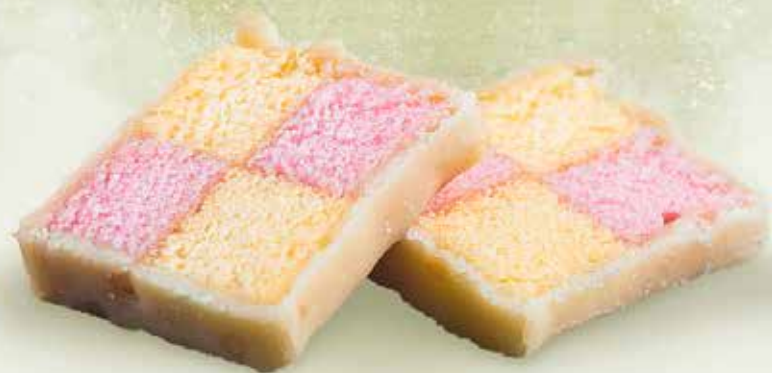


Of
BATTENBERG,
BOMBAY AND BLAG

*Tales of a Club
Cricketer Gone Rogue*



Vic Mills

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Gully Boy

FRESH-FACED, LONG-LEGGED, gym-skirted, and not long out of teacher training college, you may have an inkling where this is heading. If so, you'd be wrong. More inclined to sugar beet than sexual revolution, the 1960s rather passed Lincolnshire by. Evidence of this is that the arrival of our new gym mistress, Miss Chatterton, caused little if any groin-stirring among the rag-tag assembly of 11-year-olds. We cared little for her fresh face, gym skirt and long legs that particular May morning, but were drawn instead to the wicket sets she was carrying. Adhering strictly to the then sporting calendar, the weekend's FA Cup Final brought a civilised end to the football season and heralded the start of a summer of cricket.

A child of the '60s, knee- and navel-related matters paled when compared to the burning desire to kick with my left foot (still to be achieved) and land my off breaks on a length (patchy at best). That said, Miss Chatterton and Westgate Junior School did more in a week and a half than 30 years of club cricket by providing me with the one cricketing stat that I truly cherish. Under her watchful eye I batted undefeated during that period, encompassing several PE lessons and a few hours at the crease. This stat remained with me for decades. Until, that is, I happened upon Jack Fingleton's book *The Immortal Victor Trumper*.

The fact that Trumper and I share a Christian name is neither here nor there. That I lived for many summers in Sydney's Surry Hills close to the adjoining suburb of Paddington and Trumper's family home is, again, nothing more than coincidence. In conversation at the Sydney Cricket Ground one lunch interval, cricket historian and writer David Frith and I speculated whether there might still be a desk, long since consigned to storeroom or cellar, at Crown Street Public School with the initials VT carved into its wooden ink-stained work surface. Had this been a lengthy rain delay and not luncheon then the short walk to Crown Street was a distinct possibility. Of his early schooldays, Fingleton recalls that Trumper batted undefeated for FIVE WEEKS at Crown Street Public. His father's first question as the young Trumper entered their Paddington home, 'Still batting?' The reply, music to the ears of father and son, was affirmative, 'Still batting.'

In providing me with a long-cherished memory, Miss Chatterton was also responsible for a far more controversial piece of history that would take another 14 years before bursting into and on to the collective sporting psyche. It was the policy of Westgate Junior at that time to occasionally relocate to the sports fields of the nearby Bishop Grossteste College to participate in the very English game of rounders. Having already displayed a degree of hand-eye coordination, rounders offered me a further opportunity to put bat on ball. While all very promising, it was destined not to last.

The problem, and a painful one at that, arose post-swing. Unfortunately for me, but more so Miss Chatterton, I proceeded - the ball disappearing into the outfield, and me haring to first base - to blindly hurl the truncheon-shaped bat behind me, in the process occasioning a nasty thwack on the ankles of the nearby teacher in her role as umpire. Unimpressed

and a tad sore, she let it slide and the game continued. When next at the plate the same scene played out: I hit the ball, hared off to first base, only to hear the soft thud and accompanying groan as the bat cannoned into ankles protected only by a pair of functional white gym socks and plimsolls. The third time I barely made it off the plate before being summarily dispatched to the sidelines, there to sit cross-legged, pink with rage and regret, and ruing the consequences for self and team. Fourteen years ahead of her time, Miss Chatterton had issued the first and probably only red card in the history of rounders.

