Made debut on 14th November 1959
- Last match October 1969 (lost place to nephew Brian Reeves who made debut on December 1969)
- Recalled January 1976 to play Mens Doubles with Brian Reeves against Devon – the only occasion that Ron played alongside Brian
- Overall made 36 appearances for Somerset

Below is a photograph of the Somerset County Team on the day of Ron's Debut for the County



Bristol Senior Representation

- Bristol 2nds - 10 appearances
- Bristol 1sts – 20 appearances

6. Ron's style of play

As mentioned earlier, Ron first learnt to play table tennis during his war posting to Ceylon. He was completely self taught and understandably at that time developed a very traditional hard bat style and technique. He was a great advocate of chiselling and grinding players down through his total concentration and determination. He could however attack on both wings and it was a stroke that he built up to, seeking the right opportunity to take the opponent unawares. His defence was classic, many attacking and fast spin players became unstuck and worn down by the precision of his retrieving from every angle and position. He never gave up until the last point was won. Invariably he got involved in some long matches both before and after the expedite rule was introduced. One Belsten Cup final was halted at 1 game each at 11.30 pm and had to be played out the next day. One Premier League match between Failand and Bristol Club finished at 2.30am after 8 games went to expedite including the doubles!!! Also, given that he didn't start playing until the age of 18, makes it even more remarkable that he managed to achieve such a high level without the benefit of any coaching. It is testament to his determination that he finally made his county debut at the age of 38 – don't think that would be the case now. His style blended perfectly in the County and Bristol teams around the other more modern style players as it created something different for opposing teams to deal with.

Other than his classic defensive style, he was probably best remembered for his expertise at doubles. It can be seen from the list of titles he won and finals he was involved in, just how good a doubles player he was. He had tremendous anticipation and could play the ball to very wide angles, long and short, making the opponents having to run around to try and dominate the game. Through his time, he had two excellent doubles partners in Vernon Adams and John Wise both of whom blended so well with his style. I was lucky enough to partner him on just a few occasions, winning the Bristol Closed Doubles title. I also partnered him in his last appearance for Somerset in 1976 against Devon.

7. Citation from some former League, Club, Bristol and Somerset players:

Ron was a lovely man who was greatly respected in the table tennis world. Nobody had a bad word to say about him.

During any highly competitive matches, you could always be sure that one person would remain calm, dignified and keeping other players focussed on their games.

When sponge rubbers were first introduced, he adjusted incredibly well. It was frustrating to see the ball keep coming back from big forehand and backhand loop shots. Those who thought the new technology would provide an easy scalp were soon proved wrong!!!!!! He learnt very quickly to master defence against the loop and fast spin through his unique ability to anticipate the next shot and his agility to retrieve shots from all angles!! ***It is a fitting memorial that the Bristol Closed Mens Doubles Cup is now in his name.***

8. Ron's wise words on attitude and behaviour

Amongst the various papers that Ron had kept, I was intrigued to find the following that I remember him giving to us when we first went on to represent the Club, City or County. It showed that Ron was not just about teaching the skills of table tennis but also how to behave in sporting activities.

- Think about your club
- Think about smartness of your turnout
- Think about your punctuality both home and away
- Think about what has to be done before you knock up – lights, heating, seating, surrounds, clear any rubbish away, kitchen and toilets clean

- Think about your behaviour on the table and the need to work for points for your club
- Think about your behaviour off the table, getting on with the match and not looking the other way when it's our turn to score
- Think about being involved to support your team mates and studying the opponents you still have to play
- Never give up till the last point is won
- Think about being sociable to your opponents particularly at end of games (win or lose), at mid-point break and at end of match
- We expect you to show your opponents how to play a table tennis match properly – this is the difference between 3 players playing in a match and being a real team
- Finally, think whether or not you are in danger of never finding out how good you might have been
- I am asking you not just to play for the club but to belong to the club

9. Coaching History

Below is a list of people that Ron coached over the years with my apologies to any of those I have missed. I have tried to research all the Club Records that I have been able to go through but am sure some have been missed. All these players went on to represent Failand Table Tennis Club in the Bristol League and a number achieving individual tournament titles and both County and Bristol representation.

Vernon Adams – represented Bristol Juniors, Bristol Seniors 2nds, Somerset Seniors

Gary Auger

Charles Baker

Pat Baker

Andy Bartlett

Paul Bennett – Bristol Closed Div 4/7 Champion

Chris Bennett

Barbara Bowles – Bristol Closed Junior Champion, Swansea Junior Girls Champion, represented Bristol Juniors and Bristol Ladies, represented Somerset Seniors

Harold Bowles

Mike Bush

John Cannon

Dave Clements – represented Bristol Juniors and Bristol Closed Junior Champion, represented Somerset Juniors

Bill Cox

Bob Cox

Paul Dimambro

Stephen Down

Susan Ellis

Richard Ellis

Gerald Gilchrest

Bruce Goodridge

Rodney Harris

John Harvey

Lionel Hawkins

Andy Heyes

Richard Heyes

Paul Holder – Somerset Junior Champion

Glyn Holloway

Nick Hunt

Graham James

Geoff Kingston

Marc Meredith

Scott Meredith

Paul Owen

Ian Poole

Brian Reeves – Bristol Closed Junior Champion, Div 4/7 champion, Mens Singles Champion, Veterans Singles Champion, over 70's Singles

