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THE
Nightwatchman

THE WISDEN CRICKET QUARTERLY

WISDEN



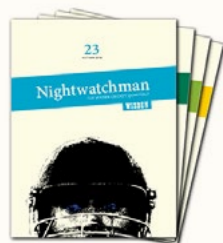
THE Nightwatchman

THE WISDEN CRICKET QUARTERLY

Cricket's past has been enriched by great writing and Wisden is making sure its future will be too. *The Nightwatchman* is a quarterly collection of essays and long-form articles and is available in print and e-book formats.

Co-edited by Anjali Doshi and Tanya Aldred, with Matt Thacker as managing editor, *The Nightwatchman* features an array of authors from around the world, writing beautifully and at length about the game and its myriad offshoots. Contributors are given free rein over subject matter and length, escaping the pressures of next-day deadlines and the despair of cramming heart and soul into a few paragraphs.

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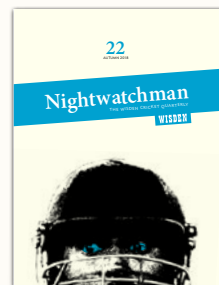
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BREAK ON THROUGH TO T'OTHER SIDE

Scott Oliver plunges into the Pennine valley where east meets west

You're either one or the other, aren't you?

Red or blue, in or out, Brexiteer or Remainer, uppers or downers, Blur or Oasis, dead or alive, Gerrard or Lampard, cats or dogs, tomayto or tomaah tah, ketchup or HP, Mac or PC, smooth or crunchy, still or sparkling, Marmite or "nah, mate".

Lancashire or Yorkshire.

One or t'other. You can't be both. Unless you're Todmorden, that is.

Nestled at the confluence of three narrow Pennine valleys, the former mill town officially sits within the West Riding of Yorkshire, with residents paying their council tax in the Calderdale district, which is headquartered in Halifax. They have an Oldham postcode and Rochdale telephone numbers, however. Both Red Rose towns. Their police, fire

and ambulance services are provided by West Yorkshire. The Anglican St Mary's church in the centre of town belongs to the diocese of Leeds, while the Roman Catholic St Joseph's is in the diocese of Salford.

Despite its West Yorkshire location, Todmorden Cricket Club have been a member of the Lancashire League for all but six years of the competition's history, switching from the nascent Central Lancashire League (CLL) in 1897. For 120 of those 121 years they were the only Yorkshire-based club in the league although, with the recent collapse of the CLL, they have this year been joined by Walsden, the neighbouring village barely a minute down the train line toward Rochdale and newly installed as Tod's arch-rivals: a Yorkshire derby in the famous old Lancashire League. Tod have won only five titles, the last in 1957, giving them the longest drought of the traditional 14 members. So it would have been

a tad frustrating to see Walsden – easily the smallest community of the league's 24 clubs – storm the first half of the campaign, winning 13 out of 13, and become odds-on favourite for the title in their debut campaign. The two clubs played their first league match against each other for 120 years on 12 August in Walsden. Two days before my visit to Todmorden, the clubs had played a first competitive match since the 19th century, Walsden winning a Friday-night T20 game on the last ball, with £742 taken on the gate and £4,000 at the bar.

Prior to the redrawing of county boundaries in the Local Government Act of 1888, the Lancashire-Yorkshire border ran straight through Todmorden, passing under the imposing arches of the railway viaduct overlooking the market in the centre of town and on south through the grand neo-classical town hall, built in the Victorian era at the height of Todmorden's weaving boom. Local couples getting married there could dance from one county into the other on the ballroom floor, while its ornate pediment depicts classical figures in a friendly embrace: Yorkshire represented by the iron and wool trades; Lancashire by cotton.

The border also used to run on a shallow diagonal straight through the cricket club's beautiful Centre Vale ground, passing under the so-called Boundary Tree. On certain pitches on the square you would be batting in one county and facing bowling from the other. When WG Grace played there for the United South against the United North in 1874, the doctor clumped a few boundaries from Lancashire into Yorkshire and vice

versa. The club's crest reflects this dual identity, bearing both a white and red rose – sometimes Lancashire first, sometimes Yorkshire, although it isn't entirely clear whether this is an attempt to be diplomatic, an oversight, or the work of mischievous sign-painters that was never corrected.

Perhaps a fraction small to serve as a first-class outground, Todmorden have nevertheless hosted numerous county second XI matches. Indeed, both Lancashire and Yorkshire have used it as a home venue, sometimes to play against each other in the same season, the teams taking turns to use the home dressing-room. There have been a total of six "rosebuds" matches played at Centre Vale and Yorkshire are yet to win any of them.