* * *

Easter 1967: as if the prototype Adrian Mole, I am 15 and a half years old, have zero qualifications, and am about to leave Rosemary Secondary Modern School. On the plus side: I'm not down a mine, up a chimney, or working long hours, for starvation wages, in a Lancashire cotton mill. I also had, although unbeknownst to me, someone fighting my corner. Gerry Knox was a music, history, and occasional games teacher at Rosemary. He'd tried, but ultimately failed, to enlighten and enhance our lives with Gilbert and Sullivan. A commendable effort, but he might have had more luck with Cowdrey and Dexter or Trueman and Statham (three little maidens?).

The previous summer he'd stopped me in the corridor and congratulated me on scoring a fifty in a match against St Giles School. A match it may have been, but the fixture, pitting tough secondary modern against frighteningly tough secondary modern, was about as far away from the Eton and Harrow match as you could possibly imagine. I remember little of the innings itself other than a straight six that clattered into the gym wall at deep long-off. The same gym that months earlier - in an inter-school after-hours basketball match - had

to have its doors bolted and windows locked to keep local ruffians out. A timely act, but it didn't stop the barrage of abuse or our growing fears for the journey home.

There was a degree of payback in the fifty as, two years earlier, as a pencil-thin 12-year-old centre-half for Rosemary's under-13 team we'd played St Giles in a school cup final on Lincoln City's St Andrew's training ground. At full time the score stood at 1-1. We wanted a replay. They wanted extra time. Extra time it was. We lost 5-1! The St Giles umpire that afternoon was teacher Fred Green. He generously offered 'well batted, lad' when I reached 50. Years later Fred joined the Lindum Cricket Club and became a resolute opener for the seconds. A dedicated counter of runs, it was not beyond him to cross-examine the scorers during the tea interval or at the close of play if he thought they'd missed a single or two. When not wielding a Senior Counties bat in the manner of his hero Tom Graveney, he could be seen in clubhouse or pavilion smoking Senior Service and hunched over the *Daily Telegraph* crossword. I used to irritate the living daylight out of him by wandering over and explaining that six down in every crossword (and this is true) was rattlesnake otherwise they simply didn't work.

In the last week of term before my Easter departure, Gerry sought me out and said I was to meet him at the Lindum Sports Ground on the coming Saturday. He was refereeing a rugby match and wanted to see me after the game. With handshakes and three cheers on the final whistle, players and officials made their slow, muddied way back to the Nissen hut and waiting bath. Barely off the pitch, Gerry spotted me, called me over, and introduced me to one of the Lincoln players, Ray Ingram, a local solicitor, and Lindum Cricket Club secretary. I stayed on until both had bathed and changed. We talked again outside the clubhouse. Gerry explained that

I had just left school, was a promising cricketer, and in need of a club.

More than provide me with an introduction to the club, Gerry went the extra yard and actually paid my first year's subscriptions of ten shillings. Years later, and privy to the club secretary's files, I found the actual piece of paper detailing that meeting. The note is signed by the club secretary and dated 10 April 1967. Fifty-five years on it would be fair to say that this simple yet lasting act of kindness is still paying dividends. A couple of weeks later I attended my first net practice. The *Lincolnshire Echo* just happened to be on hand to record the session and duly photographed the young off-spinner in action. I hope Gerry saw the picture.

* * *

Lindum Cricket Club in April 1967 was an engaging mix of ancient and modern. The new clubhouse was a joy to behold with plans already drawn for the second phase which would include tea room, changing rooms, showers, squash courts and gym. These would be a year or two coming, but most were happy to have a new clubhouse in which to chorus and carouse. The ancient came in the form of an old Nissen hut that housed a shower unit for those so inclined. As difficult as it is to comprehend, personal hygiene back then ran to little more than a bar of Lifebuoy soap and the club towel. The shortfall was aided and abetted by a daring blitzkrieg of talcum powder and Old Spice deodorant.

