



AN ANTHOLOGY

WISDEN ON YORKSHIRE

EDITED BY DUNCAN HAMILTON



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To Anthony George Nicholson,
1938–85.

With grateful thanks for a
memory of summer
from long ago.

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Introduction:

Bloody good bowler, bloody good man

I begin with a confession. I wasn't born in Yorkshire. I am an outsider, still to qualify for 'nationality' and 'passport' status. I grew up just south of Nottingham, a shilling bus ride from Trent Bridge.

My view of Yorkshire was shaped through J. M. Kilburn's *Thanks to Cricket* – time and again I took it out of the village library – and from watching Roses matches. These were shown live on Yorkshire Television, which our miniscule set could mysteriously pick up in dusty black and white from a nearby transmitter. Sometimes the players were just silvery pencil marks across the pale screen. By then the 1970s had dawned, and Yorkshire were coming to terms with the painful ordeal of reality. Their years of omnipotence – seven Championships and two Gillette Cups from 1959 to 1969 – were over. Winning no longer came as naturally as breathing to them, a purgatorial state that would cause tangled in-fighting of an Esher-like complexity and an oral riot almost every bleak mid-winter as private, ideological feuds became public. Sometimes it seemed like a non-stop concerto of indulgent and destructive whining. But the rows and recriminations also demonstrated – were it necessary – how much Yorkshire *cared*.

It seemed to me then that nowhere else was so absorbed in cricket or regarded it so earnestly; nowhere else studied it so thoughtfully or followed it with such obsessive passion, as if the scorecards were parchment scripture; and certainly nowhere else were the vagaries of the game so cherished, so understood or so utterly and deeply felt. In my eyes those who played or merely observed cricket in Yorkshire were sure of, and never lost, an appreciation of where they came from and the proud, firm sense of self it gave them. Being from, and belonging to, the geography of Yorkshire was fundamental to them.

To understand a river you must see it at source. To understand Yorkshire's preoccupation with cricket you must be aware of its past. In outlining it, as well as the county's tribal nature and guiding principles – a tireless, driven determination – Kilburn proved to be a good tutor. He came to know the make-up and motivation of both as correspondent of the *Yorkshire Post* for more than 40 years, which he christened his 'sweet summers'. As he rolled out its jewelled history and pinned it in front of me like a tapestry, I understood how much it mattered. In God's Own Country, God's game was indisputably cricket, and make no mistake about it. It was even spoken about in high-pulpit rhetoric.

Kilburn evoked names of which I was then only dimly aware: Herbert Sutcliffe, Maurice Leyland, Percy Holmes and Hedley Verity, and the benign ghosts of Bobby Peel, Major Booth and a cast of hundreds besides, who seemed to have the mists of history trailing behind them. Through Kilburn I came to know the importance of Yorkshire's neat, perfectly symmetrical progress: first match, against Norfolk in 1833 (Yorkshire won by 120 runs); first constitution (subscriptions from 10s/6d upwards) in 1863; and first official Championship in 1893 (George Hirst took 69 wickets). The bar for anyone following Hirst and his contemporaries was set at an onerous height and subsequent stumblings to vault it became hard to take as a consequence. They are *still* hard to take because the expectation of success – despite shifts in time, circumstances and custom – remains undiminished.

Kilburn made me conscious, too, of what it meant to play for Yorkshire – a privilege then exclusive to those born within its boundaries – and to wear the county cap. When the autocratic Lord Hawke once passed over Alonzo Drake for the honour, almost crushing his fragile spirit in the process, Drake's mother told him, 'Dunna fret about that cap, Lonza. If Lord Hawke won't give it to you, go and buy thysen one.' If only...

The value of those gathered quarters of dark-blue cloth is put into perspective by this: the swell of pride Len Hutton experienced after being awarded his own in 1936 was only ever equalled by his Knighthood, which came 20 years later. The cap was precious because the stitched White Rose represented acceptance, confirmation that the wearer had joined Yorkshire's aristocratic lineage, which stretched back to the mid-19th century, and because the competition to possess it was ferocious. Genius is never too strong a word to use about Hutton. But what strikes me most about him, especially at the beginning of his career, is his self-effacing response to his blessing of natural talent. After being told he'd make his first-class debut against Cambridge University, he was found 'enjoying a private joke'.

'What are you laughing at?' he was asked.

'Me, playing for Yorkshire,' he replied, properly understanding the full significance of it.

Hutton believed cricket constituted the core of Yorkshire. Economically, it turned on the sparks from steelmaking, the clang of the shipbuilder's hammer, the regular, rhythmic clack of the textile looms and the hacking out of coal from cavernous seams. Emotionally, it was defined and drew its sense of identity and swagger from the production of runs and the taking of wickets.

To begin anything with the phrase *legend has it* usually means that the facts don't fit whatever follows. But there are stories – perhaps ever so slightly embroidered or plainly apocryphal – that nonetheless emphasise it and convey the importance of cricket to Yorkshire. There was the tale of a man caught applauding with equal fervour both Yorkshire and Lancashire's efforts in a Roses game.

'Are you Lancashire?' demanded his neighbour.

'No,' he replied.

'Are you Yorkshire?'

'No,' he replied again.

‘Then shut up and mind thi own business.’

From another, far older vintage, comes the story of a boy frantically forcing his way through the dense crowd until he finds his father near the boundary. ‘Dad,’ he said, ‘I’ve summat to tell thee. Our house is on fire and mi mum can’t find neither t’ twins nor t’ insurance policy.’ The father is unimpressed. ‘And I’ve got summat to tell thee,’ he said, ‘Sutcliffe’s out.’ As the writer A. A. Thomson made clear, ‘The same tale was later told of Hutton ... and was, I have no doubt, told of all Yorkshire’s men back to Louis Hall.’

Be that as it may, no illusion can be created except by reason, and even most myths contain a smidgen of truth. The glowing example of it is the now hoary, certainly stony, but absolutely sincere remark attributed to Wilfred Rhodes – his growl that, ‘We don’t play it for fun.’ It is often re-quoted to satirise Yorkshire in the same way that James Gillray’s drawings are re-hung to mock George III. Kilburn the craftsman expressed it more eloquently, ‘In the Yorkshire philosophy of sport it is impossible to be too keen on winning a competitive engagement,’ he wrote. Take your pick – the bluntness of Rhodes or the finesse of Kilburn. The difference between them lies only in the style of the message; for both sing from the same hymn sheet.