Brian Heywood was a long-time Todmorden opening batsman and is now a keen local historian who co-authored a 392-page history of the club, *In a League of Their Own*, with his parents Freda and Malcolm, the latter a former president of the Lancashire League. Heywood insists that "culturally and in sport, the town identifies much more closely with Lancashire than Yorkshire". He adds: "Like Pudsey and Scarborough, it's much more of a cricket town than football or rugby. When those team sports were developing in the late-19th century, rugby was the dominant sport down the valleys towards Halifax and Rochdale, and football up the valley towards Burnley. Todmorden didn't develop a strong identity in either sport, although in football it is, like Hebden Bridge and Keighley [both in Yorkshire], a Burnley FC town."



Having signed up in September 1890 for the inaugural Lancashire League – or North East Lancashire League, as it was originally known – Todmorden resigned without bowling a ball. It was the peak of the Challenge Match era, and the club were keen to keep options open and their prestigious fixture programme intact. Thus in 1891 they played Manchester at Old Trafford, Leeds at Headingley and Bradford at Park Avenue, as well as a host of other leading clubs including Bingley, Keighley, Dewsbury Savile, Barnsley and Burnley. “Of their 38 matches,” says Heywood, “24 were against Yorkshire clubs and 14 against Lancashire clubs. Little wonder Todmorden was reluctant to confine itself to fixtures in one league.”

However, local cricket leagues – inspired in part by the success of the Football League, founded in 1888 – were sprouting up across industrial Yorkshire and Lancashire. Come summer 1892, the Huddersfield and District, Leeds and District, Pudsey and District, Spen Valley, West Riding Central, West Riding and West Yorkshire leagues were all underway. “Every Yorkshire team that Todmorden had ever played was playing in a league,” says Heywood. “Some were in two leagues. Todmorden foresaw the decimation of their Challenge Match fixture list and became founder members of the South East Lancashire League – renamed the Central Lancashire League – in late 1891, playing their first season of league cricket in 1892.”

Maintaining a skeleton Challenge Match programme alongside their new league commitments became unsustainable, and so Todmorden hopped into the Lancashire League

for the 1897 season, becoming its 14th club (the league had an unchanged membership from 1897 to 2016, a world record for longevity for any league in any sport). Todmorden’s Lancastrianisation was sealed, or so it seemed.

• • •

Lancashire-leaning this West Yorkshire town may well be, but cut the club with a knife and it would bleed both red and white. Arriving at the ground on a glorious midsummer Sunday afternoon as England were slamming six past Panama in Nizhny Novgorod, the first person I meet is gateman and treasurer John Vickers, born and bred in Bolton but an honorary Todmordian of 37 years and very much a Red Rose man. John was on the gate in 1987 when a fierce hook from Rishton’s pro hit a passing car, causing its irate driver stop to remonstrate with Vickers. “It wasn’t me,” came the reply, “it was Viv Richards.” (The driver hadn’t heard of him.)

“We are committed Northerners,” affirms Vickers of the club’s divided loyalties, “and our attitudes and temperaments are very similar. However, there remains a friendly rivalry, particularly over cricket.” The operative word here is “friendly”, as illustrated by the response Vickers gets when accidentally under-paying for his bacon sandwich in Tod’s tea rooms, the Red Brick. “She told me it was obvious I came from the Yorkshire side of Todmorden. Then, they do say Yorkshiremen have short arms and deep pockets.”

Hailing originally from Hebden Bridge, the next train stop down the Calder

Valley, club stalwart Ken Sutcliffe is dyed-in-the-wool Yorkshire. I catch him in the Members’ Bar pointedly sliding his freshly pulled but not-quite-full pint of bitter back toward the young barman: “Can you make that a Yorkshire pint, please?” Sutcliffe once lived on the west-facing slope overlooking the Burnley Road that runs the length of the ground and he vividly remembers instructing his pregnant wife that when her waters broke she was to “tell the ambulance driver to turn left” (a phrase that has now become shorthand for White Rose allegiance): 12 miles to a Yorkshire hospital in Halifax was evidently preferable to the seven miles to Burnley or nine to Rochdale.

For all the stereotypes, club president Nevil Sutcliffe (no relation) believes the rivalry is becoming gentler with time, in part the result of Yorkshire CCC relaxing their qualification criteria to allow “off-cumden” (outsiders) to be selected. “Back in the day, my own father and his brother, both Yorkshiremen, left wishes saying they didn’t want to be cremated in Lancashire and insisted the family had to take them to Elland – where the crematorium is further [from Tod] – instead of Burnley or Rochdale. Some of the older generation still don’t like to see the other county do well at all but I feel that is not the case these days – unless it’s a Roses match, when allegiances matter a great deal. Other than that, I find we want our own county to do well, but the other county is the next result we look for.”