The jewel in the Lindum crown, albeit fast-fading, was the old-style wooden pavilion. The more charitable would say it had character; those less so that it should be put out of its misery. Having survived Hitler, its main threat now appeared to be dry rot and reluctant drains. A devotee of the faded and fusty, it was love at first sight. The uncomplaining

carpets, arthritic chairs, rust-stained washbasin, and feisty floorboards meant it was the ghost of cricket past. In its pomp, the pavilion housed changing rooms, kitchen, bar, and tea room. The bar had been lost to the new clubhouse, but the rest was still functioning albeit wheezing and watery-eyed.

While 1967 marked the start of my playing days, I had been a regular Lindum attendee for the previous four years. With sandwiches, cake, crisps, and a drink in my school satchel, I'd begin the long march through Newport cemetery, down Nettleham Road, into The Grove and finally through the car park entrance. With vantage point selected, and play under way, afternoons would melt into weekends and weekends into long, idyllic summers. Still several years away from league cricket, matches were self-styled friendlies and, if the side batting first had not been bowled out, required a sporting declaration of sorts on the part of the captain. Friendlies they may have been, but the games, featuring county second XI and minor counties players, were not without edge.

The fixture list in those days would see us heading over to Nottingham most weekends or further afield to Sheffield and Derby. These were always hard-fought games, against good opposition, on picturesque grounds. Entry into the South Lincs & Border League in the early 1970s, while a necessity for the club's survival, brought an abrupt and somewhat sad end to many of these long-established fixtures. A regular feature in the late 1960s was Lindum's annual six-a-side tournament. Local clubs and village sides were invited to participate in a competition consisting of four groups, three teams in each, with semi-finals and final to be held early evening. On a sunny Bank Holiday Monday there was no better place to be.

To encourage big hitting – an incentive years ahead of its time – the groundsman reduced the boundary size. To further embolden pursuit of the maximum, a bottle of beer was

awarded to the batsman for every six hit; a tactic that the IPL would do well to adopt as they look to narrow the gap between bat and ball. The day was also a much-needed fundraiser. As befits a club day, there was a raffle, food and drink stalls, and a lucky programme draw. On what would turn out to be a memorable Monday, I was fortunate to bag the latter's first prize of a transistor radio. A pivotal moment in my cricketing education, the transistor was immediately tuned to *Test Match Special* and there it stayed!

This was vintage *TMS* in every sense of the word with classic commentary courtesy of John Arlott, E.W. (Jim) Swanton, Alan Gibson, and the early chirpings of the Lesser Spotted Brian Johnston. It was still Johnston in those days and not Johnners. Indeed, the style of commentary was chalk and cheese to the vaudeville of today. This was austerity airtime; a simpatico union of lbp (language, binoculars, and pipe) with lbw. The prospect of cake or clotted cream entering the commentary box was still a decade or more away. The picture-painting all the better for an absence of sponge, scone, and slice.

* * *

I made my Lindum debut on 29 April 1967 in a first XI fixture at Grantham. The town was still some years away from being voted the most boring in Britain by the *Today* programme listeners. It was also still untainted by anything remotely Thatcher-esque. The cricket club shared its ground in those days with Grantham Town Football Club. The football pitch was at the far end of the paddock and ran east to west. The cricket square nudged a relatively straight touchline and was north to south. Behind each goal and along the northern edge of the ground stood dilapidated stands, far from grand, which housed Town's faithful few. Not everything, however, was

breeze-block bland. A paint-peeling hoarding, as if offering insight into Grantham's Tory roots, advertised dressed crab. During that first afternoon in the field, and as much as my concentration levels were focused on play, I couldn't help but wonder what on earth was dressed crab? Dressed how? Why? And for what?

As the junior member of the XI I was called upon to do very little during the innings. I didn't bowl and, positioned out of the firing line for long stretches of play, was left ample time to consider the fate of crabs, dressed or otherwise. Not that I was completely idle. Towards the end of the Grantham innings, I was walking in from mid-on when the batsman launched an Exocet straight drive with its coordinates locked firmly on the bowler. Heroically, and without perhaps quite thinking it through, he planted a sizeable right boot in its path. The ball – after contact with ankle bone and following an impressive scream that would have warmed the cockles of Edvard Munch – ricocheted to my right. Instinctively I hurled myself crab-like down and across, managing to arrest its progress with a juvenile claw. Returning the ball to our now hobbling bowler, I dusted myself down and thought no more of the incident.