Alan Bennett put the contrary case in his first television play, *A Day Out*. It includes a cricket match set within the ruins of Fountains Abbey. The participants are members of a Yorkshire cycling club, who ride there in May 1911. The grey stone of one of the Abbey’s inner walls becomes the wicket, which is haphazardly drawn with a stub of chalk. The bat is as dark as anthracite and bound near the toe with thin twine. The ball lacks a seam. The fielders scatter themselves haphazardly across an oblong of grass decorated with spots of wild flowers. Even someone with only an embryonic understanding of the history of Yorkshire cricket won’t be surprised by what happens next. The friendly atmosphere immediately breaks apart under the competitive strain of the occasion. There is a disputed decision, which turns into a push-and-pull argument, and the game dissolves into controversy. Eventually the disgruntled batsman hurls down his bat and struts off in a huff. ‘I don’t know,’ says the bowler, watching him stride away, ‘It’s nobbut a game.’

As with everything else he’s ever written, Bennett not only captures the scene beautifully but also makes the viewer dwell on the nuances and layered meanings concealed within it. The skilful image he created stayed with me long after I’d first viewed it, as though the characters in waistcoats and braces, clomping boots and flat caps, were once as real as Tom Emmett, Ted Peate, Schofield Haigh or John Tunnicliffe. In particular, after turning the pages of the Wells-like time machine that is *Wisden*, the hissy fit over ‘nobbut a game’ made me curious. Was Bennett, born in Leeds, ever so gently satirising the Yorkshire devotion to, and obsession with, cricket and acting as the polar opposite to Rhodes and Kilburn? I wrote to him, and back came – almost instantly, in fact – a picture postcard depicting a spread of shadowed limestone pavement and a solitary, naked tree in the middle distance. Its branches resembled spindly brown bones. ‘Below Ingleborough, Yorkshire Dales’ read the caption beside Bennett’s explanation in black ink. The line ‘nobbut a game’ originated from home and hearth. ‘It was very much Dad’s view of it,’ he wrote. His father, Walter, was a butcher, who moved the

family to Headingley in 1946. ‘We lived for ten years or so around the corner from the cricket ground, but never went in,’ he added. ‘The only sport dad could tolerate was wrestling on TV on Saturday afternoon – partly because the wrestlers were “such bad ’uns”. When there was too much sport on TV it would be referred to as “stinkin” sport. I think that would sum up his attitude to sport in general, “It’s nobbut a game”.’

Bennett’s reply spring-boarded one thought and then another. Along with Rhodes’ and Kilburn’s assessments, it brought to mind C. L. R. James’ pivotal tenant of faith – ‘What do they know of cricket who only cricket know?’ – and then John Arlott’s stoic endorsement of it. ‘I have enjoyed cricket more and served it better,’ said Arlott, ‘for realising it was never the be-all and end-all of everything as, alas, so many cricketers think it is.’ Those separate quotations illuminate the same question: do we take cricket too seriously or not seriously enough? Any response can only ever elicit a point of view, rather than a definitive answer, because it hinges wholly on perception, prejudice and taste, which is always subjective. But – and I know this from trawling through 147 years’ worth of *Wisden* – it is obvious in which ranking order Yorkshire places life, death and cricket. In a contest between them ... well, let’s just say, without too much exaggeration, that it’s a close run thing. To a considerable extent, I came to admire Yorkshire for exactly that reason and because the past is always tangible in its present. But then, how could it not be?

Crowds of 8,000–10,000, fantasy figures for today’s Championship, used to squeeze into Headingley or Bramall Lane, Scarborough or Bradford, Hull or Harrogate in anticipation of Verity tweaking the ball so it dipped unexpectedly late at the batsman; the bespectacled Bill Bowes twisting his lanky frame side-on beside the stumps; Rhodes and Hirst with stern, weathered faces and hooded, pebble-black eyes; Holmes and Sutcliffe striding out side-by-side with that edge of entitlement which distinguishes the genuine run-maker; and the quite extraordinary, multi-talented and uncommonly slender F. S. Jackson (*Spy* draws Jackson as if he’s a heron holding a bat). Add Hutton and the aforementioned comprise the Yorkshiremen I’d most like to have actually seen play, rather than just half-glimpsed in snatches of scratchy film or framed in a monochrome pose behind glass. Imagine witnessing Verity’s 10 for 10 against Nottinghamshire; Hirst’s triple century at Aylestone Road; Holmes and Sutcliffe almost breaking the rattling scoreboard at Leyton; Hutton completing his hundredth hundred at The Oval.

A wonderful mythology is also heaped up alongside each of them too. Think of Hirst scoring a rapid half-century at Lord’s, which was more agricultural than cultural. A top-hatted gent in the pavilion is supposed to have marked each shot with anguished disapproval, and the words ‘disgraceful’ and ‘shocking’. Lastly, came his rebuke: ‘Look at the fellow’s feet?’ he said, as though the innings was sacrilegious. ‘Ay,’ shouted back a Yorkshire voice, ‘but look at t’ scoreboard.’

Or think of Rhodes, already blind and in the glimmering evening of his life, travelling home by train from the Headingley Test against Australia in 1956. A stranger in the compartment asks his daughter, ‘Is he your dad?’

‘Yes,’ she says.

‘Blind, is he?’

‘Yes.’

‘I wonder if he knows anything about cricket.’

‘A bit.’

‘Fine. You ought to take him to a match or two and explain things to him. It would do him the world of good to have an interest.’

Rhodes used to quote that brief conversation to visitors, always ending with the casual, self-deprecating response, ‘And there I was in my corner and I never cried squeak.’

And think of Jackson, who defies classification. He was the genuine all-rounder – batsman, bowler, MP, soldier, writer, Governor of Bengal, Knight and the survivor of an assassin’s bullet. Some cricketer. Some life. Jackson once asked Hirst to speak on his behalf at a municipal election. Hirst’s speech was short. ‘Ladies and gentleman,’ he said. ‘Mr Jackson’s a fine man and a grand cricketer. But if you get him on to this council, he’ll play less cricket, and that’ll be a bad thing for Yorkshire, England and everybody. So don’t vote for him – any of you.’ At Jackson’s memorial service, the Bishop of Knaresborough recalled the scene at his funeral. ‘There were hundreds of cricketers,’ he said, ‘and as I looked down on the rapt faces of that vast congregation I could see how their hearts went out to that great man, how they revered him as though he were the Almighty – only infinitely stronger on the leg side.’ No novelist would dare to invent a character such as Jackson; his presence on the page would be just too implausible.

