



BIRSTALL CRICKET TEAM 1909



BIRSTALL CRICKET TEAM 1915

History of Birstall

A SHORT HISTORY
by GERRY GAUNT

The origins of the Club go back much further than a hundred years so why are we celebrating a Centenary? It was in 1883 that the Club actually became called Birstall Cricket (and Football) Club, the result of an amalgamation between Birstall Victoria Cricket Club and the old Birstall Football Club.

In 1856 there was a cricket club occupying a field near the Black Bull in Kirkgate. It was called Birstall Albert in honour of the Prince Consort and it was rather conservative, membership being restricted to thirty. Only about six matches a year were played, the most popular being those against Holmfirth played on respective Feast Days.

About 1860 the club moved to a field behind Trinity Terrace which belonged to Rectory Farm and started to gain importance in local sporting circles. Membership was allowed to increase and an agitation arose for a change of name. From this time the club became known as Birstall Victoria or, more commonly, as t'Vic. In 1870 the club was given notice to quit the ground behind the National Schools and moved to its present ground in Leeds Road. It continued as t'Vic till 1883 when the aforementioned amalgamation took place. A further amalgamation with another prominent Birstall cricket team, Birstall Young England also took place at a later date. The Birstall Cricket Club played its first match on Saturday, 26th May, 1883 against Morley C.C. at Morley and, happily, Birstall won.

All cricket clubs have their share of "ups and downs" and Birstall has been no exception. As a former captain, Councillor F. W. H. Auty once said in 1915 "We've had more downs than ups". However, at this time of celebration, let us concentrate on the "ups".

From the very beginning Birstall C.C. was successful. There was no league competition a hundred years ago, in fact, such a competition was frowned on for a very long time by the "gentlemen" of cricket. Coincidentally however, the Heavy Woolfen Cup Competition was inaugurated in 1883. Cup "sudden death" competitions by their very nature can produce exciting games and Birstall has had success in this competition during its long history.

The cup was first won in 1885 when Birstall beat Dewsbury & Savile at Savile Town. Dewsbury batting first scored a very respectable total of 242 but Birstall recognised as "one of the most powerful teams in Yorkshire", replied with 243 for 6. Willie Jubb scored 90, Johnnie Lister 42 and Oliver Wilson took 7 for 85 with his "trundlers". This Oliver Wilson became a legend in his own time. Oliver was a local man with a tobacconist shop O & S. Wilson in Commercial Street, Batley as older people may recall. He first played for Birstall St. Saviours. In the Yorkshire Cricket Guide for 1897 it is recorded that in ten years at Birstall C.C. he took 1,008 wickets for an average of less than 8 runs each. This at a time when batsmen could bat as long and as slowly as they wished. Throughout his career Oliver suffered badly from the rheumatism which made him unable to play in the cup-ties of 1884. Lord Hawke once invited him to play for his team but Oliver declined and this probably cost him a place in the Yorkshire team.

In 1886 Birstall played Batley in the Cup Final and scored a very modest 112 all out. Batley however, only managed 102 in reply with Oliver Wilson taking 6 for 43. During 1885 & 1886 Oliver took 241 wickets at a cost of 6.7 runs per wicket. During this very successful period Birstall included such excellent players as Willie Jubb, over 1,000 runs in a season when boundaries counted only 3, including a score over 200 not out against Spen Victoria in a single Saturday afternoon. He was also an excellent bowler, fielder and catcher according to contemporary reports. Another such player was Jack Milnes who once scored 182 against Ossett (the H.W. Cup holders) in 1885.

