

THE WAR OF THE WHITE ROSES

Yorkshire Cricket's Civil War
1968-1986

Stuart Rayner



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Introduction and Acknowledgements

I WAS there the day Yorkshire won back-to-back County Championship titles for the first time since 1968. On 9 September 2015, the White Rose players and their travelling supporters were at Lord's for the second day of their Championship game against Middlesex. I was at Trent Bridge in my capacity as a sports writer for *The Journal*, *Newcastle Chronicle* and *Sunday Sun*, covering Durham's match against Nottinghamshire. When Graham Onions bowled Harry Gurney at 3.07pm to dismiss the hosts for 204, Yorkshire's points tally became unassailable and their 32nd title was confirmed.

It had been on the cards for some time. Despite losing six players – five of them Yorkshire-born – to England over the course of the season, the trophy was secured with two and a half matches to spare. After nearly half a century Yorkshire could finally claim to be the dominant force in English cricket again. Rather than heralding the start of a long-term revival, the 2001 title had been followed by relegation the next summer and four of the next ten seasons were spent in the bottom division, but this time Yorkshire had emphatically backed up their success with a record-breaking year.

The safe vantage point of such a happy time for Yorkshire County Cricket Club seems to me to be a good place from which to look back at the darkest period in its history. Many of the former players, supporters and committeemen I approached for interviews

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told me they did not want to rake over the past when things were finally going so well for the club again. I understand and respect their attitude, but firmly believe the maxim that those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it. Those lessons are as important as they have ever been now the team is doing so well. The story told in this book starts in 1968 because the seeds of the discord which ripped a proud club apart were sown in the complacency and hubris inadvertently created by what many believe was its greatest team. Yorkshire are now strong enough and the events distant enough to look back on them objectively.

The club which paraded the famous County Championship trophy around Lord's in 2015 is far removed from the insular, conservative institution run by an unwieldy committee which collected the same silverware at Hull in 1968, and all the better suited to the 21st century for it. This book is an attempt to explain what happened in the bad times between 1968 and 1986 which were almost as important in framing the identity of the modern-day club as the many glory years preceding them. The point of the exercise is not to apportion blame because I firmly believe almost everything those involved did during this period was done because they felt it was the right thing for Yorkshire, even if to others at the time and those of us with the benefit of hindsight it is clear that was not always the case. Other clubs could probably have avoided much of the bitter in-fighting of the 1970s and 80s and settled into a gentle, humdrum existence but quietly making up the numbers is not what Yorkshire cricket stands for.

My interest in this period was really piqued in December 2013 by a book that had been gathering dust on my shelves for some time. My passion for Yorkshire cricket comes from my mum, but it was my dad who unwittingly set me on the path towards writing this book when he bought me a second-hand copy of David Bairstow's diary of Yorkshire's 1984 season. Finally getting around to reading it made me interested to know more about the political upheaval Bairstow and his team-mates had to contend with. It soon became apparent there was no definitive book on that period

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of Yorkshire's history written from a neutral perspective – there were some good ones from the viewpoint of those, like Bairstow, who were heavily (and in his case reluctantly) involved, and wider histories of the club or the game, or biographies of Geoffrey Boycott which mentioned it. Perhaps it was hubris of my own, but I decided to write a book myself. Now living outside the county, and having been born in it halfway through the period, gives me a certain distance which I hope makes for a fair account of a divisive period in the club's history.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have helped or encouraged me along the way, from my dad thinking of me when he came across Bairstow's book in a second-hand bookstall to those who proofread chapters, and too many in between to mention you all. If you were not already, just by reading you have become one of those people.

Special thanks must go to David Warner, widely regarded as the fairest journalist covering Yorkshire at that time, and now a vice-president of the club. The extraordinary collection of cuttings he lent me was of great help and I hope to see them again one day in the club museum. The advice offered by David and the *Yorkshire Post's* excellent cricket correspondent Chris Waters, who wrote the foreword, and many others whose knowledge of Yorkshire County Cricket Club is far greater than mine will ever be has been gratefully received.

