

JOHN FULLER

Brews on the Boundary

Travels to Yorkshire's cricket clubs

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For Moira and Tigs

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Introduction

October

It is an inky black October morning. I tug at memories from the last two cricket seasons. Our cat, Tigs, snoozes beside the kitchen chair as a mug of Yorkshire Gold steams away in my hand.

The sun is some way from rising. A white light bobs up and down in the dark behind our house: a cyclist negotiating the crag above. Resisting the invisible pull to grab my phone and scroll at pixels, I let the silence sit. It's something I want to do more of. To carve out time in a day to just be. That's when ideas percolate or curiosity tugs playfully. This is a transition month. Outdoor cricket in the UK has concluded and for those who cannot resist, indoor matches in sports halls beckon to satisfy a craving.

Clubs, leagues and committees will be reviewing and looking ahead; an exercise I am leaning into for my *Cricket Yorkshire* website after a much-needed break on the Northumberland coast to rest, walk Alnmouth's glorious beach and listen to the thunder of the North Sea. We have already had Storm Amy batter us; the first of the named storms that re-set each

Autumn. Bram, Chandra, Dave and Eddie will surely follow; a curious band christened by the Met Office with Tadhg, Violet and Wubbo at the other end of this meteorological season.

Time will tell how far we get through the alphabet but the frequency and ferocity of the weather has noticeably ramped up in our part of West Yorkshire in the last decade. This book, a look back at the last two club cricket seasons here in Yorkshire, inevitably has lashing rain, howling winds and unwavering sun as characters. Not just because we all obsess over the meteorological in this country but principally as it dictates so much about our game, not least the minor issue of whether it happens in the first place. According to Yorkshire Water, we have been in drought since June and that continues into Autumn. I've long since given up attempting to rationalise or predict patterns but the contrast between the two seasons in these pages could not be more stark.

While it never scaled the ridiculous heights of 2022 when I grimly sat in my kitchen with a wet tea towel over my head as the mercury reached a shade under a hundred Fahrenheit, this year has been extremely dry. A rain-free Spring meant groundskeepers were merrily able to do whatever grass-related mysteries keep them happy. By May, pitches had cracked up enough to get your car keys lost. Rewind a further year and it just did not stop raining right up until when matches were due to start. Many outfielders were saturated marshland and leagues postponed the first round of fixtures; the second year in a row that had happened in Yorkshire.

As I piece together the stories, travels and chance encounters from articles on the website, notes, photos saved in Google's digital solar system and the glut of social media outpourings, one irrefutable fact is a reassurance. There is always cricket

happening somewhere in Yorkshire. As I type this and demolish a Tunnock's teacake to boost productivity, the South Yorkshire Women & Girls Cricket League have already begun their indoor adventures. That's over fifty teams across two hardball divisions and four softball divisions with matches inked in for months. By my reckoning, they play almost continually across the year. Just a few weeks form an interlude to pause for breath, as the women's game hovers up any chance to train, coach and compete.

At this point, I should explain what you'll encounter in the coming chapters. You might eagerly snap up a copy as soon as it hits the shelves. Or take a punt on an author you've never heard of after spotting the dusty cover in a second-hand bookshop in years to come. Either way, there will be travels by car and train to grounds across Yorkshire to watch a beautifully broad range of matches in the 2024 and 2025 seasons. Get ready for characters you'll relate to or even know personally. Conversations gleaned from many hours of watching. A sense of place as I guide you through villages, towns and cities. Cricket teas crop up as I munch my way from BD5 to HG4 (other postcodes also feature). Those who mow the outfield, plan fixtures, raise funds, score matches, officiate in white coats or play in coloured shirts all make an appearance. This latest instalment is neither encyclopaedic nor planned with any particular mission. I never sat with a blank piece of paper to scope out a route. Or a theme. My life isn't that regimented and nor would I want it to be.

I am fortunate that I have the power to choose, pivot or decide on a whim. There is a freedom that comes with minding my own business, if I can put it like that. No-one has ordered me to Middle Wharfewell to report on the Greater Wensleydale

Caves League when everyone knows a cyclone will deposit a year's rain on Saturday morning. For inspiration, the book uses my articles from cricketyorkshire.com but adapted, built out and with plenty here that is exclusive to these pages. I deliberately held back some travels, trophies and tournaments rather than publish them online. You'll get a keener sense of things in these pages. It was therapeutic to write in my own way under my own steam. I didn't head to South Yorkshire and barely touched the surface of clubs within an hour of my doorstep in West Yorkshire. I am magnetically drawn North, time and again. I go where I go and all I can say is that the best laid plans are so often binned that I am a world expert at smiling ruefully and going with the flow.

Besides, the weather, allied with life, health, the pressures and peculiarities of the recreational game make planning a roll of the dice. Games were cancelled at short notice for no apparent reason (conceded due to lack of players as it transpired), mischievous weather fronts hurled the contents of clouds out of nowhere. Matches on Play-Cricket (the England & Wales Cricket Board (ECB) network of websites for clubs and leagues with fixtures, results and stats) are sometimes wrong. Timings, dates and venues. So, changing plans even en route to a game is all part of life's rich tapestry.

But at the heart of it all is a deep, enduring love of Yorkshire. What extraordinary history, people and places make the game so vibrant and fulfilling here. I have been writing about recreational cricket on my website, in my books and for cricket magazines over 15 years now. You would think I am a wizened cynic. Seen it all. Well, there are plenty more grey hairs but the landscape of our great game is constantly shifting at grassroots. There are trends, similarities sure, but always something new

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and so much still to see and savour.

Come on this journey with me, it'll be fun.