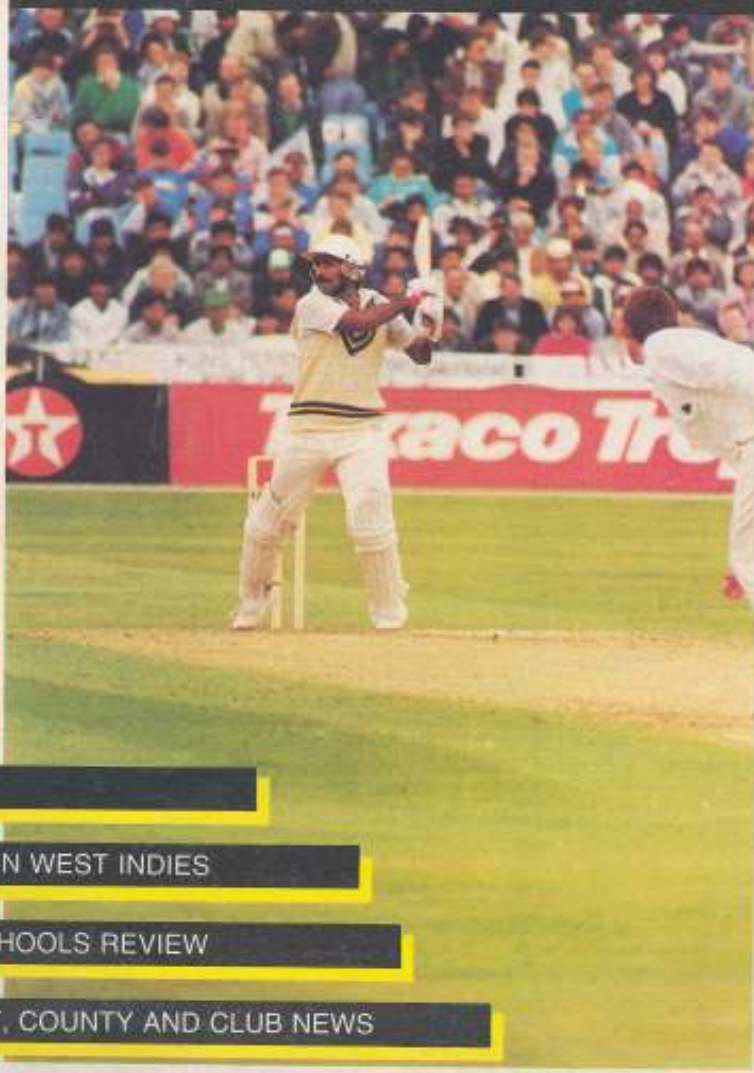


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CRICKET WORLD

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PUBLIC SCHOOLS REVIEW

PLUS TEST, COUNTY AND CLUB NEWS

THE HISTORY OF BRADFORD CRICKET LEAGUE CLUBS

No. 24 SPEN VICTORIA C.C.

August Bank Holiday Monday 1914 was the date of the first ever Century opening stand between Percy Holmes and Herbert Sutcliffe. It was achieved for Spen Victoria in a Yorkshire Council game at Spen Lane against Keighley. Spen Victoria had dismissed Keighley for 105. Holmes (58*) and Sutcliffe (46*) then knocked off the runs without being parted. They had 69 such partnerships for Yorkshire, and of course hold that 1st wicket partnership record of 555 at Leyton against Essex in 1932. It was however, with Spen Victoria that it happened first, though it was a further 17 years before Spen Victoria made their Bradford League debut.

A fine start was made too in that 1931 season with only two defeats in 20 League games. Among their players was a stylish 19-year-old batsman of tremendous promise, averaging 33.50 and taking stylish 50s, home and away against Gt. Horton. His name was Fred Prentice and although Fred never actually reached the heights of a Holmes or Sutcliffe, he was good enough to play 241 First-Class matches for Leicestershire. He scored 54* against Baildon Green when Spen had their first Cup-Tie win in the 1st round of the 1932 competition. Prentice was not the only player with the club at the time destined for higher things. Arthur Cecil Rhodes, who topped both Spens batting and bowling in 1931 played for Yorkshire (1932-34) and took 107 First-Class wickets with his fast-medium pace.