This was not the case in the pavilion bar after the game. In fact, I walked straight into a discussion about the very episode itself. Although time distorts memory, I believe it was the first time the Lindum players had seen a fielder – the folly of youth – dive to stop a ball. Although never mentioned, I suspect that some saw my actions as not really in the spirit of the game as it deprived the batsman of full value for his shot. We were still some years away from the fielding revolution championed by Derek Randall, Ross Edwards, and Jonty Rhodes. Colin Bland roamed the cover region for South Africa and could hit the stumps with a direct throw seven

or eight times out of ten, but I can't ever recall him diving to stop a ball.

Fielding was a far simpler skillset back then. A stop was required if the ball was hit straight at a fielder; either side and a bend or stretch was expected as a sign or signal of intent. If beyond the realm of bend or stretch then pursuit was the order of the day. But on no account was a fielder expected to throw himself at the ball in order to prevent accumulation or gain. Of course, the added bonus to such an approach was the fact that, with limited contact to grass and outfield, it was possible for a pair of fielding flannels to last an entire season without recourse to twin-tub or Tide. It would be too sweeping a generalisation to say that this single piece of fielding brought a premature end to the careers of several of those watching, but there was certainly a degree of concern in the bar that night. Had they witnessed the future? More to the point perhaps, did they want to be part of it?

* * *

The outdoor nets that springtime were situated about 30 or so yards from the clubhouse steps, flush with the tarmac car park, and facing the square. This had the twin benefits of being within a short sprint of the clubhouse or car should the weather turn inclement and also within easy reach of liquid refreshment. Not that rehydration was a high priority in those far-off cricketing days as what focus we possessed was firmly centred on mastering the intricacies of bat and ball. The positioning of the nets proved absolutely crucial that late spring as before the end of the month we were snowed off! And there the nets stayed for several years until a flurry of top edges, all of which landed on the roof or bonnet of nearby cars, brought a hasty relocation to the far side of the ground.

Hard as it is to imagine looking at the ground nowadays, in 1967 the northern and eastern edges were flanked by towering elm trees, all of which sadly went the way of the chainsaw as Dutch Elm disease took hold. The high-end housing estate that today occupies a significant part of the eastern side of the ground was a paddock back then occupied by an old grey mare. The horse was in no danger of injury until the day John Harris took it upon himself to bludgeon a quickfire century against a strong Peterborough side. To this day it remains the best amateur innings I've ever seen. Not a graceful knock of timing and technique but a brutal, violent innings that had the grey horse constantly on the hoof as Harris peppered the paddock with furious flat sixes.

Seen by many around that time, and even still today perhaps, as the club for toffs, the Lindum suffered from this thinking for all my playing days. This was fostered by the fact that many of its members were local businessmen or from well-connected families. Add in Lindum's winter sports of rugby and hockey and you could understand the reasoning. Indeed, with the ground ringed by spectators for an Albion Cup Final we would always work on the fact that around three-quarters were there to watch Lindum lose. The most picturesque ground in both city and county, the Lindum could easily have passed for a first-class venue. Appearances, however, can be deceptive. For a quick scan of Lindum's balance sheet – the club barely making ends meet – told a different story. In fact, we were totally dependent on the six-a-side and minor counties games to balance the books. Indeed, in my second season at the Lindum the committee came up with the idea of holding a jumble sale in the still standing, but only just, pavilion. With leaflets delivered to surrounding houses, players could be seen in the weeks leading up to the event scouring the neighbourhood for anything we might recycle as jumble. The

event proved a roaring success with a long queue formed well before the doors opened. Hardly the stuff of toffs.

A keen Lindum cricketer in the 1950s and early '60s was the then Lincoln City FC manager, Bill Anderson. Every August, as part of their pre-season training, Bill would bring his Red Imps squad to the ground to challenge a club XI. This too brought a large crowd keen to see their heroes with bat and ball along with the chance of an early autograph. So, a busy, colourful summer for the newly arrived 15-year-old and a lot to come to terms with from a first season of senior cricket. I remain indebted to the many players who took the time to improve my game, to offer advice, and to generally point me in the right direction. In the interests of balance, it would be remiss of me not to mention those Lindum characters who were only too keen to point me – God bless 'em! – in the opposite direction.