The Todmorden XI for the day’s mid-table clash with Lancashire League newcomers Middleton is a five-five split between the Roses (ideal for the football warm-up), with the Indian substitute pro

from Greenmount – the club of Gary and Phil Neville – yet to declare his loyalties. He’s here because rules stipulate that all teams must field a professional in every game – Tod have employed Fanie de Villiers, Faf du Plessis, Mohsin Khan, Vasbert Drakes and Frank Tyson down the years, as well as the brothers of Hansie Cronje and the ex-Manchester United striker Dwight Yorke. This year’s regular paid man is the former England leg-spinner Chris Schofield, ruled out by injury, although his presence would of course tip the balance of the team toward the red corner. Some might say this would be apposite, for while Todmorden has forged a smattering of professional cricketers, including two Test players in Derek Shackleton and Lancashire legend Peter Lever, it has not yet produced one of comparavle stature for Yorkshire (wicket-keeper Ken Fiddling played 18 first-class matches for the Tykes either side of the Second World War, before a seven-year stint at Northamptonshire). Brian Close, the quintessential Yorkshireman, did “pro” for Tod in 1978 – presumably on the basis that, if he was ever going to play for a Lancashire League club, then it would have to be one based in Yorkshire – although he once cried off at the eleventh hour on a Saturday due to a pre-arranged golf day, leaving Tod pro-less and thus in breach of the rules. The league’s disciplinary board were rumoured to have taken great delight in fining “those Yorkshire bastards” £250. It wasn’t clear how much of that came out of Close’s pocket.

For quite a few reasons, one would be loath to depict a town as “schizophrenic”, but the waters are certainly muddier here than in most places. This was seen in Todmorden’s attempts to achieve ECB Clubmark

accreditation - eventually secured from the Yorkshire Cricket Board after representation had been made on the other side of the Pennines and both counties had fought for their signature - and is exemplified by the clashes over district (schools) and county representative cricket.

Take first-team opening batsman Ben Pearson. A couple of years ago he made a hundred in schools cricket for Rossendale District - the valley due west where Lancashire League rivals Rawtenstall, Haslingden and Bacup are based - and immediately had his eligibility questioned; despite playing for Lancashire under-17s and turning out in the Lancashire League, he didn't qualify to play schools cricket under the umbrella of a Lancashire district because his school, Todmorden High, was in Yorkshire. The Lancashire Cricket Board did not step in to arbitrate, so he had to sit out the rest of the district cricket season. The following year Pearson ended up playing for Rochdale District. In Lancashire. He was also playing county football for West Yorkshire but his eligibility was again challenged because he played his club football for Todmorden Sports, who were affiliated to the Lancashire FA, not the West Riding FA. "We had the exact same dilemma, but going in the opposite direction," laughs his father Lee, a Leeds United season ticket holder who supports Lancashire CCC.

Brian Heywood had a similarly confusing situation in the late 1970s, playing schools cricket under the Calderdale/Yorkshire jurisdiction and county representative cricket for Lancashire on account of Tod being in the Lancashire League. "In 1975, '78 and

'79 I played for Yorkshire Schoolboys, but in 1976 I played at the first Lancashire under-16s cricket festival and in 1979 for Lancashire Federation. In 1979 I represented Yorkshire and Lancashire in the same month."

Madonna perhaps summed it all up best:

Borderline, feels like I'm going to lose my mind

You just keep on pushing my love over the borderline.

•••

Given all this, is it really true that there are distinct Lancashire and Yorkshire character traits discernible, to the knowledgeable eye, in the way a person acts, thinks, speaks? Is it all somehow in the flesh, pre-existing and guiding the sporting affinity toward its "natural" side of the Pennines, or do these traits emerge after a largely arbitrary choice of identification has been made (or enforced), one way or t'other? Or again: are the supposedly distinct quirks of Red and White Rose personality just a form of ribbing that got a bit out of hand and built itself a bogus mythology? Cricket committee member Duncan Sutcliffe (no relation, either to Ken or Nevil) argues that there is a difference: "As a Lanky who worked all his life in Yorkshire, I would definitely say that Yorkshiremen take themselves far more seriously, whereas we can laugh at ourselves. Just about all Northern comedians you can name are from west of the Pennines. Perhaps the Irish influence couldn't climb the hills!"