After their fine start the club slumped to 17th in 1932 though W. Halstead had the honour of notching their first century in the League with 112* v. East Bierley.

Year three however, was an entirely different matter, as Spen with just one defeat qualified for a Championship play-off. Unfortunately, they failed by just 16 runs to Bradford, and a reaction must have set in for in 1934-35 positions of only 10th and 12th were a great disappointment.

The club had never been past the 2nd round of the Cup, when, in 1936 they not only did so for the first time, but they went on to win the trophy. A. Waterhouse helped beat Brighouse with 97, and another good batting performance

came from H. Mortimer whose 76* v. Windhill took Spen to their first Semi-Final. In that Semi-Final they were indebted to Arnold Robertshaw, who made a valuable 56* helping provide a total which proved sufficient after Wintersgill bowled himself to a standstill and took eight wickets. Robertshaw's daughter, Pauline, now living in that famous cricket town of Pudsey, told me recently that she was always dragged from an early age to watch Dad playing for Spen. Eventually she enjoyed it, and met many famous players, and became one of a dying breed, an autograph hunter.

Batting first in the Final against Lightcliffe, Spen suspended their innings at 152-6 as rules allowed in those days. It was quite enough, for Wintersgill got to work again, took 5-40 and Spen won their first trophy by 32 runs.

Two satisfactory seasons followed (3rd and 6th) before in 1939 the club were back in the Final. This time their opponents were Ecdeshill and although a total of 197 looked promising Ecdeshill lost only one wicket in making Spen Victoria beaten finalists.

One of Spen's bowlers in that Final was Enoch St. Hill, a 35-year-old West Indian fast bowler. Enoch had four seasons with Spen, his 43 League wickets in 1938 being increased to 59 wickets (at 10.73) one year later, which included 9-50 against Pudsey.

Coope 149*, a club record

When the 1940 season started Fred Prentice was available from time to time, and he scored 85 v. Great Horton and 54 v. Baildon which, by a strange coincidence, was the same two opponents against whom he had made 50s some years previously. Miles Coope had joined and later that decade he too was to follow Prentice and Rhodes into County cricket. Another new valuable signing was Johnnie Lawrence a wily gooply and leg-break bowler, who made his First-Class debut at 32 (in 1946) and played 281 matches for Somerset. Hopes were high but 1940 (7th) and 1941 (3rd) were rather disappointing in view of the team 'on paper'. Coope had scored 149* to record the club's highest individual total, but

team performances were poor, and got worse, for in 1942 despite Wilf Barber's arrival, Spen were relegated.

Without fear of contradiction I can state that 1943 and 1944 were the finest seasons the club has had. Largely responsible were three wise men. Arthur Booth, loved League Cricket, a useful batsman, his left-arm slows were his greatest contribution to his side. Booth played County cricket with Yorkshire, making his debut in 1945, FOURTEEN YEARS AFTER HIS COUNTY TRIAL. Then there was George Pope, brother of Alf, he was a fast-medium bowler who had already been on a tour of India, and he was to play Test cricket in 1947. The third member was Arnold Hamer, a soccer player who played for York City, a Yorkshire lad who had two games for his native county, before moving to Derbyshire where he performed with distinction. These three made Spen a feared side, and in 1943 the club were Division Two champions. Just one defeat in 18 matches, thirteen of which were won. Booth became the first player to perform a hat-trick for the club in the Bradford League, this he did against Pudsey. Hamer's highest contribution was 106* against Lightcliffe, while Pope among many performances of match-winning class had 8-11 against Farsley and 7-17 v. East Bierley. At the season's end Booth (76 wickets at 6.76) and Pope (71 wickets at 7.40) were top two in the League averages.

So, it was up to Division One for 1944, where many Test and County players awaited their arrival. Results in Division One went little differently from Division Two. Spen lost just three games and were champions again. Pope had 67 wickets at 11.22 and Booth 61 wickets at 12.95, not as startling as the previous season, but this was after all the strongest cricket League in the World. Hamer topped 600 League runs at over 40, and this formidable side, fulfilling all expectations was expected to do well in the Cup. Easy wins over Bowling Old Lane, and Bingley, and a bye helped Spen reach the Semi-Final where waiting for them were Pudsey St. Lawrence. Now earlier in the season Pudsey thrashed Spen and Pudsey's No. 1 son, Len Hutton,