* * *

As hard as it is to imagine, there was a time when a club cricketer's lot did not revolve around mobile phone, bluetooth, iPad, and internet connection. But how to inform a player of his selection if not by text, social media, or web page? A good question and one that involves a variety of components, not least imagination and left field. What has to be factored in at this point, and again this may seem astonishing when compared to the situation today, is that few players in the late 1960s had a home telephone on which to be contacted. Back then, the person assigned to collect match fees would also be tasked with noting availability for the following weekend. In the grand scheme of all things selectorial, this scrap of paper was crucial. For depending on where both the first and seconds were playing on a Sunday, it might be possible for the respective captains to hold their weekly selection meeting that

night. If not within striking distance, then selection would be held in the clubhouse on the Monday evening following the latest net practice.

With captains and, on occasion, vice-captains in attendance, their number would be augmented by the honorary team secretary, a role occupied in the summer of 1967 by none other than Lindum legend 'Big Jim' Quincey. During a 64-year association with club and ground, Quincey turned his hand to many roles from player to committee man to scorer to groundsman before moving upstairs to president. With selection points chewed over, and fates decided, a list of the various weekend XIs would be pinned to the noticeboard in the clubhouse entrance. But what of those who couldn't make net practice and didn't have a telephone? By way of backup, it was then the job of the secretary, with support from the massed ranks of the General Post Office, to inform players of their selection by means of – POSTCARDS!

For the record, historical or otherwise, postmen were delivering twice a day in the late 1960s and were, near as damn it, as regular as clockwork. Which was one of the reasons why, along with your dustmen and paperboy, that postmen were considered worthy with the onset of December of a Christmas tip. It's worth mentioning too that there were no first- or second-class stamps in those days. The GPO compensated by the fact that, with a legion of postmen at their disposal, deliveries would, within perhaps a small margin of error, arrive the next day. Detailing the opposition, venue, meet time, and whether the first or second XI, the postcards would come complete with a threepenny (d as opposed to p) stamp along with a youthful picture of Her Majesty.

As with all such systems, especially those that rely on both paperwork and outside agencies, the Lindum's method of Presence by Postcard left itself wide open to cock-up and

calamity. This would manifest itself on a Friday evening in frenzied (press button B) phone calls from players yet to be informed through one medium or another of their selection, and club captains who feared, rightly so on occasion, that they may be setting off for a difficult away match with fewer than the required 11 players. If it was a home game then there was always someone who could be called upon to make up the numbers. This was not the case, however, should you find yourself already heading down the A46 to Nottingham and facing the prospect of a long afternoon of leather chasing.

As to the season's cost for such a system, I can report that the Lindum CC final accounts for the year ending 30 September 1967 included a figure (for those who still function in pounds, shillings and pence) of £17-12-5 for postage and stationery. This from a balance sheet registering the total expenditure for the year of £587-17-8. As a sign of the times, I can further reveal from the same yellowing and dog-eared annual report that the expenditure included the sum of £15 for an end-of-season dinner for the tea ladies and a £5 gratuity for the groundsman. Proof, if such were needed, that as valuable as players and postcards happened to be, they were just part of the support cast when set against tea ladies and groundsman.

* * *

It was a simpler world back then, even the world of club cricket. Fifteen and in the first XI, the game was not without standards, rightly so, and not least on the dress front. Evidence this with a friend and club colleague promoted to the firsts after a seven-fer in the seconds at Burghley Park. Not standing on ceremony, he promptly took a five-fer on debut against a strong Peterborough side. Approached by the club captain after being applauded off the pitch, and expecting further praise for his efforts, he was simply informed that if he wished

to play for the first XI next week he would need to clean his boots!

Thus it was that the first job on a sunny Saturday morning, having first breakfasted on marmalade sandwiches and tea, was the cleaning of boots. The ritual was to span three decades and two continents, but mercifully not the same pair of boots. My cricket bag was still an anorexic affair in those days. Not one of today's monsters that can only be manoeuvred or reversed thanks to a pair of training wheels. If only running between the wickets came with a similar pair. Expecting nor deserving to bat any higher than 11, or ten if the skipper was in a charitable mood, I did not have the need for a bat or pads and thus, should the need arise, was more than happy to delve into the bag of 'club kit' to find the necessary. With helmets not an option in those far off days, one simply ducked, took a stroll to square leg, or prepared for A&E.