What about the difference in cricketing character? Heywood, who was coached

at both Headingley and Old Trafford, concurs that Lancashire was the more chilled (cf. '90s England coaches, Bumble and Illy). "It was serious, dour stuff at Yorkshire. Praise had to be earned. I was often told what I was bad at, but never anything I was doing well. Yorkshire under-15s went years without defeat - about 130 matches I think - and we were a part of that. We would bat into a position from which we couldn't lose, then go all-out-attack to win. That is what we were taught, and it made us into better and harder cricketers. In my year, 1975, we won ten and drew five. We were in danger of defeat three times but batted our way out of trouble each time."

Uptight in character, tight in defence, even tighter in the bar - the Todmordians of both persuasions seem to agree with this assessment of the Tyke character. Club chairman Mark Clayton provides a fitting example during the game against Middleton: when a collection hat goes round for the Indian pro's half-century, he proudly shows me how to hide the amount of coinage being dropped in with the back of his hand. "That's the Yorkshire way." Not that the Yorkshire reputation for business acumen is entirely justified, he says, citing the time when a visit from the Lancashire League's greatest-ever batsman - Bacup's Everton Weekes, whose nine seasons along the A681 yielded all-time records for centuries (32) and batting average (91.60) - attracted a mammoth crowd to Centre Vale. "Apparently there was a queue of cars stretching 600 metres down the Burnley Road and past the town hall to get on the ground," says Clayton. "Unfortunately, though, a Todmorden bowler spoilt the party

by getting Weekes out cheaply, at which point Dennis Bloor, the club's then vice-chairman, dashed outside and said: 'Don't bother, you're wasting your time. Weekes is out.' And they all buggered off. Must have cost the club a fortune!"

Clayton agrees with his president that the once prevalent "anyone but them lot" sentiments are on the wane: "Except for when they play Yorkshire, I'm happy for Lancashire to win." The rivalry here carries a soft-edged and congenial air, precisely because "them lot" are always sat on the same bench or perhaps even sleep under the same roof: flesh-and-blood frenemies, rather than phantasmal There may well be a salutary general lesson here, one that seems especially relevant for our era of populism and polarisation: when the "other" is rarely encountered yet continually obsessed over, the "us-them" divide inevitably becomes harsh and paranoiac, but when everything is this proximal and jumbled up and familiar, the labels disappear and in the end you're faced with just another flesh-and-blood human. Everyone becomes "us".

Perhaps Tod's mixed-up identity, this neither-one-thing-nor-t'other, this "both and" rather than "either/or", is the root of its palpably welcoming atmosphere and all-round vibe of "each to her own". It's the sort of town that French deconstructionist Jacques Derrida would no doubt commend for "destabilising the binary couple Yorkshire/Lancashire".

•••

Shielded from the outside world by the forbidding gritstone-capped moors like

a father's broad shoulders protecting a toddler from the biting wind, it would be easy to imagine Todmorden to be a place of over-stewed flat-cap insularity, closed-minded and inward-looking, but nothing seems further from the truth. The town boasts a righteously rebellious past - it was a hub of clandestine Chartist meetings in the mid-19th century, the working classes gearing up to widen the voting franchise, and also witnessed riots against the Poor Laws and workhouses. And it has a thriving and progressive activist present, with local groups Incredible Edible and Pushing Up Daisies involved in sustainable food production and humane conversations around death and dying. It's chock-full of independent shops, too, and there's a fully functioning theatre, more than a little unusual for a town of 13,000 people. Installations around town proclaim, simply, "KINDNESS", one looming Hollywood-style on the hills below the disused Unitarian church. The initial impression that Todmorden is a small jewel in a magical stretch of trans-Pennine bohemia encompassing neighbouring Hebden Bridge - a place transformed by an influx of hippies in the 1970s - is confirmed when I hear that ex-Pulp frontman Jarvis Cocker is upstairs recovering in the first pub I'd dropped into for an informal identity vox-pop (and, it turns out, amazing Thai food). The Golden Lion's list of guest DJs is more what you'd expect in Ibiza or Berlin than a small Pennine market town.

Bedecked in St George's crosses for the football it may have been, but Todmorden's pavilion also hosts a monthly lesbian night (Hebden has the highest per-capita population of

lesbians in the UK). A female couple with dyed hair and colourful tattoos and scanty clothing do a lap of the ground hand in hand and no one bats an eyelid. These are not the only gays in the village, Myfanwy.

