

## **Profile of Geoff Gill**

### **By Dave Wooding**

A man who was at the heart of the Shepley team for many years, former club captain Geoff Gill was a player who commanded immense respect from all those around him. With a playing career that spanned over 25 years, most of which were spent at Shepley, Geoff has enjoyed a level of success that most at the club would find hard to match.

Starting his cricketing life as a bowler, Geoff made his senior bow at the young age of 15, for Lascelles Hall, where he proudly recalls: 'I managed to take a wicket with my first ever ball.' Although recognised as a batsman during most of his career, the big-hitting Yorkshireman once opened the bowling for the county's Under-18s team before injuries forced him to concentrate on his batting instead.

Having worked on his batting at Fartown, where he hit his maiden 50 on his birthday, Gill joined Shepley in time for the 1977 season, and began to cement his place in the top order of the first team. Shepley was Geoff's home club until 2003, apart from two years spent at Batley in 1980 and 1981. It was during his first season there that Geoff was awarded the batting trophy for the Central Yorkshire League.



Perhaps the biggest hitter in Shepley history, Geoff admits, 'I never really did a lot of running between the wickets. I preferred hitting sixes!' His highest score was 208 against local rivals Shelley, and he recalls: 'I hit 16 sixes and 14 fours in that knock'.

Despite obvious individual ability, Geoff 'enjoyed playing more for the team', and said: 'If I get runs it's nice, but if we win and I get nothing I'm still happy.' With this attitude, coupled with a natural cricketing brain, it was perhaps little surprise when Geoff took over as captain of the Shepley side for the first time during the 1984 season.

Hailed by several at the club as perhaps Shepley's most gifted skipper, Geoff describes himself as 'a very focused captain' who was not afraid to make controversial and difficult decisions to help lead his team to victory. He would make his decisions and then expect his players to either 'like it or lump it, regardless of who they were.' Indeed, during his time in charge he was known to replace bowlers after just one over if they failed to live up to expectations.

With the '84 team tipped for relegation in the *Examiner's* season preview, it could easily be argued that it was Geoff's tactical nous that helped guide the side to the league title, as Shepley won several matches that season that could have gone either way. Former teammate Ian Glover recalls: 'A lot of reasons why we won the league came down to Geoff.' With by no means the most talented team of cricketers at his disposal, Gill and his side really defied the odds that season - something he puts down to the closeness and the attitude the team had over that season. Indeed, with no batsman averaging over 30, it took a great team effort to win the league, and Geoff's captaincy certainly played its part. He says: 'It will probably never be done again with a team like ours was that year.'

Those who knew him on the field will remember Geoff as a disciplined captain, and those around the club will also remember the infamous incident involving Derek Randall, the former England international, who felt the full brunt of Geoff's professionalism in a Sykes Cup match between Shepley and Randall's Thongsbridge. While it may seem to have been a controversial decision to inform Randall that he was not allowed to bat because he had missed the previous day's action, Geoff, ever the team player, was quick to consult his colleagues before being placed in the unenviable position of making the tough, but ultimately correct, decision.

Although he achieved a lot during his time at Marsh Lane, Geoff singles out leading the Huddersfield League Under-22s to victory in the prestigious White Rose competition as one of his greatest moments. However, it was Shepley who probably gave Geoff his lowest moment in cricket, as he was part of the team that suffered relegation in 1997, as well as being a losing finalist in the 1990 Heavy Woollen Cup.

Gill finally hung up his cricket spikes following the 2003 season, when poor circulation in his legs finally took its toll. However, it is fitting that Geoff was awarded the Lady Sykes Trophy before he called time on a successful career, receiving this special Huddersfield League recognition in 2001.