But boots, being virtually the one compulsory item, were a must as was the cleaning. I would thus troop from kitchen to garden, boots in hand, together with a tube of Meltonian whitener. Dispensed through a small sponge pad, the ritual whitening had to wait until dirt or mud was removed from the studs followed by a wipe with a wet cloth. Liberally doused in whitener, the boots would then be left to bake in the morning sun. When of sufficient merit with bat to warrant a pair of pads these too would be sponged free of marks and scuffs before whitening.

Back inside the house, and to avoid any last-minute panic, shirt and flannels were located and laid out ready for packing. With that, the pre-match ritual was complete. With the morning still young, I headed along Newport and into Bailgate. Around 100 yards past the cathedral at the top of Steep Hill stood a row of second-hand bookshops. The sort of establishments that announced entry courtesy of a bell

above the door. And there I would stay for the next hour or so digging around the shelves, threatening lungs with mustiness and mildew, in search of treasure. Whether propped, piled, stacked or free-standing, the treasure was there albeit that pursuit might occasion the odd close encounter with small furry animals, dust mites or a trawl or two of silverfish.

Once located there was the shiver of anticipation as you thumbed the inside cover in search of the obligatory pencilled price. Some of the finds remain with me today: the autobiography of Neville Cardus with torn and sellotaped dust cover published in 1947, Charlie Macartney's *My Cricketing Days* circa 1930, *Playfair Cricket Annuals* from the 1950s, and two lovingly preserved publications – *How to Watch Cricket 1949* by John Arlott and of similar vintage *Armchair Cricket (a BBC guide to cricket commentaries)* by Brian Johnston and Roy Webber. The jewels in the crown, however, remain Douglas Jardine's account of Bodyline, *In Quest of the Ashes*, and to provide balance if nothing else, 'Tiger' O'Reilly's travels with the 1948 Australian tourists, *Cricket Conquest*. Treasure, real treasure!

With the clock nudging towards midday, and content with the morning's swag, it was time to tear myself from must and mite and head home for lunch and then the walk to the Lindum ground. If the morning's booty was too exciting to wait then I'd toss one of the finds into my cricket bag for the hours of inactivity until called upon to field, bat or bowl. Simple, sunny, summer Saturdays, these. No manic callisthenics before the start of play. No team huddle. No mass outbreaks of high-fiving. No boorish chi'acking of opponents. And no tattoos, sunglasses, or earrings. Just unfussy flannelled friends and the English game at its most pure. As for what might pass as cause for concern? Unfurrow the brow and look no further than a temperamental tea urn.

* * *

Five minutes before the Sunday tea interval during the third England vs Pakistan Test at the Ageas Bowl in 2020, *Test Match Special's* Jonathan Agnew stated that Joe Root had dispensed with a gully, confirming moments later that the position is now out of favour. Sense at last. Sense at last. Thank God Almighty we have sense at last. Apologies to the late Dr King for a slight corruption of his words, but the news from Southampton sent shockwaves through every strata of the game, nowhere more so than at club level where many cricketers still bear the scars, both mental and physical, from a far-too-close encounter with gully on entering senior cricket.

As a pale youth of 15 I recall being advised by the first XI skipper that, along with the intricacies of bat and ball, I should seek out a specialist fielding position and make it my own. With that he promptly dispatched me to gully – née Shell Alley – for the remainder of the season. The cosy, comfortable, leather on willow impression of gully is of innocuous looping edges gleefully seized upon by the innocent and untainted. In reality, gully can only stand and ponder the Meaning of Life as the batsman rocks back and unleashes a full-bloodied, pigeon-scattering square cut that lasers past (or through) him before crashing into boundary marker or picket fence.

The cricketing equivalent of a Victorian child chimney sweep: gully fielders are young, work in a confined space between fourth slip and cover point, and are constantly under threat from the proximity of action and environment. Lucky to pouch one in ten, the minimal returns from player and position elicit few if any expletives should a chance be shelled. In contrast, a catch taken will signal an outpouring of hugging and high-fives of near bacchanalian proportions.