One wonders whether this worldly openness is a function of Todmorden's borderline existence, its refusal to slot into readymade identity categories. *This is Tod: a bit of this, a bit of that.* The Roses rivalry is here, but as amiable posturing, as pantomime. All the baggage handed down from history - the compulsory mutual enmity, the symbiotic loathing - is taken with a pinch of salt, and one suspects that if the two counties ever had to tie the knot, so to speak (say, for a North regional first-class team), 'appen they wouldn't be slow to trumpet their joint superiority over the rest of the country.

But all that aggro seems far from proceedings on a sun-kissed summer Sunday afternoon, gazing across a snooker-table outfield overlooked by moorlands rising up from the steep-sided valleys flanking the Burnley Road. Here the chatter floats past in a soft Lancastrian Yorkshire Todmordian burr; an affable cross-generational interaction, the oldsters keeping a genial eye on the young'uns and "all that modern rigmarole" - knowing a little bit more than they're letting on, or else being very good at hiding what they don't know lest the juniors take advantage - and the young'uns happy to pause for a natter, too, stopping a bit longer than Respectful Obligation dictates and into territory that might be called Genuine Bonhomie. Thus the social fabric is stitched together.

Near to the main gate, near to the end of the game, Todmorden's first female president Betty Whittaker is telling me about her seven-decade involvement with the club when a six is hooked over the hefty Yorkshire stone wall, the ball rebounding off a car and then just over her head and into my hands (it wasn't Viv Richards' fault). Soon Whittaker is being badgered by one of her brood of grandkids for pocket-money top-ups. Her husband Brian was a long-serving first-team player, starting out in the championship-winning team of 1957. Daughter Sarah works in the Red Brick on match days while son-in-law Stuart Priestley has the most first XI appearances for Tod

and is one of two men to make 10,000 career runs for them. All four of their kids have played for Tod's senior teams. Stuart is a big Lancashire fan and his daughter Evie plays for Lancashire Ladies and Burnley FC Women. Youngest son Noah plays for Yorkshire under-14s.

"We're mixed up. We don't know who we are", Betty Whittaker remarks while handing over a tenner to one of the grandkids, reminding him that it's not a gift but a loan and she wants it back. Judging by how unconvincing and resigned she sounds when saying it, my guess is she leans toward the red side of town.

• • •





EXTRACTS

Months afterwards, in the depth of winter, I was in Yorkshire at a dinner. Who should be sitting next to me but Emmott Robinson! (He ordered a cup of tea after the dinner, saying that he thought that coffee “were no good” for anybody after a meal.) I had forgotten the match at Old Trafford, and Waddington’s rashness. But the wound was still bleeding for Emmott. “Think of it,” he said. “Gettin’ stumped with t’match in that state.” He paused and then, looking at me terribly, he said, “I’d ‘a’ died first before they stumped me”. He meant it; Emmott meant everything he ever said about cricket, or did about cricket, in all his life. He once told me how Derbyshire were put out by Yorkshire at Chesterfield for 86. “But,” he added, “they should never ‘a’ got them. Townsend were missed before he scored. They should never ‘a’ got them.” He was referring to a match that had taken place six years ago. “Never mind, Emmott,” I said, in the hope of consoling him; “it all happened a long time back.” He smote the table with his fist. “It doesn’t matter, they should never ‘a’ got them!” He will die in that belief.

NEVILLE CARDUS

• • •

Back then it was called Whit Saturday. The idea that it could be re-named Spring Bank Holiday weekend would have been regarded as blasphemous in the England of 1955, but for a five-year-old boy already seduced by cricket the occasion was significant only because Whit Saturday was traditionally the first day of the Roses match and 28 May 1955 was to be the date of my very first visit to Old Trafford to watch a County Championship match. “Nothing like starting at the top,” said my Uncle Laurence as he picked me up from home in his new Daimler.

Uncle Laurence was a Socialist, a Marxist of the Groucho school of political philosophy. He hated with a passion (in no particular order) Capitalism, the Chief Rabbi, Association Football, the committee of the Lancashire County Cricket Club and the cricket correspondent of the Manchester Guardian.

COLIN SHINDLER

• • •

Faced with extinction, a rogue group of high-ranking Yorkshire people decided that they had to take matters into their own hands. They selected their most cunning, stealthy, imaginative and sophisticated operative – Tim Bresnan – and encouraged him to think of a plan of subtlety and fiendish subterfuge that might turn the tide and save Yorkshire from the GallagherBots. Bresnan chewed thoughtfully on a sausage bap, and declared himself capable.

