# Profile of Ian Spencer

By Jon O'Shea

Late one Friday evening in summer 1972, Ian Spencer answered a knock at the front door of his home in Northowram village. On the front step stood one Harry Andrew – the man who had skilfully captained Northowram Hedge Top CC to Halifax League Division Two glory ten years previously. Harry was looking for some fresh blood to fill in for a raft of absentees before an important match the next day. When Ian made his debut in that game, little did he know his involvement with the club would span nearly 30 years in all.

Ian's cricketing career had begun in the early 1960s, while playing for his works side, Pratt's of Calderdale. However, his time with Hedge Top was his most productive – spending a total of seven years (in two separate spells) as a wicketkeeping skipper of the second XI, and 14 as the club's league representative. This was a time, he remembers, when industry in Halifax would habitually shut down for a whole fortnight in July in order to accommodate the summer holidays of the workforce, and cricket would take a mid-season break – a tradition that Ian feels helped local clubs to thrive, as the same eleven could be kept maintained for the entire season without disruption. He acknowledges, though, that a very different culture permeates local club cricket at present.

His personal commitment to the game and the club could certainly not be doubted by anyone told the tale of his hasty exit from a family break in Wales. In a desperate effort to help the team out of a player shortage crisis, Ian and his wife spent the vast majority of a wet Saturday morning working their way through the rain and the traffic to get home in time for the afternoon game at Triangle. Inevitably, by the time they reached the Grassy Bottom ground the game had already been rained off!

Ian's most treasured memory, though, is of the time he spent as one of three concurrent father-son partnerships at the club along with son Graham (the Oldman and Barber families were similarly represented). He also believes that on more than one occasion during that era, a remarkable four such duos played in the same Hedge Top side – a true sign of the club's family spirit. In particular, Ian proudly recalls a stand in excess of 80 runs shared with Graham – himself a talented batsman, who later followed in his dad's footsteps by donning the gloves for Hedge Top – for the second XI in a Crossley Shield tie against Mytholmroyd.

In a Sunday game at Blackley during the early 1990s, Ian, then in his late forties, had his finest hour with the bat. With Northowram struggling direly at 35 for 5, Ian was joined in the middle by stylish left-handed batsman Bruce Deadman. The two then proceeded to put on a phenomenal 202 runs for the sixth wicket, with Bruce being the senior partner and Ian cannily keeping the scoreboard ticking along with a series of well-taken ones and twos.

Due to the nature of the game – essentially a friendly – Bruce at this point sportingly decided to give up his wicket in order to allow a promising youngster to come in and gain invaluable experience. With the innings coming to a close, Ian decided he would follow Bruce's lead and allow another young prospect down the order to have a quick knock by running himself out. Unfortunately, one of the Blackley fieldsmen hadn't quite read that script; instead improbably hurling the ball directly at Ian's partner's stumps, breaking them with the youngster just short of his crease. The young lad's watching parents were understandably upset that their boy had been effectively run out by his own team-mate on his senior debut, and made sure that a mortified Ian knew all about it on his departure from the field!

Once his playing days were over, Ian took up the role of club chairman – and at a crucial time in the club's development. During his spell at the helm, he oversaw the extensive redevelopment of the Hedge Top Lane pavilion and was a vital cog in the various fundraising activities that financed the expansion. When, after five years in the position, Ian decided to step aside for a younger man he found no-one forthcoming. Instead, Bruce Deadman, the man with whom he had shared that memorable double-ton stand at Blackley, was his eventual successor – despite being six years Ian's senior.

It remains a concern to Ian that the next generation of Northowram Hedge Top players appear reluctant to take on the time-consuming senior positions at the club due to the time-consuming strains of modern life. However, with a new chairman in club veteran Andy Gardner taking up the reins from this summer, and Ian's daughter Rachel and son-in-law Steffan remaining intimately linked with Hedge Top, he feels that the foundations for future success are now being laid at the club he has served for some three decades.