Consultation of the Laws of Cricket reveals a shocking absence of anything in the way of human rights pertaining

to gully fielders. It is a similar situation in the case of parliamentary statutes and international relief agencies. Adrift on a tide of indifference and inhumanity, the forgotten few go quietly and uncomplainingly about their work, pausing occasionally to suffer the breaks and bruises of outrageous fortune. However, as decreed by *Test Match Special*, their suffering may soon be at an end with gully rapidly falling out of favour with captain, and coaches alike. A humane decision, long overdue, but one that will do little to heal the scars of several generations of gullible gully boys.

* * *

It wasn't compulsory in the late 1960s to have a cockney rebel in your first XI, but sometimes it just happened. Given that most Londoners suffer increasing bouts of vertigo the further they travel outside the capital, few if any were game enough to venture beyond the North Circular. One to undertake the long march to Lincolnshire was rugby-playing cricketer Ken Lynn. A bit of a speed merchant, Ken spent the winter plying his trade on the wing for Lincoln RFC and was good enough to be capped by Notts, Lincs & Derby XV.

He saved his cockney credentials, however, for the summer months, when he was considered of sufficient nuisance value to be entrusted with the new ball. This did come with conditions, for what he lacked in pace he made up for with the gift of the gab. Before the first ball was bowled, he was already in conversation with captain, fielders, and batsmen. Not in any dark arts sort of way, more as a means to pass the time and have some fun along the way.

His best lines, however, were saved for his blossoming relationship with umpires. Indeed, Ken would quickly inform the umpire after his first appeal of the afternoon that the ball was in fact sparring down the leg side. The next appeal would

follow a similar format only this time the ball had pitched outside the off stump. His next appeal, and by some decibels his loudest, was followed by an all-enveloping silence. The only conclusion the umpire could draw from this was that it must have been hitting middle and up came the finger. The circumstances were never fully explained to me, but it seems that at one away fixture at Skegness, Ken enraged the local burghers and assorted watching holidaymakers by bowling underarm. I suspect there was nothing untoward in this other than Ken getting a little bored with proceedings and looking to enliven both day and play.

When called upon to bat, he played the numbers game of block, block, swing, and any permutation thereof. In my first season in 1967 he and I shared a last-wicket partnership of 50 away at Normanby Park. While I played nothing more adventurous than a forward defensive, Ken went on the attack with mighty heaves into his arc between long-on and deep midwicket. At one point he cleared the boundary with the ball landing in a field still awaiting harvest. As an increasing number of the home side searched in vain Ken, not wanting to miss a trick, ventured that they might have more luck exploring an area a further 50 yards into the vegetation. Batting at the death that summer he amassed five not outs over 11 visits to the crease. Although only compiling 167 runs, his adjusted average of 33.40 was enough to win the Wells-Cole first XI batting trophy. This led to a rule change shortly after with qualification for the averages requiring ten completed innings. At the AGM that autumn Ken milked the presentation for every last drop, his smile as wide as the Thames Estuary.

Smaller and no less talkative, but decidedly grumpier, was another dual sportsman, Peter 'Piggy' Moore. In his case it was hockey in the winter with the Lincoln Imps and cricket during the summer. When not appearing at the Lindum his

smallness of stature enabled him to ride out for a local flat racing trainer. He also blew the horn for a local dance band and could occasionally be seen in the orchestra pit at Lincoln Theatre Royal.

A decent egg at heart, Piggy's persona, like many others before, changed dramatically on crossing the boundary rope. There was nothing malicious in his sniping other than to be on the winning side and to get the best out of his team-mates. An inveterate grizzler, it was worth misdirecting a throw or bowling the odd delivery down the leg side just to keep him simmering on gas mark seven. A more than adequate wicketkeeper for the seconds, he cut a curious figure behind the stumps: bearded, brooding, cap pulled piratically low, the whole topped off with glasses and polychromatic lenses as dark as sin. Had he swapped orchestra pit for stage, he would have made the perfect, albeit diminutive, pantomime villain.