Bresnan crossed the border, walked up to the nearest GallagherBot, and hit it repeatedly in the head with a leg of lamb until it started crying and agreed to defect to Yorkshire. Sticking the GallagherBot under one arm and the leg of lamb under the other, Bresnan marched back to Yorkshire. The GallagherBot was installed and put to work. Within hours, Yorkshire had an awesome nuclear deterrent of its own.

ALAN TYERS

• • •

In my first years at Lancashire we would always go to Scarborough for the festival. That was quite an outing for us. The spectators were quite friendly and for lots of older folk it was their holidays. I’ve got happy memories. We had a few nights out on the booze but I never played cricket on the beach – no thank you! I saved that for the West Indies! But the fish and chips were good.

CLIVE LLOYD

• • •

The mind’s picture is of an unimpressively slight and youthful figure approaching business with a casual air. There is no elaborate routine of muscle-flexing and to all appearances Statham is not unduly concerned with the details of field-setting. One feature alone of preparation is remarkable; Statham pulls off his sweater by stretching one hand over his shoulder to the small of the back indicating an uncommon suppleness of joints.

The run-up is smooth but not fearsome. The action is high with a marked cross-over of the feet before the delivery stride. The balance is delicate and when it is disturbed Statham sometimes stretches his length in an alarming fall. To most bowlers such accident would mean severe injury or, at best, an upset of rhythm and confidence. Statham has begun a Test match with a horrifying tumble, picked himself up and entered a long spell of swift and accurate bowling.

JIM KILBURN

• • •

January 1997, Calcutta. Steaming hot. Smog thick and low over the city. Rag-gatherers pick through ten-foot-high stacks of rubbish, teenage lads stripped to the waist dance under a gushing water pump and lather themselves with a stick of soap, kerosene stoves burn brightly as the roadside snack stalls prepare for the lunchtime rush. And here I am, coughing, dazed and lost in a warren of narrow streets as I search for my dingy lodging house. Suddenly an arm around my shoulders. "Colin, you look in need of a pint."

The shock of bumping into Brian Statham in a chaotic, filthy Calcutta ginnel makes me cough even harder. "Maybe a couple of pints," he adds with that wry, disarming smile which he offered many a bewildered batsman. "Come over to the Oberoi tonight. It's Happy Hour at six o'clock. We'll have a few."

COLIN EVANS

• • •

In March 2002, somewhere in South Africa, a dyed-in-the-wool Yorkshireman was silently committing an act of treason. He was a man of Scarborough, nearly 40, with a weathered face, a plain ginger-fringe haircut and slit eyes - you would put a pair of wellies on him even if you didn't know he was a farmer. For more than 15 years he had been the bulwark of Yorkshire cricket as a doughty left-handed opener, and for the last half dozen an inspirational captain. Less than six months earlier he had taken the catch at North Marine Road, his home ground, which sealed Yorkshire's first Championship title in 33 years, a memory he could bask in for the rest of his days on the farm after announcing his retirement from professional cricket: "I made the decision and that's it: finish," he told The Cricketer. "I won't play in league cricket, for the village, or ever put on whites again."

Yet here he was on a pre-season tour, his Yorkshire helmet resting on his lap, painting the White Rose emblem in red. The enemy had turned him: in 2002 David Byas would be playing for Lancashire County Cricket Club. For disbelieving Yorkies, the truth was hammered home by a picture of their former captain in an all-red tracksuit below the Old Trafford pavilion on the eve of the new season. Not since the Houses of York and Lancaster...

BENJ MOOREHEAD

• • •

Or was there nothing? Hang on, I'm in Yorkshire, or Lancashire, or both. I'm in Schrödinger's Cat-shire. I'm in a different ITV region and I'm looking at the wrong TV listing. I'm looking at Thames. Channelling my inner Princess Leia, I mutter out loud: "Help me Granada, or Yorkshire TV, whichever one of you will be here in the occupied territory of Barlick. You are my only hope." And lo, screaming forth from the TV listings page of a copy of The Times bought in a shop in Knaresborough is the word "cricket". Cricket? How is that even possible? Cricket on ITV? I must be dreaming. I rub my eyes, I slap myself vigorously around the cheeks. I check again. Cricket: The Roses Match.

Let freedom ring. Let beacons be lit from Blackpool in the West to Whitby in the East. The saviour is born, or at least is on from 11 to 12, with a preposterous break for The Cedar Tree (an 119-episode soap opera about an aristocratic family on the eve of the Second World War), followed by the News at One. Thereafter it would take a further break for Crown Court at 1.30 and share coverage with racing from Sandown until 4.20. Still, a part-time Messiah is better than none at all.

