

John Crowther

'He could aptly be called "Gentleman John" – his selfless approach to the game, his keenness, his immaculate attire, his true sportsmanship, his courtesy, have made him an example that I suggest all young cricketers should try to emulate ...He was known all over the league, not only for the feats he performed, both with bat and ball, but for the sportsmanlike way he always played the game.'

So wrote Lancashire League secretary Jack Isherwood in his annual report following John Crowther's retirement in 1959.

John was an exceptional club cricketer who could, had he wished, have played county cricket. A stylish opening batsman with a fine technique, a leg spin and googly bowler and a very good close to the wicket fieldsman he would have been outstanding in any generation.

Playing briefly as a junior at Walsden Cricket Club, he made his Todmorden debut in 1931. Within five years he was playing as a club professional for Darwen and then Whitehaven before returning to Todmorden as a key player in the 1938 double winning team. His finest hour came in the 1938 championship play-off against Haslingden at Turf Moor. He dominated the match with 144 runs and 5 wickets, as Todmorden won by an innings and 71 runs.

After the war John returned to the Bradford League, where his record for Bingley compares favourably with England batsmen such as Len Hutton and Eddie Paynter. John was second in the Bradford League batting averages in 1946 and top, one place ahead of Paynter with an average of 53 in 1947.

There was further evidence of John's ability to compete with the best at Nelson in 1952 when he hit a half century against an attack spearheaded by Australia's greatest fast bowler of the 1950s, Ray Lindwall. John later recalled the over which Lindwall bowled to him on 49 not out as the best he ever faced.

John Crowther and Harold Dawson, the only cricketers to score 10000 runs for Todmorden, were the backbone of the team in the club's two most successful periods, the 1930s and the 1950s. John won Worsley Cup winners medals in 1935, 1938 and 1954 and championship medals in 1933, 1938, 1954 and 1957. He was still an accomplished league cricketer in his final season, 1959, contributing a remarkable 597 runs, 24 wickets and 19 catches at the age of 49.

In total for Todmorden John hit 10028 runs, took 386 wickets and held 195 catches, but figures tell only part of the story of a cricketer whose popularity reflected not just his ability, but respect for a quiet gentleman who always played the game in the best spirit.

John maintained close links with the game after his retirement, as groundsman at Lowerhouse and then Rawtenstall. Sadly, John died relatively young in 1971, aged 61.