Thanks also to Paul Cunningham, Richard Neale and Rachel Wearmouth for reading drafts from their different perspectives and suggesting improvements, Mick Pope of Adelphi Archive and Penny Coleman of *The Gazette* in Middlesbrough for their help in obtaining photographs, and the team at Pitch Publishing for transforming it all into the book you are reading now. I am indebted to my employers, ncjMedia, for allowing me time to finish writing the book, and the staff at the British Library (the Boston Spa and London branches) and those in Leeds, Harrogate, Northallerton and Scarborough who helped as I ploughed through microfilm, microfiche and old newspapers in my research.

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While others were understandably reticent, Jack Bond, Mike Bore, Geoffrey Boycott, Matthew Caswell, Geoff Cook, Andrew Dalton, Sidney Fielden, David Hall, George Hepworth, Richard Hutton, Ashley Metcalfe, Martyn Moxon, Chris Old, Kevin Sharp, Jack Simmons, Bryan Stott, Julian Vallance, Alan Walker, Neil Whitaker, Russell Devy and Ted Lester were kind enough to share their very different experiences of what, for many of them, was a difficult time. I hope I have represented their views fairly. The last two names on the list sadly died during the writing of this book, and it is dedicated to the memories of Russell and Ted. I hope I have done them justice in producing something you enjoy reading as much as I have enjoyed writing it.

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An Era Ends, An Error Begins

YORKSHIRE'S third straight County Championship title had not yet been confirmed and already their secretary, John Nash, was getting big ideas. 'I hope that the team now equal or beat Surrey's feat in winning the Championship in seven successive seasons,' he told the *Yorkshire Post*.

Four days earlier the White Rose County had finished their 1968 campaign by beating the team of the 1950s, Surrey, live on Yorkshire Television with five minutes to spare. While they wound their season down at the Scarborough Cricket Festival, Kent and Glamorgan still had two matches each to try to overhaul them; the last against one another. They needed more bonus points from each than any county had won all season. The headline above Nash's quotes said it all, 'All over bar the shouting'. Yorkshire won the title by 14 points.

Never mind four Championships in the next four seasons, Yorkshire would have to wait until the following millennium to get their hands on English domestic cricket's most prestigious trophy again. In 1968 such a barren spell would have been unthinkable but the county's complacency was one of many contributing factors. Nothing summed it up better than the dismissive response of cricket chairman Brian Sellers when Raymond Illingworth asked for the

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same treatment other counties gave their players, 'Let him go then, and he can take any other bugger who feels the same way.' The modern-day Yorkshire County Cricket Club, poles apart from the dysfunctional committee-run institution described in this book, is finally returning to its former glories but the sadness is it has taken nearly half a century and so much wasted talent. The civil war whose roots lie in the glory of 1968 ripped the club apart for decades.

The county's passion for its 'national' sport can be a strength and a weakness, making the highs higher and the lows lower. Between 1968 and 1986 it too often brought the worst out of the club, its players and supporters. 'It was like a serial war,' admits Bryan Stott, who opened the batting for Yorkshire from 1952 to 1963 and served on the committee between 1982 and 1993. '[It was] very, very upsetting when you knew how good it could be for the players. I feel really sorry for the lads that had to play cricket for us at that time. You need all the support you can get when you play for Yorkshire because you've got some super-critical spectators. If they think you're an idiot, they tell you you're an idiot. It was such a disappointing time because the outcome could have been so different.'

Cricketers who had spent their lives dreaming of playing for or captaining Yorkshire would end up wishing they never had. Promising careers ended prematurely, huge amounts of potential went unfulfilled. What ought to have been a game played for fun turned into a job that made lives a misery, and not only for those directly involved. Wives and children were abused and friendships broken off; team-mates became enemies and fans turned on one another. Tens of thousands of pounds that could have been spent on cricket were frittered away in an attempt to settle old scores but all it did was widen divisions and enrich lawyers. If it was a war – and at times that word was not as far-fetched as it ought to have been – it was often war by proxies. Many of the flashpoints were laughably childish, some illegal, from colleagues refusing to speak to one another or sabotaging their team's chances of winning to secretly-taped conversations and obscene phonecalls. A committee

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loaded with experience of playing first-class cricket was swept aside by a group of supporters with none, only for some of the key figures to switch sides and launch a counter-revolution. One player rose above it with a metronomic consistency that at its best was world-class, yet Geoffrey Boycott was as passionately hated by some who were supposed to be on his side as he was loved by others. It was a period so extraordinary it could probably never be repeated, but however uncomfortable they can be at times, its stories need to be told to ensure it is not.