DANIEL NORCROSS

• • •

My life outside of sport was pretty shit. School was horrific. I've got a very loving family but they didn't know how to show affection. My brothers and sisters were like my other parents. My mum's a devout Christian and she was quite strict. My dad worked a lot - he was a miner for 25 years, down the pits, six kids and a stay-at-home mum - so he was never there. And a huge part of growing up is school, and school was terrible. I'd be bullied, more mentally than physically.

It was tearing me down. I kept asking myself: "What do I do? Where do I fit in?" Well, the answer was Shaw Lane, the beautiful home of Barnsley CC. That was where I grew up, all week, every week. It became my place. I felt like I belonged.

KATHERINE BRUNT

• • •

I still think back with a lump in my throat to 1972 and a visit to the Scarborough Cricket Festival. Yorkshire were playing Lancashire in the final of the Fenner Trophy (don't knock it, a trophy's a trophy) and captain Jack Bond came in to bat in his last innings in the Broadacres. A packed North Marine Road rose as one as he left the shadow of the pavilion and the applause lasted until he reached the crease. Now that's respect - and it isn't earned cheaply and it isn't earned overnight.

Home-grown players in the men's and women's teams seem to go out of their way to educate their "imported" teammates about the importance of winning Roses battles at all costs, though they succeed more with some than others.

DAVID WARNER

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"It's a bit different for me, because my dad still says he's a Lancastrian," Livingstone adds. "Barrow was part of Lancashire when he was growing up. So there was never any doubt for me. I've supported Lancashire since I was a kid. I played club cricket for Barrow, who play in the Northern League with a lot of Lancashire clubs. And I'll still get messages from Barrow people who are coming down to watch us play T20 games.

"Then as soon as you sign for Lancashire, you find out straight away what the Roses game is all about. Dane Vilas was talking about this before we played Yorkshire in the [T20] Blast earlier this year - and he's from South Africa. It's not just the local Lancashire lads who take it very seriously, but the whole club. And obviously it helps when you're playing in front of a full house making a lot of noise, as we've been lucky enough to do for the last couple of years."

ANDY WILSON

• • •

One half of the ground is full of people chanting "Yorkshire! Yorkshire! Yorkshire!", the word divided into two syllables that pound like drums rallying an army to war. The other half is full of people chanting "Lancasheer Tra La La! Lancasheer Tra La La!" in a lyrical way as though they're purveying black puddings on Bury Market. The two sounds mix and blend to produce what, to my ears, is a beautiful piece of improvised choral music, like Thomas Tallis on Pro Plus. But to the aliens, like my dad said about Captain Beefheart, it's just a row.

What the aliens are encountering is what linguists call an "isogloss", where language changes in a small geographical space. Because let's face it (and as a proud Yorkshireman I don't admit this very readily), Lancashire and Yorkshire are very close, like fish and chips in the same page of the newspaper, like Morecambe and Wise in the same double bed. The two counties bump into each other in places like Todmorden and they also bump into each other in the shape of our mouths and the way we form our words.

IAN MCMILLAN

• • •

On the other side - Yorkshire - you had Fred Trueman.

Fred would come into our changing-room. Those stories are true. He would come in with his pipe. He'd point at us with it: "Are you playing...? Are you playing...? Are you playing...? Well that's three for me."

He came to me and he said: "And who's this then?"

"This is David Lloyd, Fred."

"Oh. Can you hook, lad?"

And I'm shitting myself. I'm going: "Er... Er..."

Fred said: "Well you'll get plenty of practice today..."

He was outrageous. I got a pair in me first Roses match. I'd also got a pair in me first county game, against Middlesex. In fact, I got umpteen pairs. I got a pair in a Test trial. I got run out in one of them... anyhow, as a player I was petrified of Fred all the way through, because he was bloody good. He was sharp, and so was Brian Statham. These blokes were naturally fit. No fetching and carrying. You'd have to walk places, or get the bus. My job in the winter was loading beer wagons and then changing industrial tyres. You were bloody fit.

DAVID LLOYD

• • •

At 11am on 2 August 1947 Yorkshire's opening batsmen walked out from the Bramall Lane pavilion to face Lancashire. The better known of the pair was Len Hutton, the other was a former captain of Eton and an Oxford blue who would play 35 times for Yorkshire and captain them to a thumping innings victory over Hampshire in 1950. Talented and blue-blooded, he was talked of as a possible successor to skipper Norman Yardley. Instead he'd emigrate to Australia, become a sheep farmer, learn to fly, launch a classical music radio station and, as a member of the New South Wales legislature, campaign for the legalisation of cannabis. From our point of view though, it's inarguable that the most remarkable thing about this doughty Yorkshire cricketer is the place of his birth – the French Riviera.