The purpose of this book is to celebrate Jackson, Hutton, Rhodes *et al.* With 30 Championships plus one shared, and 42 *Wisden Cricketers of the Year*, Yorkshire already has almost more history than it can consume. None of those honours could have been achieved without a necessarily hard, aggressive approach, which sometimes tipped into sheer bloody-mindedness. But it also took a consummate, adroit skill, which was sometimes overlooked or ignored, perhaps because of a touch of green-eyed jealousy elsewhere. The evidence of superior talent as well as toughness is found throughout *Wisden*. Contradictory as it seems, what follows both dispels and confirms the stereotypical classification of Yorkshire as attritional and austere, dour and dogmatic, win-at-all-costs and don’t-let-the-buggers-grind-you-down.

From its contributors comes an amalgam of impeccable judgement and exceptional writing. Here is Neville Cardus on Holmes – ‘volatile, unpredictable of mood, always alive by instinct, so to say, intent on enjoyment on the cricket field, or off it’ and, ‘always first to admit that, like the rest of humans, he was fallible.’ Here is R. C. Robertson-Glasgow on Verity’s wily, biting spin, which he regarded as ‘nature embellished by art’. Here is Bowes admiringly recalling Fred Trueman’s ‘sweet gathering of momentum’ as he came ‘hurtling to the bowling crease’. Here is Derek Hodgson explaining the painstaking preparation of Boycott, who ‘knew most bowlers backwards, most pitches, even the direction of the prevailing wind.’ Here is David Hopps on the ‘broad-beamed, stomping gait’ of Matthew Hoggard, which ‘encouraged so much farming imagery it would have been no surprise had he stopped midway through his run to close a gate or chase a sheep.’ Here is Mathew Engel on Darren Gough – ‘an inspirational cricketer in an uninspiring era.’ Finally, here is Cardus again on the beating heart and other pulses of Emmott Robinson. ‘Few,’ he said ‘have absorbed the game, the Yorkshire game, into

their systems, their minds, nerves and bloodstreams, as Emmott did ... Yorkshire cricket was, for him, a way of living.' That last phrase defines Yorkshire cricket for me – a way of living, indeed.

I end with another confession. There is something uniquely personal about the bond I forged a long time ago with Yorkshire and its cricket. Odd, but there is a curious and arbitrary nature to the remembrance of things past; for often what is retained most vividly is the apparently minor, miniscule detail of seminal events. When, belatedly, I got to watch Yorkshire at Trent Bridge, I tucked myself, as I always did, on a rug beside the rope. The flow of the match was dull. It was rather like studying a pond in which there is barely a ripple to break the water. But, in yawning mid-afternoon, Tony Nicholson began patrolling the patch of outfield in front of where I was sitting. He began to speak to me. I remember what was said between us in vague generalities. How long had I been interested in cricket? How often did I go to Trent Bridge? Who were my favourite players? I could scarcely believe it. *A professional cricketer was talking to me!* Nicholson was compassionate enough to bother with a boy he'd never met before and would never see again.

The rest of that memory comes back to me as if it's just been freshly minted. The grassy stains streaked down his flannels, the tips of his huge fingers tinged with the red pigment of the ball and the sight of his spikes, small clumps of damp earth clinging to them, as he walked in before each delivery. From my crouched position I remember looking up at his blocky, rectangular frame, trunk-like legs and wide, square shoulders. To me, Nicholson looked nine feet tall. I remember, too, how unaccountably but ineffably sad I felt one morning in 1985 when I read that he'd died of cancer, aged 47. Preposterous as it sounds, it felt to me as if I'd lost someone with whom I'd once had a genuine rapport.

I was fortunate to catch the rump end of Trueman's career. I saw Boycott at his best; and Brian Close and Ray Illingworth too – albeit under the flag and colours of other counties. I've admired Michael Vaughan and especially the flashy, firecracker batting of Darren Lehmann. And I'd willingly pay to see Adil Rashid bowl anywhere – against that rough wall at Fountains Abbey, if necessary. I even feel a special affinity with Bowes because, after a few serendipitous twists, I now live beside the country lane where he used to walk his dog. From my kitchen window I can see the red-tiled roof of his former home in the middle-distance. Irrationally, I still hope one morning to catch sight of him in a contemplative stroll – leather lead wrapped in the hand that once bowled Bradman's first ball.

But no Yorkshire player will ever supersede Nicholson in my affections. Of course, he never knew it. I never told him how grateful I felt – and still feel – for his simple act of kindness. And I was never able to say to his face how often I thought about him afterwards.

At last I can record it publicly.

I once asked Geoffrey Boycott what he thought of Nicholson. 'Bloody good bowler,' he said – a compliment that I recognised as the equivalent of a gold star.

I nodded my head. 'Bloody good man too,' I replied.

Duncan Hamilton, Wharfedale, 2011

Chapter One:

The Greatest of the Great

He was only 13 years old, trudging off in the February snow of 1930 to his first net session at Headingley. In his pocket was the letter Yorkshire CCC had sent him. It was addressed to Mr Leonard Hutton. In his right hand was a kit bag containing his Harrow-sized, Herbert Sutcliffe bat. He said he felt very little – ‘small in a sheepish sort of a way’ – as he walked along the slushy streets of Leeds. ‘They’ll think me daft,’ he said to himself, ‘going to play cricket in winter.’

No one thought Hutton daft at the end of practice. Watching his new pupil’s stylistic correctness, George Hirst said to whoever wanted to listen, ‘There’s nothing we can teach this lad.’ Greatness knows itself, as Shakespeare said; but Hirst’s instant appraisal of the boy, and his concrete certainty that he’d just met a genius, is proof of the beholder’s almost supernatural talents too.

Hutton never let Hirst down, and his unfolding story was an authentic Ripping Yarn. Born into austerity and emotionally shaped by the mental discipline of a Moravian upbringing; run out for nought on his first-class debut (‘Don’t worry,’ said a sympathetic Maurice Leyland, ‘you’ve started at the bottom’); scoring that 13-hour, world-record 364 against the Australians at The Oval in 1939, aged only 22; injured so badly after a freakish fall that his left arm ended up two inches shorter than his right and required a bone graft from his leg, an operation regarded as pioneering in the early 1940s...

What came next is more dramatic still. Implausibly sacked in 1943 as captain of Bradford League Pudsey St Lawrence by a bone-headed committee for losing three successive matches; the first professional to take charge of England, despite loud harrumphing and surreptitious back-stabbing from the MCC’s traditionalists; surviving (and prospering) in the West Indies during the most fractious and divisive tour since Bodyline; regaining the Ashes at home in 1953 and retaining them in Australia in 1954-55. Finally, a knighthood bestowed in 1956, an era of cavernous class division. For me, Hutton is the greatest of the greats in Yorkshire’s history. He warrants the crown despite the cricketers who rival him.