Even in the good times in-fighting was part of Yorkshire cricketing life but in 1968 so was winning trophies. The 1968 title was their sixth of the 1960s, taking them to 29 outright (plus one shared with Middlesex in 1949). Nearly 50 years on, Surrey's 18 is the closest any rival has got. It was not just the other counties they bested, even the Australians were beaten – by an innings and 69 runs. England needed five attempts to defeat the tourists in the 1968 Ashes, and the Australians came to Bramall Lane in July 1-0 up after two Tests. 'Yorkshire, in the field, looked an infinitely better team than the England Test one,' *Wisden* opined. 'From 1963 onwards they were probably the strongest collective unit the Championship has had,' Stott argues.

Individually the team of the 1960s wasn't as good as the team of the 1950s, nor probably the 1920s or the 1930s, but it had that special all-for-one-one-for-all approach that probably set it apart,' explains Richard Hutton, who made his debut in 1962, following in the footsteps of his father Len, who played from 1934–55. At first glance, Nash's optimism that Yorkshire's dominance could extend into the 1970s seemed well founded. For the first time in the club's history they had done a Championship double – Bob Platt's second XI winning the Minor Counties title without losing a game. 'We were far superior,' says left-arm seamer Mike Bore, who took 39 wickets in 11 matches that season.

Not everyone, though, saw as rosy a picture. As the *Yorkshire Post's* cricket correspondent since 1934, Jim Kilburn placed the bar high when judging the county's cricket team. 'Jim used to set

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his standard on Leonard [Hutton] as a batsman and Bill Bowes as a bowler,' explains Stott. 'If you didn't come up to that standard, you might just get a mention that you were in that team. If you came above that standard, you would get a mention because Jim thought you were good enough. It was accepted because Jim had seen the Yorkshire team play at that level. It was a wonderful yardstick.' Kilburn was unimpressed by what he saw in 1968. 'When the definitive history of Yorkshire cricket comes to be written the season of 1968 is not likely to form an outstanding chapter,' began his review of the campaign. 'The overall impression will be of a year without exceptional satisfaction.' He added, witheringly, 'In day-by-day, week-in, week-out performances they suggested competence, adequacy for general purposes rather than greatness.' This was essentially the team rebuilt in the late 1950s reaching the end of its natural cycle. Its average age was nearly 32 and the public, as well as the committee, were eager for fresh faces.

What Kilburn also recognised, and Nash possibly did not, was that in 1968 even the staid world of cricket was changing. In true Yorkshire style, the county's cricket club stubbornly refused to change with it. Bore recalls Fred Trueman leading 'a bit of a revolt' when the club brought in athletics coach Alan Whitehead to work on the players' sprinting skills. In 1968 bonus points were introduced for batting and bowling in an ongoing crusade to promote 'brighter cricket' and give something to play for when the British weather made draws inevitable. Even though they had earned them the 1968 pennant – second-placed Kent won one more game – Yorkshire nevertheless looked down their noses at bonus points, seemingly regarding the very idea of trying to gain them as undignified. Limited-overs cricket, another modern development many in the county disparaged, was starting to take hold and in 1970 pitches were covered, tipping the balance from bowlers to batsmen and changing the skills both required.

Most significantly for Yorkshire, 1968 was the first year counties were allowed to employ overseas professionals. Not only did they stand alone in refusing to, it would be another 23 years before they

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even permitted anyone born outside their borders to represent them. It was Yorkshire officialdom to a tee – unashamed pride and a stubborn refusal to move with the times mixed with an arrogant belief that those spawned within their boundaries made up some sort of cricketing master race. Expectant mothers would often not be allowed out of the county without some contingency to rush them back if they went into labour early. To those from further afield or not interested in cricket it might have seemed faintly ridiculous, but to the parents denying their son his birthright would have been more ludicrous.

