

Profile of Eric Bell

By James Norbury

A solid batsman and talented off-spin bowler, Eric Bell became a prominent figure at Mirfield Cricket Club between the mid-1970s and 2005. He enjoyed a number of successes with the club, playing at a high level well into his sixties.

Eric was born in 1939 and attended Ossett Grammar School, where he first started to play competitive cricket for the school side. He had missed out on playing cricket at his primary school as there was very little organised sport available. His experience playing in the school team was his first real involvement in cricket, but it was the influence of his father that first got him interested in the sport. Eric's father was a keen cricketer and regularly played for Horbury Bridge Cricket Club. His father captained the side, which played in the Leeds Midweek League, and Eric occasionally filled in when the team was short of players.



Throughout his youth, Eric was an avid watcher of great cricketers. Some of the legends he idolised and looked to for inspiration included the likes of Fred Trueman, Jim Laker and Len Hutton. He started playing for the now defunct Rowley Hill junior side. Then, during his mid-teens he began playing regular league cricket with Flockton in the Wakefield Union, where he cycled the long distance to games from his home village of Horbury. He was also selected to play for Huddersfield Under-18s.

In 1963 Eric married and this led to a four-year break away from playing competitive cricket. While looking back he does not regret the decision, he does concede that those years could have been some of his finest as a cricketer. In 1967 Eric eventually made a return to the sport he loved, when he began to turn out for Thornhill 2nd XI. He quickly began to recapture his form of old, and worked his way in to the 1st XI.

During his younger years, Eric had gone on to study at Huddersfield Polytechnic, where he trained to be an industrial chemist. He went on to work for pharmaceutical company ICI, working there for 34 years from 1957–1991. While working for the company he caught the interest of their cricket team, which played in the Central Yorkshire League Division 2. He began to play for them in 1968, eventually going on to captain the side for three seasons. During his time there he also became opening

batsman. He carried on playing for the side until 1975 when he was convinced by his next-door neighbour to join Mirfield CC. His neighbour, incidentally, was no other than Mirfield legend Clive Brook!

Eric describes his decision to join Mirfield as “the best move I ever made.” This point was further reiterated when the ICI team eventually folded. He had in fact lived in Mirfield since 1960. He was also reunited with old pal and fellow Mirfield cricketer Albert Ambler, who he had played Under-18s football with. Eric believes that the late 1970s at Mirfield were his most enjoyable years in cricket. This was largely due to the array of talented youngsters who were forcing their way into the 1st XI at this time. And this, mixed with the experience of players such as himself and Clive Brook, meant for a very promising cricket team.

It was around this time that he also began to play for a Sunday League team called ‘The Penguins’. The team was formed in the 1950s and included a number of players from Mirfield in the squad. During his time there, Eric played against a number of talented players such as Martin Crowe, who played for Scarborough. Crowe was just a teenager at the time, but was an obvious raw talent and would later go on to captain New Zealand. However, Eric believes the best player he ever played against was legendary West Indian bowler and 1951 Wisden Cricketer of the Year, Sonny Ramadhin. Ramadhin took 9 wickets against The Penguins, but was frustrated when bowling against Eric, who lasted 40 overs against him.

Mirfield began to yo-yo between the first and second divisions between 1979 and 1981, but started to stabilise after this. This saw the side being strengthened with players such as Ghulam Parkar and later Iqbal Khan being brought in. This period was also an important one in Eric’s career, as he was made first-team captain. Eric captained the side for two seasons. In the late 1980s he dropped down to the second team, where he continued to be a great influence during matches.

In 1987 the seconds were narrowly defeated in the Wheatley Cup Final, losing out by just 13 runs to Batley at Thornhill. Despite losing the final, Eric picked up the man of the match award, scoring 65 and taking three wickets. This was an incredible achievement given that the award is not usually awarded to a player on the losing side! However, Eric admits this was little consolation to him at the time, as he would have gladly turned in the award for a Mirfield win.

Eric rejoined the Mirfield firsts in the early 1990s, and helped lead them to the Jack Hampshire Memorial Cup Final in 1994. Mirfield were victorious in this match against Methley, bringing the cup home for the first time in their history. Eric played a key part in this momentous victory for the club, managing to score two runs off his pads in the process! Those runs proved vital as Methley were beaten by just one wicket.

In 1995 Eric retired from cricket, but went on to play numerous times for the club over the next ten years, and completed his final full season in 2005. To this day Eric is still heavily involved with the club. His wife Val is club treasurer and acts as tea lady on match days. Speaking about the club Eric said: “I have taken a lot and given a lot, that is what it’s all about”. And he still goes down to the Memorial Ground to watch matches so he can cheer on the team he holds so dear.