

A STUDENT IN HIS SEVENTIES

By Brian Senior

It all started two years ago when, with cricketing colleagues and Society members, Tony Hutton and Mick Bourne, I followed all the events set up by Peter Davies of Huddersfield University who, with a grant of £43,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund, had formed the Cricket Heritage project that covered the history of local cricket in the Calderdale and Kirklees areas. During this time the three of us visited many clubs and pubs, and occasionally a library, to view exhibitions of cricketing memorabilia and club histories. The most impressive display was that put on at the Tolson Museum in Huddersfield – a must for any lover of the game. It is quite amazing what has been dug up by clubs from their archives and by local people who have taken an interest in the project. (I believe that the exhibition, with more items added, has moved on to Dewsbury.) Another major event in March 2005 was a full-day cricket conference at the University. This was so good that a second was held this year with people coming from several counties, and another is planned for 2007.

And so, signing on for the marvellous 11-week “Bat and Ball” course in the History of Cricket (principally in Kirklees and Calderdale) at the university in January of this year was a natural progression. But first I had to sign on as a bona fide student – at my age!

In addition to the three of us from Leeds (although Mick went off to Australia after the first few weeks), there were 15 other “students” mostly locals, who turned up regularly for the three-hour sessions. Peter Davies and Rob Light (a student of Sports History at de Montfort University and a regular player for Pateley Bridge CC) guided us through the fascinating changes in the game and its development at the recreational level over the past 200 years. Much of the material was linked in with local history and people in the Yorkshire area. Lectures were backed up with a vast amount of handouts and literature, and a large manual of the complete course, which I am willing to show anybody who is interested. For those with an Internet facility who would like a taste of what we covered, a mountain of material is to be found on the project website – www.cricketheritage.org.uk.

Occasionally we had a bit of homework to do and there were classroom activities like role-play, but nothing too stressful. Most of our contributions amounted to verbal comments and reminiscences with, of course, a touch of humour. I have to admit that occasionally I showed my age: whenever a well known local player of the fifties or sixties was mentioned, I chipped in by saying I had seen him play! My main contribution was a ten-minute presentation on cricket in the Second World War for which I had to do quite a bit of research in local libraries. The book on the History of the Bradford League was very useful. That league was one of the very few that played on throughout the war years and, in doing so, attracted many top players. I also had the good fortune to be able to relate the memories of one of our Society colleagues, Reg Parker, who played cricket as a junior in the wartime.

Not all the course was classroom based. One evening session started at the Tolson Museum with the task of scrutinising and evaluating many of the exhibits – trophies, old photographs,

ancient cricket equipment, broadsheets, team sheets and even song sheets about the game and its local heroes. The last five weeks of the course incorporated visits to clubs – Hanging Heaton, Todmorden, Golcar, Thurstonland and Illingworth – where, in addition to a few more lectures, we enjoyed some very fine hospitality.

Another event, linked in with the course, was a “Field Day” when, one cold Saturday morning in March, we trekked to some former grounds around Huddersfield and, in particular, Fartown. I was pleasantly surprised by the condition of the former county ground which the Council has renovated. It seems that minor games are still played there on an all-weather surface. Most importantly the Memorial to Hirst, Rhodes and Haigh is in very good order. We also visited Bradley Mills, sadly defunct, with only football played now, and, behind the Galpharm Stadium, the old Dalton ground where Edgerton now play in the Huddersfield Central League. Finally, having dropped in at Kirkheaton and viewed the pictures and prints of Rhodes and Hirst in the pavilion, we came to Lascelles Hall where the committee men awaited us with interesting tales from the past.

Fortunately, there were no exams at the end of the eleven weeks, but amazingly, my attendance counted 20 points towards a degree. With another 250 points or so I can have letters behind my name! But that would mean another article – “A Student in his Nineties”. Instead, I am going on to “post-graduate studies” by visiting more of the Cricket Heritage exhibitions and presentations and I shall take my student union card with me as proof of my achievements so far.



“Bat & Ball” Students at Illingworth Cricket Club