Until the policy was relaxed in 1991, only 29 exceptions were made. Geoffrey Keighley – born in the south of France but, like his surname, of West Riding stock – was the only one after World War Two, and one of only four to play more than 20 games. Ironically, Yorkshire cricket's most dominant figure, Lord Martin Hawke, had been born prematurely in Willingham by Stow in Lincolnshire rather than the baronial seat at Wighill Park near Tadcaster. He, his 1911 successor as captain, Tiverton-born Everard Radcliffe, Capt. Ronald Stanyforth and William Harbord were given special dispensation because they were amateurs. Ces Parkin was making his debut in 1906 when it was discovered he was born 20 yards outside Yorkshire, in Eaglescliffe, County Durham. He never played for the county again. He was unlucky. It took 30 years until William Blackburn was found to have been born not in Sawley, but Clitheroe. In 1964, legendary West Indian all-rounder Garfield Sobers played for Yorkshire on the Bermuda leg of a post-season tour which also took in Canada and the United States of America but there was no question of the county budging when it came to competitive cricket, so in 1968 he joined Nottinghamshire. While Yorkshire were not prepared to look 20 yards away, their 16 first-class rivals could go anywhere on the globe in search of talent. In 1971, 43 overseas professionals played county cricket.

Fortunately for Yorkshire, in the 1960s they had world-class players of their own, not least 't'greatest fast bowler who ever lived' as Trueman liked to call himself. By 1968, however, he was having

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to face up to being simply t'greatest bowler who ever lived. *Wisden's* report of his debut at Cambridge University in 1949 would go on to be a standing joke. The bible of cricket described him as 'an off-spinner' despite taking his maiden wicket with a bouncer fended to short leg. Trueman's pace was as much a matter of personal pride as his wicket tally, but by 1968 time was catching up with him. Perhaps but perhaps not tongue in cheek, Brian Close suggested it was the bowler's doing that towards the end of his career *Wisden* incorrectly recorded Trueman as being born in 1932, not 1931. He was still as skilful as ever but increasingly more reliant on his force of personality and sharp cricketing brain than the even sharper pace of years gone by.

One thing that never left Trueman was his charisma. Chris Old encountered it as soon as he walked into a Yorkshire changing room, at Bramall Lane in 1966. 'There was nobody there,' Old, AKA 'The 12th Man', recalls. 'All the pegs were filled. There was a newspaper in the corner with a pair of feet coming out of the bottom and the odd puff of smoke coming from it. I put my bag down quite loudly and Fred Trueman lowered the paper and said, "Who the bloody hell are you?" When I explained he said, "They're all over at the nets. There's a bloke called Boycott there, you go bowl at him because I'm not!" That was my introduction to a Yorkshire dressing room.'

At Middlesbrough in May 1968, Yorkshire dropped Trueman. His brushes with authority and habit for cutting it fine or even turning up late for matches had cost him his place before, but it was the first time since his junior days he had been left out for cricketing reasons. The 37-year-old's place was taken by Old, a fraction over half his age. 'Fred was getting tired,' explains Stott. Richard Hutton, a team-mate and lifelong admirer, puts it more bluntly, 'I think he realised with his bowling he was a busted flush.' Trueman was only seventh in Yorkshire's 1968 bowling averages, 32nd nationally. What hurt him most about being dropped was that it was the opposition captain, Warwickshire's Alan Smith, not Close who broke the news to him. Throughout his life Trueman's relationship with authority was rarely comfortable. It is the main reason why, despite being

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the first bowler to 300 Test wickets, he only played in 67 of the 120 matches between his England debut and final appearance. The chips he had on either shoulder sat as uneasily with the men from Marylebone Cricket Club who ran the game as his willingness to speak his mind, and they were small-minded enough let it to influence their team selections.