An interesting story is an account of a game between Birstall and a minor team, Dewsbury Moor, in an earlier round of the H.W. Cup in 1886. Birstall were so confident they allowed Willie Jubb to go on holiday to Blackpool. In order to prolong the match so that a profit could be made on refreshments Birstall were encouraged to throw away a few chances and in so doing allowed Dewsbury Moor to score 208. Birstall, however, were still confident but when stumps were drawn that evening they had slumped to 35 for 5. A telegram was dispatched to Willie Jubb but he dismissed it as a hoax until he read the 'News Chronicle' on Sunday. On Monday he caught the first train home and was in the pavilion to coach Walter Fearnley and Herbert Aveyard before they went out to bat. All to



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In 1856 there was a cricket club occupying a field near the Black Bull in Kirkgate. This club was called Birstall Albert in honour of the Prince Consort and it was rather conservative, membership being restricted to thirty. They played only about six matches a year, most popular of which were the games against Holmfirth played home and away on the respective Feast Days.

About 1860 the club moved to another field behind Trinity Terrace which belonged to Rectory Farm, and as time passed, it gained a position of some importance in local sporting circles. Membership was allowed to increase and an agitation arose for a change of name. From this time for about twenty years the club became known as Birstall Victoria or, more commonly as t'Vic.

Round about 1870 the club was given notice to quit the ground behind the National Schools and moved to its present ground in Leeds Road. It was still t'Vic but on Friday 27th April 1883 Birstall Football Club held its A.G.M. at the White Bear and it was decided not to elect officers "owing to negotiations with Birstall Victoria Cricket Club to amalgamate". The following Friday 4th May 1883 t'Vic held a G.M. at the Greyhound and a resolution was passed in favour of amalgamating with the "Old" Football Club. It was decided that, in future, the Club should be called Birstall Cricket and Football Club.

For much of the above information leading up to the amalgamation I am indebted to my long standing friend and expert on Birstall affairs, Malcolm Clegg.

On Saturday 26th May, 1883 the new Birstall C. and F. Club played its first match against Morley C.C. at Morley and Birstall Won! Like all cricket clubs Birstall has had its share of ups and downs (this was said by its captain in 1915, Councillor F. W. H. Auty, adding more downs than ups!), and its share of controversy. Which was the best team? Who were the best players? I have my own opinion but first controversy.

Recent events in the C.Y.L. have made national news and shocked many, but as long ago as 1869 there were problems. On 7th August 1869 Birstall Victoria played at home against Heckmondwike(!) Birstall won the toss and elected "to take the bat". Wickets fell rapidly and with the score at 14 for 6 there was a dispute over a run-out decision by the Heckmondwike umpire, a Mr Bruce. Steward, the Victoria captain, to the "amazement of

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EARLY DAYS continued...

the Heckmondwike players" abruptly drew the stumps saying there should be no more play. Letters were written to the local press. Steward claimed that, on entering the field, Heckmondwike, who had a weakened team due to their best player Firth being at the Oval and to the absence of their bowler Smithson, were overheard to say that they had come prepared to "fratch, fight or win!" They had chosen an umpire who "did not or would not understand the game!" W. H. Farrand one of Birstall's best bats, had been given out L.B.W. from a left handed delivery by Redfearn which "pitched considerably wide of the wicket" and then Preston was given "run out" by the umpire without any appeal (!!) whilst standing in his ground next to the bowler and umpire. In the ensuing argument spectators came onto the pitch, so Steward ended the game, since the umpire would not change his decision, to avoid "fratching and fighting." He also suggested that the 16 runs already scored were far too many for the likes of Heckmondwike.

A tart reply from the Heckmondwike Secretary claimed that at 16 for 7 Birstall saw defeat staring them in the face and "for fear of losing their boastful reputation" called in question the authority of our umpire who was well-known as a cricketer for some years.

Ironically the following week Birstall scored 205 against Methley and in reply Methley scored 57 all out and 41 for 6 in their two innings and in mid-week against Heath, Birstall scored 156 whilst in reply Heath were 98 all out and 59 for 6. On the other hand Heckmondwike could only score 45 all out against Holmfirth's 64.

A similar upset, this time between Birstall and Liversedge occurred in June 1922. With Liversedge 224 for 6 declared and Birstall 41 for 5 the acting captain, Charlie Turner was knocked unconscious by a rising ball, Birstall walked off claiming the wicket was dangerous. The match was awarded to Liversedge but they were told to improve their wicket for the following season.

What of good teams and good players?