HARRY PEARSON

• • •

Has any domestic cricket fixture in the world attracted quite so much hokum as the Roses match? The enmity must always be bitter, the rivalry intense, the antipathy mutual. Collect your cliché with your scorecard, don't forget to spout the whiskery guff about the game being no other bugger's business and do feel free to add a "thee" or "tha", according to your vintage. But remember to toast Sir Walter Scott, who first called England's 15th-century civil conflicts "the Wars of the Roses".

That said, many of the 20,000 or so spectators attending T20 games between the counties have little interest in the origin of the bilious abuse they hurl at their opponents' supporters. They swallow the marketing along with the lager and watch the floodlit sixes arch into the crowd. Pleasingly, though, this sort of thing has attracted the attention of the satirists. One splendid T-shirt pictures a father holding his young son in his arms. They are both looking towards a black-shadowed land in the distance. "Dad, what's that dark place over there?" asks the lad. "That's Yorkshire, son," comes the answer. "You must never go there."

PAUL EDWARDS

• • •

My third recollection still gives me nightmares. This was another August Bank Holiday fixture, but at Bramall Lane, Sheffield, in 1969. In a low-scoring match we required 65 to win from the last 19 overs of the match and arrived at the penultimate over needing one to win with seven wickets in hand. We failed, losing three wickets without adding to the score. Against a field set to prevent the single, Doug Padgett played out a maiden over from Peter Lever. Barrie Leadbeater was unable to score from the first two balls of the next over and was given out lbw to the third after we thought we had won with four leg byes. Don Wilson, sent in to have a slog, failed to make contact with the fourth ball and was stumped from the next, leaving yours truly to make the winning hit from the last ball after the previous 11 balls had yielded nought.

The last ball was a bouncer and I top-edged a pull which was caught at square leg. So ended a performance of incredible ineptitude, to the utter dismay of everyone on the ground except the Lancashire players, who couldn't believe their luck.

I still wake frequently in the middle of the night needing one to win off the last ball.

RICHARD HUTTON

• • •

Middlesex and Surrey? Not even close. Lancashire and Yorkshire, the two old foes, have a rivalry beyond compare in county cricket. And four recent battles, in 2011 and 2014, will live long in the memory for more than just scintillating cricket. Liverpool, Old Trafford and Headingley were like school playgrounds, with squabbles kicking off in all corners.

In Barnoldswick, they remember 2011 and forget about 2014. In Bingley, they remember 2014 and forget about 2011. In both cases, one Rose won the Championship title and the other was relegated.

GRAHAM HARDCASTLE

• • •

I'm a Yorkshireman: hopefully not a professional one, although the danger lurks in every conversation. Straight talking is prized in these parts like no other quality and for many good reasons. But straight talking at its most ill-judged can be destructive, boorish, and achieve precisely the opposite effect to the one intended.

So when I start by emphasising (with arms tightly folded) that there was a time when Roses matches were essentially fraudulent – arguably the worst county cricket in the country – it will probably cause such offence that readers will turn elsewhere in these pages in search of a more joyful extolling of the world's most famous club cricket contest.

DAVID HOPPS

• • •

Growing up in Yorkshire in the 1970s and '80s was a unique cricketing experience for a migrant. You played in your own leagues, and if your Asian team did play any competitions in an "official" league you'd play against white players. You wouldn't think about playing for a non-Asian team, and the other teams wouldn't try to recruit you however good you were. You were probably too poor to be sent to a private school, and only if you were lucky, as I was, did your state school offer cricket. You were cricketers of the shadows. As years went by these fences were slowly dismantled but the status quo of racial division was tacitly accepted for too long.

KAMRAN ABBASI

• • •

The attendance at Old Trafford for the match was 22,515 – a record for a T20 outside of London, other than Finals Day. Lancashire v Yorkshire still gets 'em in – at least in this form of cricket.

The shortest format and social media are both comfortable homes for a rivalry that is more sibling than sneering. Yes, it can get a little hot-headed, but if you were to express enmity on a scale from pantomime to pugilism, Lancashire v Yorkshire is way over on the Widow Twankey end of that spectrum.

It is the kind of rivalry that this sport does so much better than others. The cricket is hard, the abuse is good-natured and the two teams might have a drink together afterwards. It is, above all else, fun; tribalism without the vitriol.

Livingstone told Lancashire Cricket TV he enjoyed the unique feel of a Roses match. "It's quite a good laugh to wind them up – and the Yorkies are quite easy to wind up, aren't they."

ALEX BOWDEN

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