

MEMORIES OF LASCELLES HALL 1946-1949

By Tony Hutton



I lived in Lascelles Hall village for three years from the autumn of 1946 to autumn 1949. At the age of nine it was a considerable upheaval for someone who had been born in Leeds and lived there throughout the Second World War.

During the war my father was away from home for most of the time in France, North Africa and Italy and I spent much of the time with my grandparents as my mother was in full time employment. However within a year of the end of the war, my father, who was a local government employee, got promotion to a job in Huddersfield and off we went.

My father bought a newly built red brick semi-detached house on Lascelles Hall Road, facing the bottom of Highfield Lane and alongside the public footpath which went almost vertically downhill to Waterloo. There were amazing views from my bedroom window over the town of Huddersfield, to Castle Hill and the Pennine moors beyond.

We were actually next door to the old 'Shirt Neck Club', the scene of a violent murder mentioned elsewhere in the history of the village on this website. However I was unaware of that at the time. While we were there the club was converted into a stone built bungalow and at the auction of the club contents we bought some very old chairs.

I went to school at Lepton Junior School which was almost in Fenay Bridge, next door to the brickworks, which was then serviced by the Kirkburton railway branch line, with a siding across the road into the brickworks, which we crossed on the way to school. With my new found school friends from the village I soon became a regular spectator at the Lascelles Hall cricket ground at the top of the hill.

For three seasons I must have seen nearly all the games played there, although it was many years later that I actually believed the tales told by my friends that the great Len Hutton had played there in the summer of 1946 and

was out for 97. What I did soon learn was the amazing early years of the club and the fact that it had produced some of the greatest cricketers in Yorkshire history.

I spent much of the summer holidays playing on the outfield with a bat and tennis ball with my friends or my cousin who would come to stay during the holidays. I did in fact play my very first organized game of cricket on the ground. Our school team (under 11s) played another local school on the very far edge of the square.

I think the headmaster had arranged the game with a member of the committee who had failed to notify the groundsman. A considerable altercation took place, with 22 young boys on tenterhooks as to whether they could play. However all was resolved amicably in the end. As the keenest cricketer at the school I was made captain and remember keeping wicket in a large polo necked white sweater.

In 1947 it is reported that Rochdale from the Central Lancashire League played an early season friendly match at Lascelles Hall. According to the Cricketer Magazine, the famous Australian professional for Rochdale, Cec Pepper, scored 167 in one and a half hours, including no less than 17 sixes. I wish I could remember being there but unfortunately I can't.

The players I remember most from that period were Harry Webster, who I think was the village plumber, Frank Whittle, the wicketkeeper and most of all the professional who arrived in 1948, John Whitehead who was reputed to be the fastest bowler in England.

Whitehead arrived in mid-season when the original professional, Entwistle, was injured. This created a furore in the Huddersfield League, although Whitehead had been allocated to Lascelles Hall by the Yorkshire county club. He immediately took wickets galore and bowled the Hall to the Sykes cup final.

I remember going on the bus to the semi final. I always thought it was played at Thongsbridge, but subsequent reports state that it was Holmfirth. However what is not in doubt was that Whitehead bowled out Hall Bower for just 50 taking 9-15 on debut. This caused uproar among the other clubs of the Huddersfield League and protests were made about employing such a star player half way through a season. However the dispute was finally settled in the Hall's favour some two weeks later. While all this was going on Whitehead took 5-17 the following Saturday to dismiss Slaithwaite for 95. The Hall winning by 9 wickets.

They went on to play Meltham in what turned out to be a three day final at Fartown over the August Bank Holiday weekend. The game started on Saturday in front of a crowd of 6,000 people. Meltham made 153-3 when their innings was suspended and Hall made 120-3 in reply when bad light stopped play, Whitehead having made 48 with the bat.

The game resumed on Bank Holiday Monday, when unfortunately for the Hall, Whitehead was required to play for Yorkshire Colts and was unavailable. Without him Meltham were able to pile up a huge score of 330 all out and the Hall were 186-7 at the close of play. Only a few overs were required on the Tuesday as the Hall were all out for 199 and Meltham won the Sykes Cup by 131 runs.

The following week Whitehead took a hat-trick in a victory over Almondbury, but then they lost again to Huddersfield, mainly due to former Yorkshire player Horace Fisher, the archetypal league professional. He took 8-43 and then scored 61 not out.

Whitehead played again throughout the 1949 season, when available, as he also played a few games for the Yorkshire 1st XI taking 14 wickets. His most notable performance coming against Derbyshire at Park Avenue when he dismissed four of the first five batsman on the opening day. He reduced Derbyshire to 14-4 and then 41-5, Yorkshire going on to win the match comfortably. Unfortunately for Whitehead his appearance coincided with that of a certain F.S. Trueman, which was probably why he eventually left Yorkshire and played for Worcestershire.

At the end of April he helped the Hall gain revenge for that Sykes Cup Final defeat by taking 7-38 to dismiss Meltham for only 72. The following week a certain S. Barlow, who I cannot say I remember at all, scored a century in only an hour against Marsden. On the same day a young 13 year old called Ken Taylor, later to play for Yorkshire and England, took 8-37 for Primrose Hill.

My other abiding memory of Whitehead is his long run. He went back almost to the boundary edge where we sat at the Gawthorpe end of the ground. It is hard to say, so many years on, how fast he really was in today's terms, but there is no doubt that for these few seasons he really terrified most of the opposition's batsmen.

Sadly in the autumn of 1949 my dad got another promotion at work and we were off again, this time to Birmingham, which was a real culture shock. Although I watched both Warwickshire and Worcestershire for a time and played a lot of club cricket in the Midlands, I was always staunchly Yorkshire in cricketing matters. It took me 20 years to get back to Yorkshire and I eventually returned to see cricket at Lascelles Hall when Yorkshire played there in benefit games in the 1970s.

However there was then another long gap before my next visit in the summer of 2008 when Huddersfield New College played the M.C.C. It was an excellent day in every way, with a lot of cricketing friends in attendance. During the lunch interval I explored my old haunts around the village which has changed of course considerably over the years. The area around the ground however has hardly changed at all.

The ground itself has an improved pavilion, with lots of interesting memorabilia, and a new scoreboard and groundsman's equipment store. The

wall along the pavilion side of the ground used to be much higher and all the old men sat on benches underneath the wall to avoid the prevailing winds.

The view across the ground to Kirkheaton remains and you can still see the ground on which Hirst and Rhodes learned to play. Lascelles Hall also produced so many great players. It will remain forever in my memories as the very cradle of Yorkshire cricket.