Yorkshire had been just as good at making Trueman feel underappreciated. In 1951 he was only awarded his county cap, a symbol he was now a *bona fide* first-team player with a pay rise to boot, the Monday after asking captain Norman Yardley for it in light of interest from Lancashire, Sussex and Surrey. When Yorkshire, the only first-class county not to send him a congratulatory telegram after taking 250 Test wickets, presented him with a silver tea service to mark his 300th – then unprecedented – he asked them to take it back and inscribe it. These things rankled with Trueman. In 1967 the county aggravated him further.

After 20 years' service the bowler had qualified for a second benefit year, reward for his loyalty which would help set him up for retirement. Yorkshire had annoyed Trueman by delaying his first by a couple of years because others were ahead of him in the queue, and he missed out on a second when Ken Taylor was chosen instead for 1968. Close's suggestion of a £1,000 thank-you – a fraction of what Trueman would have earned in a benefit – was also rejected. Being left out at Acklam Park and having to face up to life as 'only' a fast-medium bowler pushed him to the edge. Trueman wanted to bow out in style before he was cynically pushed aside like so many past Yorkshire heroes. 'I do not want to play as a second-rater and would rather go now than remain on sufferance,' he wrote when announcing his retirement. First, though, he had to magic up a high to bow out on.

'I've always said the win over Australia was Fred's greatest moment in the whole of his illustrious career,' says Hutton. 'He led us to not only a win, but a win by an innings. I took the new ball with Fred and in my first over of the second innings I yorked Bill Lawry, which caused Fred a huge amount of joy because Lawry had scored

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[58] runs in the first. Fred, I think, saw him as a thorn in our side and he didn't particularly like bowling at left-handers, so his relief and joy when I got rid of him in the first over was unbounded. Some 25 years later I was somewhat galled to see the *Daily Telegraph*, who were doing flashbacks to great sporting moments. Fred was quoted *ad infinitum*. At one point he said, "I knew as soon as I got rid of Bill Lawry, we were through 'em." I very hastily put pen and paper together. It was typical of Fred to grab the credit!

Trueman called the win, only Yorkshire's second against the Australians, 'One of the greatest days of my life,' demonstrating inspirational leadership, brilliant fielding and shrewd captaincy deputising for the injured Close. Trueman pressed for a declaration half an hour before lunch, then took six wickets in the match (Hutton claimed four and Illingworth eight) and some brilliant catches including a one-handed effort to remove Doug Walters as the Australians were bowled out twice. He even ran Ian Chappell out from extra cover. It just highlighted to Trueman what he had known all along – he was cut out for this captaincy lark. Yorkshire won four and drew the other three matches he took charge of in 1968. In all he led his county 31 times, winning 16 and losing four.

Having ended the season a champion, in November Trueman informed Yorkshire's president Sir William Worsley he was retiring. Worsley tried to talk him out of it, arguing Trueman had plenty of good years left in him – two, the player reckoned – adding, 'We're holding a meeting next week and there's every likelihood you will be offered the captaincy.' It was the first Trueman had heard of it. As far as he was concerned, 'It is more coveted than the captaincy of England!'

The offer had come too late. Trueman wrote a column for the *Sunday People*, and not for the last time it would be a fly in Yorkshire's ointment. As Trueman spoke to Worsley that Saturday, the early editions were coming off the presses bearing exclusive news of his retirement.

The committee decided to give the club's greatest fast bowler a farewell present of his choosing. Trueman picked a Charles II silver

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cruet set and Yorkshire bought it for £220, but informed him they had only set aside £100, and he would have to pay the difference. 'There was no ceremony,' Trueman recalled in his autobiography. 'No drinks in the committee room prior to being officially presented with the gift. A committeeman simply handed it over to me one day when I was at Headingley. When I got home and took the cruet set out of the box, I discovered they'd not had it inscribed.'

Yorkshire had seen countless outstanding players retire only for someone to emerge in their place. In 1968 they were confident it would happen again. 'I was the new Fred Trueman!' exclaims Old, approaching his 20th birthday when the news broke. 'He was 5ft 10in, as wide as he was tall, and there was me 6ft 3in and like a pencil, so we looked exactly alike! Fred's was always regarded as a superb bowling action, mine was always regarded as a good bowling action, so it was a natural thing that I was exactly like Fred but I was totally different. One of Fred's comments was that I was the only person who had to run around in the shower to get wet. I think I was 12 stone wet through. Towards the best years of my career I'd be two-and-a-half to three stone heavier because the muscles had grown, the strength was there.