Champion, Gloucestershire County Closed Mens Singles Champion ,
represented Bristol Juniors, Bristol Senior 2nds, Bristol Senior 1sts,
Gloucestershire Juniors, Somerset Seniors, Somerset Veterans, South
West Counties Singles Champion, Vetts over 70's Western Masters
Champion

David Reeves – Bristol Closed Mens Singles Champion, Bristol vets,
Bristol Closed Div 3/4 Champion, Avon County Closed Champion, Stroud
Closed Mens Singles and Veterans Champion, Bristol Hard Bat Champion
(Ron would have been delighted with this!!!), represented Avon Seniors,
Avon Veterans, England Veterans over 40's

Janet Reeves

John Scoones

Dave Snook - Bristol Junior Champion and represented Bristol Juniors
and Seniors

Roland Taysum – Bristol Closed Junior Champion, Somerset Junior
Champion, represented Bristol Juniors, Somerset Juniors and Bristol
Senior 2nds

Nigel Williams

Mark Williams - Bristol Closed Division 1/2 Doubles Winner (with Will
Hollingworth)

Mike Williams - Bristol Closed Junior Champion, Somerset Junior
Champion and represented Bristol and Somerset Juniors

John Wise – Bristol Closed Junior Champion, represented Bristol Juniors,
Bristol 2nds and Bristol 1sts



The pictures above from the top show – Nellie Mason and Club Juniors following one of the coaching sessions and Club Tournament, Ron demonstrating his classic forehand drive and Ron with the members of the first Failand Team to enter the Bristol League

10. Club Team Successes in the Bristol League include:

Following on from the highlights listed earlier, the following list charts all the team successes since first entering the Bristol League in 1956.

1956/57 - Failand Youth Club first season in Bristol League Division 13

1957/58 – Failand A Champions Division 8A

1966/67 – Failand A Champions Division 5B

1966/67 – Failand B Champions Division 6B

1968/69 – Failand A Runners Up Division 4A

1969/70 – Failand A Champions Division 3A

1970/71 – Failand A Champions Division 2

1970/71 – Failand B Runners Up Division 6A

1971/72 – Failand A Champions Division 1

1972/73 – Failand B Runners Up Division 5B

1974/75 – Failand A Runners Up Premier Division

1975/76 – Failand B Runners Up Division 5B

1976/77 – Failand B Champions Division 4A

1976/77 – Failand E Runners Up Division 8A

1977/78 – Failand C Runners Up Division 6D

1978/79 – Failand A Champions Premier Division

1978/79 – Failand B Champions Division 3A

1979/80 – Failand C Champions Division 5D

1980/81 – Failand C Runners Up Division 4B

1980/81 – Failand D Runners Up Division 5C

1989/90 – Failand A Champions Division 3A

1989/90 – Failand D Runners Up Division 6C

1989/90 – Failand E Champions Division 8A

1990/91 – Failand B Champions Division 3B

1991/92 – Failand C Champions Division 5B

1992/93 – Failand A Champions Division 1

1992/93 - Failand C Runners Up Division 4A

1992/93 – Failand G Runners Up Division 7B

1993/94 – Failand A Runners Up Premier Division

1993/94 – Failand B Champions Division 3B
1994/95 – Failand A Runners Up Premier Division
1994/95 – Failand B Runners Up Division 2
1994/95 – Failand F Champions Division 6A
1996/97 – Failand B Runners Up Division 2
1996/97 – Failand C Runners Up Division 3B
1997/98 – Failand A Runners Up Premier Division
1997/98 – Failand D Runners Up Division 5A
1998/99 – Failand B Runners Up Division 1
1998/99 – Failand F Champions Division 5A
1999/00 – Failand B Runners Up Division 1
2001/02 – Failand A Champions Premier Division
2002/03 – Failand A Runners Up Premier Division
2003/04 – Failand A Champions Premier Division
2004/05 – Failand A Runners Up Premier Division
2004/05 – Failand C Division2 Champions
2005/06 – Failand A Champions Premier Division
2005/06 – Failand E Champions Division 5
2006/07 – Failand A Runners Up Premier Division
2008/09 – Failand C Runners Up Division 2
2009/10 – Failand A Champions Premier Division
2009/10 – Failand D Champions Division 5
2010/11 – Failand A Runners Up premier Division
2015/16 – Failand A Champions Premier Division
2016/17 – Failand B Champions Premier Division
2017/18 – Failand B Champions Premier Division
2018/19 – Failand B Runners Up Premier Division

11.Acknowledgements

- Bristol League Website and Archives
- Ron’s own personal records, notes and newspaper cuttings
- Comments from former Failand, Bristol and Somerset players
- Some of my personal records, notes, cuttings etc

- Old family photographs and notes
- My cousin Barbara and son David for their valued assistance in helping me to complete this document