This chapter celebrates Hutton alongside the many other extraordinary cricketers who make up that competition. Their inclusion – all except one – requires no elaboration.

True, the sunlit peaks of Ray Illingworth’s career were reached only after he had left Yorkshire, but that doesn’t matter. As Tony Lewis once said of Illingworth’s capacity to register the smallest detail, ‘On the field you sense that he knows every blade of grass by name. At Lord’s, the Father Time weather vane turns by one degree behind his back and he will announce “wind’s on the move”’.

True, Michael Vaughan would have been here too – if the contract and commitments of the modern international cricketer had allowed him to play more matches for Yorkshire.

And true, F. S. Jackson could be considered a surprise pick.

Let me explain. In 2006 the Yorkshire Post ran a poll to determine Yorkshire's Greatest XI. Almost 5,500 entries arrived at the newspaper's offices. The team chosen was: Hutton, Sutcliffe, Leyland, Lehmann, Close, Hirst, Rhodes, Binks, Trueman, Bowes, Verity. The second XI wasn't bad either: Boycott, Holmes, Mitchell, Denton, Watson, Illingworth, Kilner, Bairstow, Haigh, Emmett, Appleyard.

Jackson didn't make either side. He nonetheless fascinates me as a person as much as a cricketer – a multi-skilled renaissance man. J. M. Kilburn even claimed on his behalf, 'No one ever came closer to the illustration of the complete player.'

The Yorkshire Post argued that the tireless, driven and determined Close ought to be put in charge of its team of all the talents. I know without doubt who should manage it: Colonel the Honourable Sir Stanley Francis Jackson PC, GCIE.

LEN HUTTON

Leonard Hutton was born in Pudsey in 1916. He made 19 Test centuries and scored 6,971 runs for England from 1937–55. He scored 129 hundreds (11 double centuries). He was Knighted in 1956, wrote about cricket for the Observer and was serving a term as Yorkshire President when he died, aged 74, in 1990.

The Master – by Neville Cardus, 1956

Len Hutton was the only batsman of his period to whom we could apply the term Old Master, referring in his case not to his number of years but to the style and vintage of his cricket. He followed in the succession of the classic professional batsmen who each went in first for his county and for England: Shrewsbury, Hayward, Hobbs and Sutcliffe – though Sutcliffe wore his classicism with a subtly Sutcliffian difference.

As Old Masters go, Hutton was young enough; the sadness is that physical disability put an end to his career in its prime. He had all the classic points of style when, not much more than 19, he came to Lord's in 1936 and scored 55. I then wrote of him in this strain of Cassandrian prophecy, 'Here is a young cricketer who is already old in the head and destined to enliven many a Lancashire and Yorkshire match of the future.'

If by means of some time machine capable of television we could today see a picture of Hutton batting 20 years ago, and one taken of him during his maturity, we would notice no fundamental difference in technique. We would see that his cricket had grown in experience and finish ... that is all. Like the music of Bach, Hutton's batsmanship in its evolution from an early to a late period presented no marked divisions; it was never raw, unprincipled or embryonic. He batted grammatically from the start, choosing his strokes as carefully as a professor of logic his words.

Even when he first played for Yorkshire, beginning with 0, he seemed to begin an innings to a plan, building the shape and the duration of it to a blueprint in his mind, and to timetable. But once in the greenest of his salad days he fell into error. He opened a Yorkshire innings on Saturday at Bradford with Arthur Mitchell, dourest and most unsmiling of the clan. After a characteristically Yorkshire investigation of the state of the wicket, the state of the opposition bowling, the state of mind the umpires were in, the state of the weather and barometer, and probably the state of the Bank of England itself, Mitchell and Hutton began to score now and then.

Young Hutton was feeling in form, so after he had played himself in he decided to cut a rising ball outside the off-stump. Remember that he was fresh to the Yorkshire scene and policies. He actually lay back and cut hard and swiftly, with cavalier flourish. He cut under the ball by an inch, and it sped bang into the wicketkeeper's gloves. And Mitchell, from the other end of the pitch, looked hard at Hutton and said, 'That's no ***** use!' This was probably Hutton's true baptism, cleansing him of all vanity and lusts for insubstantial pageantry and temporal glory.

He observed the classical unities; that is to say, he did not venture beyond reliable and established limitations of batsmanship learned in the traditional school. Geometrical precision in the application of bat to ball, each movement of the feet considered until the right position was found almost instinctively, not bringing him merely to the ball and, as far as possible and if necessary over it, but also with body at the proper balance.

Never, or hardly ever, did Hutton play a thoughtless innings; his mind usually seemed to move a fraction of time in advance of his most rapid footwork and sudden tensions of limb, sinew and nerve. It is, of course, wrong to suppose that Hutton was at any time a batsman slow in his mental and physical reactions at the crease.

The scoreboard may have told us that he was not getting runs feverishly, but the vigilance of Hutton was eternal; the concentration in him was so intense that it frequently exhausted his not robust physique much sooner than did the more obvious toil and burden of the day. In the most austere defensive Hutton innings we could feel a mental alertness; purpose in him suffered no weariness.

And whether or not he was putting into practice his wide repertoire of strokes, he was the stylist always; rarely was he discovered in an awkward position at the crease, rarely was he hustled or hurried. Once at Kennington Oval, Lindwall knocked Hutton's cap off in a Test match. Such an outrage could be equalled in a cricketer's imagination only by supposing that Alfred Mynn's tall hat was ever likewise rudely removed.

On a bowler's wicket, when the ball's spin was angular and waspish in turn, he could maintain his premeditated technical responses, often using a dead bat, the handle held so loosely that when the ball came into contact with the blade's middle it was as though against a drugged cushion: the spin was anaesthetised into harmlessness. But Hutton was, when grace descended upon him, a versatile and handsome stroke player. Old Trafford will remember that in 1948 he made a century of a brilliance that in the circumstances – Bank Holiday and a Lancashire v Yorkshire match – was almost pagan. He drove Lindwall with Spooner-esque charm and panache at Brisbane in December 1950; at Lord's in the Test match of 1953, he played one of the most regal and most

highly pedigreed innings ever seen in an England and Australia Test match on the hallowed ground. And he has contributed to a festival at Scarborough.

If Hutton had lived and played in the Lord Hawke epoch, when even Test cricketers in England had somehow to adapt themselves and their skill to matches limited to three days, he would have been a different batsman in his tempo and mental approach. But he could not possibly have been greater.

