

George Herbert Hirst

George Herbert Hirst, or 'George Herbert' as he is still affectionately known in Huddersfield today, has been described as "the world's greatest all-round cricketer." This accolade was bestowed upon him by A.A. Thomson but you would be hard-pressed to find anyone in Huddersfield, and particularly Kirkheaton, who would argue with this statement.

Hirst was born in Kirkheaton on September 7, 1871, and went on to become Huddersfield's favourite son. By the time he died in his Huddersfield home on May 10, 1954, he had graced both county and international stage with distinction and had won fans all around the cricketing world.

Hirst was unique for a cricketer in that he was a right-handed batsman but a left-handed bowler. He was equally brutal with either bat or ball. If any proof was needed for this then it is reassuring that he is the only man to ever score 2,000 runs and take 200 wickets in a season. He completed this 'double double' in 1906 when his figures were 2,385 runs and 208 wickets. It is highly unlikely that this feat will ever be repeated. In fact when asked if he thought his achievement would ever be repeated he replied, "I don't know, but whoever does it will be very tired." Hirst's accomplishment was so remarkable that on August 16, 2006, Yorkshire Cricket Club marked its centenary by displaying it on the scoreboard during a match.

More evidence of Hirst's supreme ability with bat and ball is that in fourteen separate seasons he achieved the 'double' of scoring 1,000 runs and taking 100 wickets. His overall career figures are 36,203 runs and 2,727 runs. He also managed 550 catches. He scored 1,000 runs in 19 different seasons and took 100 wickets in fifteen different years.

Much of Hirst's success was achieved alongside his lifelong friend and fellow citizen of Kirkheaton, Wilfred Rhodes. The two played alongside each other for Kirkheaton, Yorkshire and England and were the most feared combination in world cricket at the time. Rhodes was, in fact, the only man to surpass Hirst's achievement of completing the 'double' fourteen times. He did it sixteen times.

Hirst was very proud of his Kirkheaton roots and was very complimentary towards the cricket club that gave him his first chance. He stated, "I think it would be about 1885 or 1886 when I joined, but exact dates I am unable to state. We lads practised cricket, football and knur and spell every spare moment we could get after work. In fact our parents said we lived at the ground. I owe my success as a cricketer to my early days with the club. I attribute my ability in later years to the persistent practise which half a dozen of us Kirkheaton lads put in night after night in all departments of the game. We used to take the side nets away and every ball had to be fielded."

When visiting Kirkheaton it is obvious in how high a regard they hold George Herbert Hirst. He may have died 52 years ago, but the legend lives on. Eric Hepworth, now the Treasurer at Kirkheaton CC having held many other posts at the club over the years, had this to say of Hirst: "He was the greatest. Obviously I never had the chance

to see him play but I don't need to have done to know that there's never been anyone on his level. You just have to speak to people round here. Can you tell me any other cricketer anywhere in the world who is thought of as highly as George Herbert Hirst over 50 years after their death? I just wish I had the chance to see him play."

Even the younger generation know all about Hirst. Current Kirkheaton all-rounder Naved Akram explains, "You don't play cricket in Kirkheaton without hearing about him. I'm constantly compared to him, it's ridiculous! He's the only person to ever do the 'double double'. Of course I'm nowhere near as good as him! If I was a fraction as good as him I would be a very happy, and probably very rich, man."

It was not just in Yorkshire that Hirst was so respected, however. In 1901 he was named as Wisden Cricketer of the Year, a much coveted award.

Hirst played for Kirkheaton from a very early age and shortly before his 19th birthday he fulfilled his goal of playing for his county, Yorkshire. He made a relatively slow start to his Yorkshire career but after a few years started to make his presence felt. As his performances for Yorkshire became more and more impressive he received his first England call-up in 1897 and subsequently made his debut. He went on to play for England 24 times, scoring 790 runs and taking 59 wickets. His last appearance was in 1909.

Hirst retired from the game in 1921 but such was his love for cricket he made one final appearance for Yorkshire eight years later at the age of 58. After retiring Hirst

became a coach of cricket at Eton College, passing on his vast experience to the younger generation.

Hirst has been described as 'the father of all modern seam and swing bowling.' Lord Hawke described him as, 'the greatest county cricketer of all time.'

Both on and off the cricket pitch, none can speak too highly of George Herbert Hirst. The real challenge would be to find someone to criticise him. It could be a long search.