In July 1967 Piggy and I were selected for a first XI away fixture against a strong Peterborough side. Another member of that team was RAF wallah and Somerset seconds player Brian Lewis. Bowling off the wrong foot at pace, Brian blew away the opposition for a little over 70. Called upon as emergency opener, Piggy trotted out to bat. Keen to make early inroads, Peterborough opened with a fast and nasty former Sheffield Collegiate professional. His mood was not helped by Piggy who, rocking back to short-pitched deliveries, proceeded in chipping him repeatedly over gully to the boundary. Today this would have been lauded as a ramp shot. In 1967, for a diminutive piratical horn player, it was instinct born out of a deep desire for self-preservation.

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The Lindum dressing room in the late 1960s was not short of characters. With the Scampton and Waddington air bases

still operational we, along with both the rugby and hockey sections of the club, could always count on a regular supply of service personnel to supplement an XI or XV. Dennis Carter fell into this category. A solid second XI player, his forces fitness added greatly to the team's mobility in the field. He was, as you would expect of an RAF wallah, immaculately turned out. Had there been a prize for best dressed player on the paddock then Dennis would have won hands down and turn-ups up. But it was not his sartorial presence that intrigued me, rather his pair of batting pads. They were, to cut to the chase, enormous! An impression further enhanced by his tall, pencil-thin appearance. With no rules or regulations detailing the size, shape or material for pads, Dennis's did seem to flout both custom and convention. Indeed, the collision between ball and pad when he thrust his left leg forward made for an odd hollow sound, the sort a bass drum would make if covered by the regimental goat and then struck.

If his forward play was a cause for concern, this was nothing when set against his expansive backward defence. This would see him parallel to the stumps with both pads facing down the wicket. The initial impression, with Dennis almost lost behind the huge surface area, was of those grainy black and white pictures of the Berlin Wall. An optical illusion, no doubt, but the first impression was that both the wickets and wicketkeeper had disappeared from sight, and that first slip, and leg slip were also in peril of blending in with the off-white canvas. On days of indifferent light, it was not beyond the bounds of possibility for an entire slip cordon to be lost from view behind Dennis and pads.

Unlike opposition slip cordons, there was no chance of Lindum's mystery spinner, George Leachman, fading from view. If not readily identifiable, you only had to wait for his inbuilt GPS or smoker's cough to kick in to get a firm

positional fix. One of the truly great smoker's coughs, it would start somewhere around his ankles and gradually work its way northwards before, with face contorted and changing colour from green to amber to red, it would explode somewhere around backward square leg.

George's large family house backed on to the ground. He would thus arrive in the dressing room pristine and primed for action. Below his statutory butcher's belly George sported a pair of drainpipe-thin legs, made all the thinner by a tight pair of flannels worn in the style of Max Wall. There was little chance of George over-stepping or no-balling as his stomach broke the popping crease long before that of his left foot. He had a curious action, too, in that the ball was spun out of the front of the hand thereby allowing him to bowl off and leg breaks with equal dexterity and little if any change of action. I dare say he had a doosra in his bag of tricks, but that was far too much trouble for both George and English club cricket in the late 1960s.

As savvy as they come, he was well aware of his ability to build pressure on the batsmen by wheeling quickly through his overs. As with all such mystery spinners, his action was not without speculation in that his straight right arm would barely pass his ear – no more than half past one on a timepiece – before being swung forward and the ball propelled teasingly on its way.

I recall a mid-season fixture at Cleethorpes when, from my vantage point in the back of his roomy estate car, I looked on pale and unblinking as George, a gifted multitasker, cornered at around 70mph while simultaneously lighting a Senior Service, coughing, laughing, and holding a conversation. At the close of play, George was often to be found behind the clubhouse piano belting out the tunes. One particular evening, John Harris, in black tie and en route to an RAF ball, dutifully

bought his gallon of ale for his century earlier in the day. Not a great lover of bitter, George, seeing Harris disappear with his date, wandered to the bar and quietly ordered a gallon of Guinness, took it back to the piano, and played on. When Harris, still in black tie, appeared at the Lindum the following lunchtime, he was met by the club steward and presented with the chit for George's gallon. Done up like a kipper, he sportingly paid up before fading from view behind Carter's veritable Ponderosa of pads.