Any artist or master of craft is an organism in an environment; he is very much what circumstances and atmosphere make of him. His very greatness consists in how fully he can sum up the technique of his day as he finds it, and how representative he is of his day's spirit. MacLaren, lordly and opulent at the crease, was a representative man and cricketer in a lordly opulent period; Hutton's cricket has been as true as MacLaren's to the zeitgeist, to the feeling, temper and even to the economy of the age which shaped his character and his skill, both conceived as much in integrity as in joy.

As a captain he was shrewd but courteous; he knew the game's finest points, and though never likely to give anything away, was too proud to take anything not his due. Sometimes he may have allowed thoughtfulness to turn to worry; but this is a natural habit in the part of the world which Hutton comes from.

Hutton certainly showed that a professional cricketer could wear the robes of leadership in the field of play with dignity. At first, no doubt, he appeared at the head of his troops not wearing anything like a Caesarian toga, but rather the uniform of a sergeant major. But he moved up in rank and prestige until he became worthy of his command and defeated Australia twice in successive rubbers, wresting one from the enemy at the pinch and looting the other after a series of Tests which were, if I may be free with my allusions and metaphors, the Australians' Austerlitz.

One of Hutton's most winning characteristics – and his personality is extremely attractive – is his smile, a smile with a twinkle in it. He had many occasions in his distinguished career on which to indulge this smile, many provocations to it, and he never missed the joke. A Yorkshireman has his own idea of humour, and Hutton, as great or famous as any Yorkshireman contemporary with him, relished his laugh all the more because very often it came last.

A Cricketing Legend – by John Woodcock, 1991

Between the end of the First World War in 1918 and the start of the Second in 1939, English cricket produced three great batsmen – Walter Hammond, Leonard Hutton and Denis Compton. Each one was endowed with a wonderful talent, Hammond's enabling him to play with rare splendour, Compton's with an irresistible *joie de vivre* and Hutton's with a style that was all-embracing. Although Herbert Sutcliffe had a comparable record, compiled between the wars, he was not in the same way a product of the 1920s or 1930s, having been on the point of breaking through in 1914.

Len Hutton died on September 6, 1990, at the age of 74. He had slipped into Lord's only five days earlier to watch the final of the NatWest Bank Trophy from Paul Getty's box in the Mound Stand. He had been there, too, for the Test match against India in

July, and seen Graham Gooch get to within 31 runs of his own most famous record, the 364 with which he tormented Australia at The Oval in 1938.

Hutton retained until the end the unassuming manner that marked his apprenticeship. Sir Jack Hobbs had been the same; as disarmingly unboastful after being Knighted as before. There was also about Sir Len an apparent frailty at the crease, a characteristic that caused his son, Richard, who also played for Yorkshire and England, frequent anxiety until he was old and wise enough to recognise the artistry it disguised.

For the benefit of those who never saw Hutton bat, I have been trying to think of someone playing today who puts one in mind of him, and I am not sure that I can. This is surprising, for he was essentially orthodox and resolutely conventional. Except that he gives more of an impression of hitting the ball, and less of stroking it, than Hutton did, Stephen Waugh, the gifted Australian of similar build, probably comes as near to it as anyone. Mohammad Azharuddin is another who possesses that intuition which gives the great natural players such a start to life. There was something quite uncanny about the way, for example, in which Hutton coped with the mysteries of Sonny Ramadhin's spin while carrying his bat against West Indies at The Oval in 1950, just as there was in his handling of Jack Iverson's when doing the same against Australia at Adelaide only six months later. He was, hereabouts, at the meridian of his powers. So, besides Ramadhin and Iverson, were Keith Miller and Ray Lindwall. In fair weather and foul, at home and overseas, if Len failed, the chances were that England would.

Whether his character was influenced by being born at Fulneck, the village near Pudsey where there was an isolated Moravian community ('protestants of rare missionary zeal') is a matter for conjecture. To some extent it probably was, their significance being quite considerable. But cricket, too, was a family religion. Those who didn't take to it would have been put back if that had been possible, and being chosen for Yorkshire when still a month short of his 18th birthday – his first match was against Cambridge University at Fenner's in May 1934 – made Hutton the youngest player to appear for the county since George Hirst in 1889. He came into a side that had won the Championship for the previous three years – Yorkshire had not been out of the first four since 1911 – and, although they finished a disappointing fifth in 1934, to play regularly for them in those days gave a young man a distinct advantage. If the same applied today, Richard Blakey and Ashley Metcalfe would, I am sure, be nearer to playing for England than they probably are.

In Hutton's case, the transition from callow youth, cap steeply tilted, to one of the world's most accomplished batsmen was achieved in an extraordinarily short time. Yorkshire Colts getting a game for the county side in the middle 1930s were left in no doubt that they were there to be seen and not heard. It was an austere school, and Hutton was an astute observer. Within four years of joining it he had become a household name. Nothing was more remarkable about his tour de force at The Oval than that he was only just 22 at the time.

Then came the war, claiming several summers when Hutton's play would still have carried the bloom of youth, and leaving him, as the result of a training accident, with his left arm two inches shorter than the right. With the return of peace, the mantle that

had been Hammond's passed to Hutton, whose batting, despite having been laid up for so long, had matured. Between 1934 and 1939 he had scored 11,658 runs at an average of 48.98. From 1945, when he played his next first-class innings, to his retirement in 1955 he made another 28,292 at 58.81. Although, hardly surprisingly, he himself felt handicapped by his disabled arm – its shortening was clearly visible – he made miraculously light of it. If Compton and Bill Edrich were the spirit of the immediate post-war years, Hutton was looked to in order to provide the stability. Between the three of them they did wonders for our rehabilitation.

That Compton rather than Hutton was made Freddie Brown's vice-captain in Australia in 1950-51 was for reasons of compatibility. When, in 1952, a more egalitarian age was dawning and a captain was being sought to succeed Brown, Len was the clear choice (although he had never led Yorkshire), and it fell to him to regain the Ashes in England in 1953 and then retain them in Australia two years later. In Australia he was quick to see the possibilities of a Statham-Tyson combination, despite Tyson's rather lumbering early efforts and although it meant leaving out Alec Bedser, which he did without the consideration due to so great a figure in the game.

Hutton was not, in fact, an easy communicator. It could be said that he distanced himself from his side when at times they needed a stronger lead. This was particularly so in the West Indies in 1953-54 on the first of his two tours as captain. On the other hand, they were in awe of him as a player, and that was a help. Just as Sir Henry Cotton dignified the status of the professional golfer, so Hutton did of the professional cricketer.

