

The September 2007 edition of *Yorkshire Life* magazine includes a special feature on the recent Cricket Heritage Project publication, *Off The Beaten Track* by Tony Hutton, Mick Bourne and Brian Senior



Arthington cricket ground near Pool in Wharfedale

Cricketing quest

Last year three retired chums from Leeds set out to fill their days watching cricket, wherever they could find it. Now the diary of their adventures is regarded as invaluable social history.

John Woodcock reports



Authors Tony Hutton, Mick Bourne and Brian Senior

IN their way Tony, Mick and Brian share the single-mindedness of a Geoffrey Boycott and Fred Trueman.

The trio's quest to spend their retirement watching cricket in the obscurest places has become an obsession as powerful as that which drives others to accumulate runs, capture wickets, and bemoan a slackening of the game's standards.

They have rivals out there who also travel miles and cross countless boundaries to catch a few overs involving unheralded teams at remote venues - fanatics like Jim and Len whose car boot contains a library of maps, cricket handbooks, fixtures and a tea-maker for when they're denied hospitality in the pavilion.

But in the urge to witness a cover drive, googly, or lbw, anytime, anywhere, few can compete with Mick Bourne, Brian Senior, and Tony Hutton. Hutton may have been destined for the task given that he was born in Headingley, the home of Yorkshire county cricket, and shares a surname with one of its legends.

Dr Peter Davies, of the history department at Huddersfield University, felt their adventures represented much more than the indulging of a passion, and has backed his hunch by publishing the diary they kept during their travels last year.

The account of three intrepid enthusiasts journeying through an extended cricket season describes the



Photograph: Rex Features

eccentricities and rich geography of the game, but is also a social commentary on the wider state of play in contemporary Britain.

It has been an invaluable contribution to Davies's own research. He met Tony, Mick, and Brian when they enrolled on an evening course linked to the university's Cricket Heritage Project, which has translated into an exhibition on the historical and continuing impact of 100 cricket clubs on their communities in Kirklees and Calderdale.

It is touring pubs, libraries, community halls, garden centres, police stations and post offices, and tells how, beyond its sporting element, recreational cricket, almost uniquely, brings different cultures together.

The Three Musketeers, as Davies has dubbed the diary's co-authors, confirm this time and again. On the border between Leeds and Bradford they discovered a club which relies mainly on Asian players, particularly of Pakistani origin, but where two other key figures are the widow of the club's former president, and her daughter.

The mother told her visitors that she had no interest in the actual game but as the tea-lady she felt she was making a worthwhile contribution, while her daughter had become the club's secretary and scorer.

The diary is strewn with such insights and quirky cameos gleaned as the threesome from Leeds sought out from Nidderdale to the Vale of York, the Wolds to the Bolton League, Herefordshire and County Durham, cricket matches in villages, council-run parks, on school pitches and, occasionally, at county grounds.

Tony for one wants nothing to do with games involving England. He'd rather be the lone spectator at a Second XI fixture in inner-city Bradford, or on some bleak moor, or in the shadow of Drax power station, than watch a Lord's Test surrounded by 'lager louts and Hooray Henrys'.

Last year Brian saw cricket of some kind on 88 consecutive days, involving 213 visits to grounds of various status. It helps to explain how they gathered such memorable material.

At an Under-11s game at Alwoodley play was stopped by a colony of ants which attacked a batsman; at Methley one of the number slots on the scoreboard is left open for the benefit of nesting swallows; the home of the Whitehall club, of the Dales Council Cricket League, includes ancient trees which were laid out to represent the deployment of the regiments of both sides at the Battle of Waterloo.

They glory in the quality of cricket club teas; recall the performance of Baildon Methodists, a sublime evening game at Blubberhouses, and a contest on playing fields between Superior Dewsbury and Kashmir in the Sharjah League.



Ampleforth College cricket ground

Towards the end of the official season, on a Sunday of 'black clouds and howling gales' they still found three games in the remoter reaches of the Huddersfield Central League. It illustrates their philosophy.

They write: 'Despite the weather we had a memorable day with far more cricket than we thought possible when we set off. This was truly an off-the-beaten-track sort of day and summed up our commitment to finding the most out-of-the-way grounds and the sense of achievement we feel when we find them.'

In Yorkshire, particularly, a love of cricket has many such rewards. For one thing, the game doesn't stop for Christmas. Brian was the trio's representative at the annual charity match between North Leeds CC and the Northern Cricket Society, which, whatever the weather, has played a game every Boxing Day since 1949.

And was that it until the following spring? Could bats be oiled and put away with the stumps, pads, and pitch roller? Not everywhere.

On a Sunday last January Tony, Mick and Brian hastened to the Appletreewick Oval, via the New Inn and Craven Arms, where the village was playing a team from Malhamdale. The players, they report, were dressed in a variety of winter clothing, 'but at least the umpires wore white coats.'

Dr. Davies believes the diary will become an important historical source. 'Want to know what life was like in Pennine country at the start of the 21st century? Consult your Bourne, Hutton & Senior! It is a chronicle of the ordinary and the extraordinary, a book of social observation. It is about cricket but also, more broadly, about villages and communities.'

Off the Beaten Track: Three Men and a Cricket Season, a 136-page book including 16 colour photographs costs £5, or £6 including p&p, from Dr Peter Davies, Department of History, University of Huddersfield, Queensgate, Huddersfield, HD1 3DH.

All proceeds from the book go to the Cricket Heritage Project. See www.ckcricketheritage.org.uk for further details.