

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE YORKSHIRE GENTLEMEN'S CRICKET CLUB



The Club was formed at a meeting held at Harker's Hotel, York, on 30th September 1863; *'it having been the desire for several years of many gentlemen in Yorkshire to have the County well and thoroughly represented in the cricket field in what might be termed county matches and also in gentlemen's county matches'* (History of Yorkshire County Cricket 1833-1903: Rev.R.S.Holmes:Constable Westminster: 1904:pp 168)

The desire to play 'county matches' appears to have been driven through rivalry with the other 'County Club', which had originated in Sheffield earlier the same year, and which went on to become the Yorkshire County Cricket Club that we know today, eventually in partnership with the York and Leeds 'County Clubs', initially vying for supremacy with each other. The Yorkshire Gentlemen's Cricket Club immediately became an accomplished fact. Behind it was the old Langton Wold Cricket Club, subsequently the Vale of Derwent Club, whose headquarters were at Castle Howard and whose colours were adopted by the Yorkshire Gentlemen about the year 1873. Earl Fitzwilliam became the first President, the Earl of Londesborough a Vice President, and two Honorary Secretaries were elected. Some two hundred members were enrolled, and a large field at the back of the then Bootham Asylum in York was rented for £50 a year, and a pavilion and perimeter wall were erected.

In its first season, 1864, the club played amongst others, I Zingari, Gentlemen of Notts, Gentlemen of Lancs, and North of Ireland, and in the following year the club also played the M.C.C. for the first time. The fixture list soon developed to around forty fixtures each season, the majority played in York with opposition being provided by City XI's from the County, visiting clubs such as Free Foresters, Harrow Wanderers, Uppingham Rovers, Durham University, Military XI's, Ampleforth College, St. Peters School and Gentlemens Clubs from neighbouring counties.

There continued to be close ties between the Yorkshire Gentlemen and the County Club for many years. In the early years, a number of Y.G. Members played for Yorkshire County Cricket Club, and also Captained the County, namely Lord Hawke, Major A.W.Lupton, Sir Archibald White and Sir William Worsley. This tradition extended beyond the Second World War with N.W.D.Yardley and W.H.H.Sutcliffe.

In the early 1900's tours to Southern England were a regular feature of the fixture list and in the 1930's the club visited Gibraltar in rather special circumstances due to the fact that a Member of the club was the Governor at the time! Tours to Holland followed in the post war period and in the late 1980's and early 1990's the club visited Berlin to play the against the Berlin Military Garrison prior to and following the collapse of the Berlin Wall.

In 1932 Lord Wenlock, himself a member of the committee, invited the club to move to his estate in Escrick, six miles south of York, which has remained the home of the club ever since, with cricket played in an idyllic setting, in the shadow of the splendid main house, which today is the centre piece of Queen Margaret's School, an outstanding girls boarding school. Norman Yardley, Captain of Yorkshire and England, and old boy of St. Peters School, York, wrote the following piece in his autobiography;

'The Yorkshire Gentlemen's Ground at Escrick is a wonderful place. I always think of it as the perfect setting for the most English of games. It lies about six miles outside of York, on an old estate, with the 'stately home of England' in the background, a splendid old Hall in mellow stone; great trees surround the ground, and there is a fine and comfortable thatched pavilion. The ground has seen some of the best cricket in the North - which, any Yorkshireman will tell you, means some of the best in the world!' *(Cricket Campaigns; N.W.D. Yardley: Stanley Paul: 1950: pp28)*

Sadly, the thatched pavilion has been lost to fire, but was replaced with a more modern structure in 1968, the walls of which are covered in team photographs from across the clubs' history, and a modern bar and kitchen facilities enable our Members and visiting teams to enjoy a lot more than the Cricket alone. Much of the rest of Norman Yardley's description remains accurate, as anyone familiar with Escrick Park will recognise.

The club continues to support a healthy fixture card containing approximately 35 all day fixtures, with two day games against Free Foresters and Radley Rangers. We proudly remain one of the few clubs in the county who play traditional cricket where the timing of the declaration is all important. Limited overs games are forbidden and it is interesting how many of our visitors find it a refreshing experience to play a traditional game of cricket in a lovely setting where the enjoyment and sportsmanship of the occasion, both on and off the field, is as important as the keenly fought game itself.

The club was honoured to be invited to participate in Oxford 2000, the International Millennium Cricket Festival for Wandering Clubs, held in August of that year in and around Oxford, hosted at Keble College and organised by The Cricketer Magazine. Sixteen clubs took part and The Yorkshire Gentlemen were pleased to record victories against The Invalids and

The Butterflies, a draw with De Flamingoes and a solitary defeat at the hands of The Wiltshire Queries.

What of the future? Well the following paragraph was written by the Rev. R.S.Holmes about the club in 1903;

'Is the club less popular than it was? Undoubtedly. The novelty has worn off. Moreover the claims of business make it increasingly difficult for whole day matches to be played; whilst the attractions of county cricket and the rivalry existing between local clubs have done much to keep away many...who could be helping The Yorkshire Gentlemen. Lord Hawke and the Hon. F.S.Jackson occasionally play for them still ... In these days when in my judgement veiled professionalism is an ugly blot on the game, it is to be hoped that this purely amateur club, whose members pay their own out of pocket expenses, will continue to flourish.' (History of Yorkshire County Cricket: Rev.R.S.Holmes : Constable Westminster:1904 pp170)

Much of the above concerns, expressed at the start of the 20th century, as to the club and the wider game of cricket, may still be thought to be valid today. Lord Hawke and the Hon. F.S.Jackson may be long gone, but they along with the Rev. Holmes, would be delighted to see, a full century on, that the Yorkshire Gentlemen's Cricket Club continues to flourish as hoped above, with minimal compromise to the principals established at the time of its foundation.

By kind permission of Yorkshire Gentlemen's Cricket Club.

More information about Yorkshire Gentlemen's Cricket Club can be found at <https://yorkshiregentlemenscricketclub.co.uk/>