Still good enough to make 145 against Australia at Lord's in 1953 and to average an astonishing 96.71 against West Indies that winter, by the summer of 1954 Len was suddenly finding it much more of an effort to summon the skill, nerve and concentration needed both to captain England and to make runs. There were also suggestions that, although his side had staged an epic recovery in the West Indies, they had not covered themselves with glory in other respects. There were, accordingly, calls for a change of captain. These, happily, were resisted, and off to Australia he went in September 1954 for his third and last tour there as a player. In the event it took so much out of him, once England had been horribly beaten in the first Test – not least because Hutton had put Australia in – that, within a few months of his getting home in the spring of 1955, he put his bats away. His back was playing him up, and after the heat and burden of the last two years a quiet retirement in Surrey, with a golf course nearby, had an obvious appeal. Famous Yorkshireman that he was, the south, with its less competitive responses, suited him better than the north.

For a decade Len Hutton was the model for English batsmen. As a first movement he slid his right foot back and across towards the middle stump, from where, basically, he did what came naturally. He had a lovely stance, as still as it was relaxed. He would play right back but seldom right forward, preferring to let the ball come to him and playing it very late. Between bat and pad there was sometimes, dare I say it, a gap – the forward 'prop' had yet to come into fashion – and through it he was liable to be bowled by an off-break. Early in the season, undergraduates at Oxford and Cambridge were known to get him out this way.

Yorkshire gave a trial to three young players, Lowson, an opening batsman, Close, an all-rounder, and Trueman, a spin bowler.

Cambridge University v Yorkshire, 1949

There were occasions, too, when, because of his arm, he played his cover drive not leaning into the ball so much as reaching for it. But his timing and balance were such that it was still pleasing to the eye. He had all the strokes if he wanted them, though only when no risk was involved did he loft the ball. In his 19 Test hundreds he hit only two sixes, and one of those was to what was then the shortest straight boundary in Test cricket – Jamaica’s Sabina Park. It was a drive off Gary Sobers, bowling orthodox left-arm spin.

Hutton never greatly cared for leaving his crease to the spinners, of whom there were vastly more then than there are now. Had he done so, the chances are that the generation that followed him, led by Peter May, Colin Cowdrey and Tom Graveney, would themselves have ventured forth rather more. Like all instinctively good judges of a run, he never looked to be in a hurry between the wickets. Studying under Sutcliffe in his early days for Yorkshire would have shown him the need for conviction in calling and let him into the secrets of the short single.

A broken nose gave Len a misleadingly rugged appearance. But to go with it he had a winning smile and blue eyes that regularly twinkled with his own brand of sometimes cryptic humour. He was full of paradoxes: self-contained yet vulnerable, reserved yet quizzical, shrewd yet enigmatic, gentle yet tenacious. He wanted to be judged as a person as much as in his role as a cricketer, and it may truthfully be said that, like Hobbs before him, he attracted widespread and genuine affection.

I see him on board ship in 1950 and again in 1954, bound for Australia and wrapped in contemplation. I see him working the ball around, seldom plundering the bowling, rather picking up runs as he went – a late cut here, a placed single there, and then, sometimes after a long wait, the cover drive that was his special glory. The modern game would have given us, inevitably, a different player: he would have had no chance to surpass himself, as he sometimes so memorably did, on drying pitches, and it is as dreadful to think of him in a helmet as it is to think of Compton, Hammond or W. G. in one.

I see him near the end of his tether, as a lot of us were, before the Ashes were safely in England’s keeping in Australia in 1954-55. And I shall remember him at the Lord’s Test against India last year, going quietly and a little wearily off into the twilight, content, I fancy, that his record score for England was still intact, though certain to have been just as affable had it not been. He was not one to shower compliments around, but by then he knew when they were due and duly paid them. A cricketing legend, he won as many hearts with his beguiling albeit watchful charm as with the mastery of his batting.

HEDLEY VERITY

Hedley Verity played in 40 Tests and took 144 wickets, including 8 for 43 at an average of 24.37. He took 1,956 first-class wickets at 14.90. His career began in 1930 and ran until the beginning of the Second World War. He was born in 1905 and died of wounds received in combat in July, 1943

By R. C. Robertson-Glasgow, 1944

Hedley Verity, Captain, The Green Howards, died of wounds a prisoner of war in Italy on July 31, 1943, some two months after his 38th birthday. He had been reported wounded and missing, and the news of his death came on September 1, exactly four years after he had played his last match for Yorkshire and, at Hove, taken seven Sussex wickets for nine runs in one innings, which finished County cricket before the war.

He received his wounds in the Eighth Army's first attack on the German positions at Catania, in Sicily. Eyewitnesses who were a few yards from Verity when he was hit, have told the story. The objective was a ridge with strong points and pillboxes. Behind a creeping barrage, Verity led his company forward 700 yards. When the barrage ceased, they went on another 300 yards and neared the ridge, in darkness. As the men advanced through corn two-feet high, tracer bullets swept into them. Then they wriggled through the corn, Verity encouraging them with 'Keep going, keep going'. The moon was at their back, and the enemy used mortar-fire, Very lights and firebombs, setting the corn alight. The strongest point appeared to be a farmhouse to the left of the ridge; so Verity sent one platoon round to take the farmhouse, while the other gave covering fire. The enemy fire increased, and, as they crept forward, Verity was hit in the chest. 'Keep going', he said, 'and get them out of that farmhouse'. When it was decided to withdraw, they last saw Verity lying on the ground, in front of the burning corn, his head supported by his batman, Pte Thomas Reynoldson of Bridlington. So, in the last grim game, Verity showed, as he was so sure to do, that rare courage which both calculates and inspires.