The present team is obviously quite good within the quality of the present league. There is much to admire in the technique of Peter Ingham, the skill and natural ability of Avi Karnik and, latterly, the all round talent of Andrew Townley; good players all and gentlemen on and off the field.

EARLY DAYS continued...

Some would say that the team of the 1950's was better with such as W. B. Smith, a fine attacking batsman, and Ernest Blakeley, surely the best left arm quick bowler. Others with longer memories, would say that the Cup-Winning side of 1915 was even better with players of the quality of J. Farrar, F. W. H. Auty, J. Smith and Oliver Glover.

My heroes are of a different age, almost before living memory yet I feel I know them personally such were their exploits. It is on record that between 1885 and 1888 Birstall C.C. were "one of the most powerful teams in Yorkshire." We should revere to the memory of such players as: Willie Jubb, Whitehead Ineson, Jack Milnes, Oliver Wilson, Walter Fearnley, Johnnie Lister, Willie Ratcliffe and Sam Bedford. During this period Birstall were almost undefeated against the best in the Heavy Woollen, Bradford and Huddersfield Districts. They won the H. W. Cup in 1885/6 and were narrowly beaten by Dewsbury in the 3rd round in 1887. In the 1885 Final Dewsbury scored 242 with W. France (later to be Mayor) scoring 76 and A. G. Day 49 but Birstall replied through Willie Jubb 90 and Johnnie Lister 46.

In 1886 they beat local rivals Batley. In a team of stars Willie Jubb was an outstanding batsman. He scored over 1000 runs in a season and once hit over 200 not out against Spen Vic. with a boundary only counting 3 and in a single Sat. Afternoon. He was also a fine bowler and excellent fielder and catcher. In 1885 Jack Milnes almost repeated the feat with 182 against Ossett who were the H. W. Cup Holders. Drawn against Dewsbury. Moor a minor team in the 1886 cup, they were so confident of winning that they let Willie Jubb go on holiday. It was said that in order to prolong the match and make a profit on refreshments they were encouraged to throw away a few chances which they certainly did. As a result Dewsbury scored 208 but Birstall were still confident. When stumps were drawn however Birstall were 35 for 5. A telegram was dispatched to Willie in Blackpool but he thought it was a hoax until he read the News Chronicle on the Sunday. He caught the 1st train home on Monday and was in the pavilion to coach Walter Fearnley and Herbert Aveyard before they went out to bat. All to no avail, Birstall slumped to 50 for 7. By now the Moorites were taunting "Send in Willie Jubb" and Willie was heard to say he'd give £5 to bat. After a rain shower Birstall's luck changed and a few catches were dropped so when Ackroyd was out for 87

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EARLY DAYS continued...

only 12 was required and Milnes was 56 not out. Sam Bedford, the veteran wicketkeeper was told by Milnes to keep the ball out of his wicket and leave it to him. Sam however, hit the next three balls clean out of the ground to win the match, and on returning to the pavilion was heard to remark "Fancy Jack Milnes asking me to leave it to him, if I had we should most likely have lost!"

On another occasion against Holmfirth, Sam approached the captain Fred Crowther, "Fred", he said, "It's Birstall Feast today, I'm tired of Willie Jubb and Whitehead Ineson getting talent money every week. I shall want summat to spend tonet—so I want tha' to send me in first so I can score fifty." Fred let him and Sam duly scored 54.

As a young man I remember a tobacconist shop on Commercial Street, Batley called I think, O. & S. Wilson. What I didn't know at the time was that the shop had been opened by Oliver Wilson who I believe must rank as the greatest bowler Birstall has ever had.