'In my first couple of games I was seen as a batsman who bowled but I could see that Fred was going to retire and I looked around at who the opposition were as quicker bowlers to take his place. That seemed to be the area in which I could get into the side quickly and the batting would help. But I couldn't bowl the overs Fred had. I bowled well for a certain length of time, but towards the end of the day it was a struggle. I hate to admit it in a way but before I started playing I was more a fan of [Lancashire's] Brian Statham than Fred Trueman. I didn't see the point of running up 25, 30 yards every ball and watching the batsman pick the bat up and watch it go past, whereas with Statham they had to play every ball. That was the type of bowler I wanted to be.'

Had Trueman been the only departure, Old and Co. might well have muddled through. Ken Taylor, a talented artist and former professional footballer, also retired at the end of the season, aged 33.

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'It was Ken's time,' says Stott. Only three Championship centuries in the previous seven seasons made Taylor's runs replaceable but with three Test caps and 12,864 runs for Yorkshire his departure further diluted the pool of dressing-room experience. By far the biggest loss was Ray Illingworth's, and again Yorkshire intransigence was to blame for one of the most disastrous mistakes in the club's 150-plus years.

By 1968 Yorkshire were the only first-class county who refused to give their players contracts, only match fees under an annual gentleman's agreement which, bizarrely, ended during the season, on 31 July. Not only did their players lack security, their pay did not reflect the fact they played for the country's best team even at a time when wages across the sport were low. The committee which ran the club regarded playing for Yorkshire as a privilege and exploited the fact most players saw it the same way. In 1968, Illingworth was hoping for a little better. Converted from a medium-pacer to an off-spinner by former Yorkshire bowler Bill Bowes, Illingworth turned himself into a very good batsman, bowler and fielder, but it was as a thinker on the game that he was one of the all-time greats. He had always been aware of his value, Yorkshire forever complacent about it. Like Trueman, Illingworth had only got his cap by threatening to leave – in his case in 1955 – and by 1968, aged 36 with 30 England caps, and a wife and two daughters to think of, it was security more than money he was seeking. The trouble was, he was up against the man he called the 'King of Yorkshire Cricket'.

The uncompromising Brian Sellers became Yorkshire's vice-captain for 1932 but thanks to Frank Greenwood's business commitments he led the side in 29 matches that year. Yorkshire did not lose any. It was no surprise when the cricket committee headed by his father, former player Arthur Sellers Snr, gave him the top job for the following season. Sellers oversaw six Championship titles between 1933 and 1948, joining the club's general committee in 1946. In 1959 he became chairman of the cricket sub-committee, cautioning it would take three years to overturn Surrey's dominance and win back the title. They did it that season. Ted Lester played

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for Yorkshire from 1945 to 1956 and had a spell as second-team captain before becoming scorer in 1962 until 1988. ‘The side just before the war was very dependent on Brian Sellers, who was not a great cricketer but a magnificent leader of men,’ he explained when I spoke to him before his death in 2015. ‘When Sellers captained the side there was only one person in charge – “You do what I say!” If you didn’t, you were on your bike. It was a hard game playing under Brian Sellers, but he got the best out of everybody.’

In whatever role he held, Sellers was always passionately devoted to bringing Yorkshire success, and there was no let-up in the sergeant major approach when he swapped the dressing room for the committee room. ‘Sellers wasn’t called “Crackerjack” for nothing,’ points out Richard Hutton. ‘He could be very crude. When I was having a particularly bad spell he hauled me up and I remember him saying to me, “You call yourself a quick bowler? A quick bowler needs three things – length, pace and direction. You’ve got bugger all!” That didn’t leave my soul with much hope.’

‘In a [1964] match at Portsmouth in which I got five wickets in one innings and we won the match, the heel fell off my boot as I was bowling and I finished the job in borrowed boots. When we got back to Headingley the next day Sellers hauled me into the office and said, “I hear you had to borrow a pair of boots? As a quick bowler you should always be travelling with two pairs of boots.” I found it hard to afford one! Not a word of congratulation about the wickets and winning the match, but a bollocking for not having a back-up pair of boots! That’s how it was. There was a fear element. If you were in the field and Sellers suddenly appeared on the ground the word would go round and we went up a couple of notches, licking the palms of our hands, to show how keen we were.’