His Bowling Art

Judged by any standard, Verity was great bowler. Merely to watch him was to know that. The balance of the run up, the high ease of the left-handed action, the scrupulous length, the pensive variety, all proclaimed the master. He combined nature with art to a degree not equalled by any other English bowler of our time. He received a handsome legacy of skill and, by an application that verged on scientific research, turned it into a fortune. There have been bowlers who reached greatness without knowing, or, perhaps, caring to know just how or why; but Verity could analyse his own intentions without losing the joy of surprise and describe their effect without losing the company of a listener. He was the ever-learning professor, justly proud yet utterly humble. In the matter of plain arithmetic, so often torn from its context to the confusion of judgment, Verity, by taking 1,956 wickets at 14.87 runs each in ten years of first-class cricket,

showed by far the best average during this century. In the recorded history of cricket the only bowlers of this class with lower averages are: Alfred Shaw, 2,072 wickets at 11.97 each; Tom Emmett, 1,595 wickets at 13.43 each; George Lohmann, 1,841 wickets at 13.73 each; James Southerton, 1,744 wickets at 14.30 each. It might be argued that during the period 1854 to 1898, covered by the careers of these cricketers, pitches tended to give more help to the bowler than they did during Verity's time. Verity, I know, for one, would not have pressed such a claim in his own favour. He never dwelt on decimals; and, while he enjoyed personal triumph as much as the next man, that which absorbed his deepest interest was the proper issue of a Test match with Australia or of an up-and-down bout with Lancashire; and if, in his country's or county's struggle towards victory, he brought off some recondite plot for the confounding of Bradman or McCabe or Ernest Tyldesley or Edward Paynter, well, then he was happy beyond computing.

Notable Feats

Yet his bowling achievements, pressed into but overflowing the ten years of his career, were so rich and various that they here demand some concentrated notice:

- He played in 40 Test matches, taking 144 wickets at 24.37 runs each. He took 100 wickets in Test cricket in a shorter period than any other English bowler.
- He is the only cricketer who has taken 14 wickets in a day in a Test match, this feat being performed against Australia at Lord's in the second Test, 1934. During this match, he took 15 wickets for 104 runs, thus sharing with Wilfred Rhodes, his Yorkshire predecessor, the honour of taking most wickets in an England v Australia match.
- Twice he took all 10 wickets in an innings: in 1931, against Warwickshire at Headingley, Leeds, for 36 runs in 18.4 (6-ball) overs, with 6 maidens; in 1932, on the same ground, against Nottinghamshire, for 10 runs in 19.4 (6-ball) overs, with 16 maidens – a world record in first-class cricket for the fewest number of runs conceded by a bowler taking all 10 wickets in an innings, and it included the hat-trick.
- Against Essex at Leyton, in 1933, he took 17 wickets in one day, a record shared only by C. Blythe and T. W. Goddard.
- In each of his nine full English seasons he took at least 150 wickets, and he averaged 185 wickets a season; he took over 200 wickets in three consecutive seasons (1935, '36 and '37). His average ranged from 12.42 to 17.63. He headed the first-class English bowling averages in his first season (1930) and in his last (1939), and never came out lower than fifth.

How He Began

Verity was born at Headingley, but passed his 25th birthday before he played for Yorkshire, in 1930, the year that W. Rhodes retired. Some of his earlier seasons were spent in playing as an amateur for Rawdon in the Yorkshire Council; for Accrington in the Lancashire League; and for Middleton in the Central League. He was then, as always afterwards when allowed, an all-rounder. As a batsman, his height, reach, concentration and knowledge of what to avoid raised him distinctly from the ruck of mediocrity; but, whereas his bowling

included grace, his batting had only style. The former was nature embellished by art; the latter was art improved by imitation. As a bowler, Hedley Verity stands, and will stand, with his illustrious predecessors in the Yorkshire attack: Edmund Peate (1879–87), Robert Peel (1882–99), Wilfred Rhodes (1898–1930) – the dates indicate the time of their respective playing careers – but Verity was not a slow left-armer in the accepted sense, and he used to reject comparison with Rhodes so far as method was concerned, saying: both of us are left-handed and like taking wickets; let's leave it at that.

Verity's mean pace was what is called slow-medium; on fast pitches, often about medium; and he would send down an inswinging yorker of an abrupt virulence not unworthy of George Hirst. Naturally, on wet or crumbled or sticky pitches, he reduced pace and tossed the leg-spinner higher, but even here his variety of pace and of angle of delivery was remarkable. He was a born schemer; tireless, but never wild, in experiment; as sensitive in observation as a good host, or as an instrumentalist who spots a rival on the beat; the scholar who does not only dream, the inventor who can make it work.

Comparison of Giants

Just how good a bowler was he? In relation to rivals in his own craft but of an earlier day, such a question is useless except to amuse an idle hour or to excite an idle quarrel. We can only say that, in his own short time, he was the best of his kind. In England, day-in and day-out, he may never have quite touched the greatness of Robert Peel, Colin Blythe or Wilfred Rhodes. In Australia, neither in 1932-33 or 1936-37, did he perplex their batsmen quite as J. C. White perplexed them in 1928-29, but, as a workman-artist, he will take some beating. H. B. Cameron, that fine wicketkeeper-batsman of South Africa, playing against Yorkshire in 1935, hit him for three fours and three sixes in one over; but very rarely did a batsman survive a liberty taken with Verity. He had, besides, a wonderful skill in restoring the rabbits, early and with little inconvenience, to the hutch.

If a touchstone of Verity's greatness be needed, there is D. G. Bradman, the most inexorable scorer of runs that cricket has yet seen, whose Test match average against England stands at 91.42 in 46 innings. I think it was Verity who kept that average under 150. He was one of only three or four bowlers who came to the battle with Bradman on not unequal terms (*haud impar congressus!*); and Bradman was reported as saying, 'I think I know all about Clarrie [Grimmett], but with Hedley I am never sure. You see, there's no breaking point with him.'

Beating the Best

Verity timed his blows. In the fifth Test, at Sydney, early in 1933, Australia, 19 runs on the first innings, lost Victor Richardson for 0. Woodfull and Bradman added 115; Larwood, injured, had left the field – and that particular Larwood never came back – then Verity deceived Bradman in flight, bowled him for 71 and went on to take 5 for 33 in 19 overs and win the match. In the earlier Tests, amid the fast bowling and the clamour, not much had been heard of Verity, except as a rescuing batsman. But, when the last pinch came, there he was to relieve the weary line; very Yorkshire.

Verity never allowed the opinion that Bradman was less than a master on damaged pitches, refusing to stress the evidence of his own triumph at Lord's in 1934 (Bradman c and b Verity 36; c Ames b Verity 13) and referring to Bradman's two innings of 59 and 43 in 1938 against Yorkshire at Sheffield. It was a pig of a pitch, he said, and he played me in the middle of the bat right through. Maybe Verity's opinion of Bradman was heightened by a natural generosity in its giver, but on this matter I think that Verity had reason to know best.

As an all-round fielder, Verity was no more than sound, but to his own bowling, or at backward point, he sometimes touched brilliance; and there sticks in the memory the catch that he made at Lord's in 1938, when McCabe cut one from Farnes crack from the bat's middle.