Oliver was a member of that now sadly dying breed a slow bowler. In his time he was known as a "trundler", and he suffered so badly with rheumatism that he was unable to take part in the cup ties of 1884. A local lad, he first played for Birstall St. Saviours. In the Yorkshire Cricket Guide for 1897 it is recorded that in 10 years with Birstall he took 1008 wickets at an average of under 8 runs per wicket. This was against the best teams in a wide area and at a time when there was no time or overs limit. Batsmen could bat as long and as slowly as they wished. Louis Hall the famous Batley and Yorkshire opening bat frequently batted for over three hours on Saturdays and batted right through for Yorkshire on numerous occasions. Oliver's bowling feats were legendary and his figures include 8 for 10 against Batley (18 all out with Willie Jubb 2 for 8) and 6 for 7 against Morley. It is possible to list many such performances but, sadly space does not permit. He had however 9 wickets on at least 3 occasions, 8 wickets on another 3, 7 wickets on 7, 6 wickets on 7 and 5 wickets on 5 and usually for considerably less than 30 runs each time. In 1885 and 1886 he took 241 wickets at a cost of 6.7 runs per wicket. Some trundler!!

Such is the heritage of our club. Players long dead but their deeds and their characters shine down through the years. I hope I have given their memory a new lease of life.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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BIRSTALL CRICKET TEAM 1950's

History of Birstall Cricket Club—continued.

Subsequently Birstall had a "down" period and slipped back into the Second Division. Since then a number of important decisions were taken and alterations made. The Clubhouse and bar were built and later extended so that money for cricket could be raised more easily and pleasantly. The Clubhouse was opened on June 15th, 1970 by Brian Sellars ex-captain of Yorkshire. In 1981 the new tea-room and score-box were also built and showers were added to the changing rooms. Money was also wisely spent on improving the playing area and the wicket, carefully tended by Ken Halsey with the assistance of others, has become one of the best in the league.

In order to re-discover success it was decided to hire professional players of quality and they have helped to the return of the Club to the higher reaches of the First Division. Andrew Townley (ex-Yorkshire) achieved the "double" of 1,000 runs and 100 wickets in getting promotion for the club and there have been fine performances from Indian Avi Karmik, Yorkshire County player Peter Ingham, an elegant batsman and a fine captain, and Colts wicket-keeper and opening batsman, Steven Rhodes.

Birstall had a reputation in the past for good wicket-keepers. Jim Higgins, who could have played for Lancashire, chose instead to be understudy to the famous David Hunter of Yorkshire and, even earlier J. G. Boden actually kept wicket for the County.

Recently we have been joined by Nick Taylor a fast bowler of whom Yorkshire have great hopes. He is the son of Ken Taylor ex-Yorkshire and England and ex-Huddersfield Town. This continues the policy of attracting the best talent available but one must not forget players who have given outstanding long and faithful service such as Ken Halsey, Geoff. Wolfenden, Dennis Johnson, David Gill and others.

The facilities at Birstall are excellent. The playing area is first class and the cricket teas, thanks to the Ladies Committee acknowledged amongst the best. Dare I say that all we require is a little bit of icing on the cake. Come on lads, it's 29 years since we won the cup!

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Mr. Dennis Johnson & Mr. David Gill complete their 25 years of cricket at Birstall this season. Both have served and contributed to the club since their schoolboy days, and have achieved many notable feats throughout their playing careers.

Dennis Johnson who has been the spearhead of Birstall's opening bowling attack for many seasons, has many memories of outstanding performances that have, and still continue to bring success to Birstall, and delight our spectators.

In 1966 on the 16th July, Drighlington became the victims of Mr. Johnson's lethal attack, taking 8 of their wickets for a mere 37 runs.

I am sure Dennis remembers well that Saturday in July, 1976 when his quick pace bowling ripped through the notorious Altofts batting attack, his outstanding contribution — 9 wickets for 27 runs.

Mr. David Gill along with Dennis has also contributed many notable performances. David has been a notorious batsman with the reputation of reducing many a bowler to a state of confusion and despair with his hard hitting, quick scoring ability.

His centuries for Birstall are many, one I know that gave personal pleasure to many was that against Morley on May 17th, 1980 when David scored 125 runs not out. Mirfield also paid the price in July, 1961 when David scored 111 runs before being dismissed.

Two people who's 25 years of dedicated service has truly been appreciated. To Mr. D. Johnson and Mr. D. Gill we say thank you for your loyalty and your contribution to cricket at Birstall.

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