In 1963 with Close, Trueman and Phil Sharpe playing for England against West Indies, Illingworth captained Yorkshire four times, winning two matches comprehensively and drawing one. So far down the pecking order and in demand with England himself, five years on he had not taken charge again. The idea of challenging himself as captain was tempting, and he was aware other counties

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were prepared to offer that opportunity as well as a contract. Perhaps as a result of Sellers's brutally autocratic style, Illingworth was also surprisingly insecure.

'Geoff Cope was Illingworth's replacement when he was away with England and in that season Geoff finished at the top of the national [bowling] averages,' Hutton explains. 'From the bowling point of view it felt as if we'd never been without Illingworth. I think Illingworth felt as if his future might be in jeopardy, which was a strange thing for him to feel because he was almost a regular in the England side and a vital part of Yorkshire's machinery. But he insisted on a contract and was told by the committee, "We don't give contracts and you can either take it or leave it." So he left it. Presumably Yorkshire wanted to keep the situation as flexible as possible to get rid of players who weren't pulling their weight because there would be such a queue of other players waiting to get into the team. There were so many cricketers being produced by Yorkshire at the time that they could virtually populate the whole of the Leicestershire team! The future crops weren't quite as effective, as it turned out.'

As the starting point of a negotiation he hoped would end in a two-year contract, Illingworth asked for three. He was confident he could perform for that long but, having done some coaching alongside Arthur Mitchell, reasoned if he lost his place he could contribute off the field for the remainder. 'He thought he'd got several of the other players to agree with him but when it came to it nobody backed him up!' says Old. There were no negotiations. Sellers refused to yield to what a club statement laughably referred to as 'a pistol at the head'. At Bradford Park Avenue in August Illingworth handed in his letter of resignation and waited to hear what the committee would make of it at their next meeting. He had good reason to believe they might be sympathetic, but the matter never got that far thanks to Sellers. Illingworth reckoned it was a quarter of an hour after he handed in the letter that Bill Bowes, covering the team for the *Yorkshire Evening Post*, informed the spinner he had been asked to speak to him on behalf of the press

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about his departure. Illingworth's sympathetic team-mates, led by their captain Close, tried to persuade him not to go. He had hoped it would not come to this but was no more willing to back down than Sellers. Illingworth joined Leicestershire as captain and doubled his wages.

The man earmarked as Illingworth's successor was not the safe bet Yorkshire hoped. Cope would play 267 times in all competitions but in difficult circumstance he was unable to meet the lofty standards of the man he replaced. The off-spinner won three England Test caps (and two in one-day internationals) in 1977/78 but in terms of his bowling average, 1967 (when he finished second nationally) and 1968 would be the best seasons of his first-class career. Even before Illingworth left, rumours were circulating that Cope illegally bent his arm when sending down his quicker delivery. The accusation would blight and, when it re-emerged after bans in 1972 and 1978, end his career. While Cope floundered slightly, Illingworth flourished. Less than 12 months after being fourth in line for the Yorkshire captaincy, he was England skipper. In 1970/71 he led the first England side to regain the Ashes in Australia for nearly 40 years. In 1972 he guided Leicestershire to their first major silverware, in 1975 their maiden Championship. In his ten seasons as captain Leicestershire, a county with no history to speak of when it came to winning trophies, claimed five. Illingworth's personal success mirrored Yorkshire's decline – and for what? By the time he picked up his first silverware with Leicestershire, Yorkshire players were on contracts anyway.

'Illy was such a great mentor,' says Hutton ruefully. 'With hindsight the situation could have been so easily avoided and that would have made a tremendous difference. Without that there would not have been all this nonsense that followed.' Even the club's official history called the decision, 'A total catastrophe, a move that cost Yorkshire more dearly than almost any other.' Sellers's intransigence had sown the seeds for decades of decline.