Opened England Batting

As a batsman for Yorkshire, Verity was mostly kept close to the extras. His build and reach suggested power and freedom, but it remained a suggestion; and he was analogous to those burly golfers who prod the tee-shot down the middle to a prime 180 yards. A casual observer might have mistaken Verity for Sutcliffe a little out of form, for he seemed to have caught something of that master's style and gesture, and, like Sutcliffe, he could be clean bowled in a manner that somehow exonerated the batsman from all guilt. He never quite brought off the double, though in 1936 he took 216 wickets and scored 855 runs. But he had the sovereign gift of batting to an occasion. In the 1936-37 visit to Australia, G. O. Allen could find no opening pair to stay together, so he sent in Verity with C. J. Barnett in the fourth Test, at Adelaide, and they put up partnerships of 53 and 45. Not much, perhaps; but the best till then. In all Test matches, his batting average was close on 21; nearly 3 units higher than his average in all first-class cricket.

Verity had the look and carriage of a man likely to do supremely well something that would need time and trouble. His dignity was not assumed; it was the natural reflection of mind and body harmonised and controlled. He was solid, conscientious, disciplined; and something far more. In all that he did, till his most gallant end, he showed the vital fire, and warmed others in its flame. To the spectator in the field he may have seemed, perhaps, a little stiff and aloof; but among a known company he revealed geniality, wit, and an unaffected kindness that will not be forgotten.

There was no breaking point with Verity; and his last reported words: 'Keep going', were but a text on his short and splendid life.

An Australian Appreciation – by Don Bradman, 1944

The present war has already taken heavy toll of gallant men who, after faithfully serving their countries on the cricket field in peacetime, have laid down their lives for a greater cause. Of those who have fallen, Hedley Verity was perhaps the most illustrious and from the Dominion of Australia I feel it my sad duty to join with cricketers of the Motherland in expressing sorrow that we shall not again see him on our playing fields.

The anecdotes kept growing to the point where every cricket story ever told somehow attached itself to Fred. Some, at least, had the ring of truth. One, recalled by (Don) Mosey, fits with the scorecard of a game against Northampton in 1954. Johnny Wardle was bowled, horribly, by Tyson for nought. 'A bloody fine shot that were,' snorted Trueman, as he went out, just before meeting a similar fate. 'And a bloody fine shot that were, an' all,' was Wardle's greeting to Fred. But Trueman had a knack of getting in the last word, 'Aye, I slipped on that pile o' shit you left in the crease'.

Obituary – 2007

It could truthfully be claimed that Hedley Verity was one of the greatest, if not THE greatest left-hand bowler of all time. Most certainly he could lay just claim to that honour during the 1918–39 period. No doubt his Yorkshire environment was of great assistance, for left-hand bowling seems to be in the blood of Yorkshiremen. It is one of their traditions and inalienable rights to possess the secrets of the art. Although not a young man from a cricketing standpoint when the call came, Verity was little if any beyond the zenith of his powers. He was always such a keen student of the game, and his bowling was of such a type, that brains and experience played a greater part in his successes than natural genius. Although opposed to him in many Tests, I could never claim to have completely fathomed his strategy, for it was never static nor mechanical.

Naturally he achieved his most notable successes when wickets were damp. Nobody privileged to witness that famous Test at Lord's in 1934 (least of all the Australian batsmen) will forget a performance to which even the statistics could not do justice. But it would be ungenerous to suggest that he needed assistance from the wicket, as his successful Australian tours will confirm. The ordinary left-hander who lacks the vicious unorthodox finger-spin of the Fleetwood-Smith variety, needs uncommon ability to achieve even moderate success in Australia, yet Verity was the foundation stone of England's bowling in both countries during this era.

Apart from his special department of the game, Verity could also claim to be a remarkably efficient fieldsman close to the wicket where safe hands and courage are greater attributes than agility. Add this to the fact that once he opened a Test match innings for England, not without success, and we have a fairly general picture of a really fine player. Those of us who played against this swarthy, capless champion (I never remember having seen him wear a cap) probably appreciated his indomitable fighting spirit even more than his own colleagues. We knew, when war came, that he would plainly see his duty in the same way as he regarded it his duty to win cricket matches for Yorkshire no less than England.

During our association together I cannot recall having heard Verity utter a word of complaint or criticism. If reports of his final sacrifice be correct, and I believe they are, he maintained this example right to the end. His life, his skill, his service all merited the highest honour, and with great sorrow I unhesitatingly pay humble tribute to his memory.

BRIAN CLOSE

Brian Close was told by Yorkshire in 1970 to resign or be sacked. He went to Somerset and the move rejuvenated his new county. He returned to the England team in 1976 and had his flesh turned mauve and cadmium yellow by the West Indies pace bowlers. In 786 first-class matches, he scored 34,994 runs and took 1,171 wickets. He made 22 Test appearances (887 runs).

Cricketer of the Year 1964 – by W. E. Bowes

Because he was senior professional with the club, and the job was his by right, Yorkshire in 1963 offered the captaincy to their all-rounder Brian Close – left-handed batsman and right-arm utility bowler – who hitherto had never quite accomplished what was expected of him. It was a trial appointment. Nobody quite knew how it would work out.

The result was astonishing. Almost overnight it seemed that Brian Close matured. He showed a knowledge of his own team and the play of opponents that immediately stamped him as a thinker and tactician. His field placings were as intelligent and antagonistic as any seen in the county for 25 years and, like Brian Sellers before him, if a fieldsman was required in a suicide position the captain himself was first for the job. He kept the fiery and volatile Trueman happy, used him in effective short bursts, and balanced those occasions when he asked for long and sustained effort, with opportunities to bowl at tail-enders. Determination and purpose came into his own cricket. He regained his place in the England team and won national approval for the unflinching way he played the West Indies fast bowlers, Hall and Griffith. To his own great delight he saw Yorkshire, in their centenary year, to their 28th outright Championship success.

Dennis Brian Close, the second eldest in a family of four boys and one girl, was born at Rawdon, near Leeds, on February 24, 1931. His father, Harry Close, was a well-known wicketkeeper in the local leagues and it was understandable that the boys were taken down to the Rawdon ground by their father on practice nights and for the Saturday matches. Says Brian, 'We didn't interfere with the seniors. We played much more serious games with other boys behind the pavilion and, if we were beaten at cricket, we challenged our opponents to football.' It was soon obvious that he had above average ability. He was a natural ball player but, far more important in a working-class family, he was good at lessons, too. He passed his 11-plus exam when he was ten and went to Aireborough Grammar School, which Yorkshire and England left-arm bowler Hedley Verity had attended years earlier.