

Matthew Appleby

HOW TO BE A CRICKET FAN



A Life in
50 Artefacts

from WG to Wisden

Foreword by Paul Nixon

Matthew Appleby

HOW TO BE A
CRICKET
FAN

A Life in
50 Artefacts
from WG to Wisden

Foreword by Paul Nixon



Contents

Foreword	7
1. Hawksdale	9
2. WG.	14
3. G Neville Weston	26
4. 1938 <i>An Album of Cricketers</i> issued by John Player & Sons. Price One Penny	36
5. Bradman	47
6. Milburn	54
7. EK Brown letters.	63
8. 1930 <i>Wisden</i>	69
9. <i>Wisden</i>	74
10. Mintys	82
11. England v Australia, Headingley 1977	87
12. <i>Defending the Ashes</i> by Percy Fender	92
13. <i>The Borderer</i>	103
14. Old Trafford: Lancashire v Yorkshire, 23, 25, 27 August 1980	106
15. Autograph books	113
16. Parsons	117
17. 1981 Ashes scrapbook	122
18. YCCC sunhat	126
19. Sportsmen's dinners	129
20. Yorkshire v Sussex 31 July–2 August 1982, Scarborough	140
21. 1983 Panini.	155
22. Hotspur the otterhound	166
23. Driff	173
24. Autograph album.	180
25. Lancashire collectors	186

26. NatWest Trophy 1989	192
27. 1995 Cronje cap	206
28. Membership cards	208
29. 2001/02 <i>New Zealand Test Cricket Captains</i> . . .	212
30. Cricinfo T-shirt	219
31. 2003 <i>Durham CCC 100 Greats</i>	223
32. MCC trolleys.	226
33. Ties.	233
34. 2007 Nixon benefit.	240
35. Nixon letter.	250
36. 2008 Lord's invitation	253
37. <i>Corridor of Uncertainty</i>	255
38. Collector wagon wheel	258
39. Cumbrian cricket grounds	264
40. Missing dinners	268
41. Funeral booklet.	272
42. New <i>Wisdens</i>	277
43. Funeral	279
44. Chris Cairns	285
45. McCorkell	288
46. The good stuff	292
47. Memorial event.	294
48. Bodyline	305
49. Gardening	311
50. <i>Wisden</i> 2017 Obituary	313
Acknowledgements	316
Bibliography	317

Chapter One

Hawksdale

APPLEBY WAS struggling. His knee was giving way. Lumbering singles were drying up. Appleby was turning them down. ‘Git im a runna,’ rasped Renyard, his captain. Appleby plodded on. The venue was The Sheepmount in Carlisle, a bleak, council-run collection of cricket pitches and changing rooms, surrounded by tall poplars and flanked by the River Eden, which brought rain from the Lake District fells to the Solway Firth, on to the sea.

I was on the scorebook, sitting on a form bench, under which the grass was worn into a trough at my feet. Among the dust there were cricket bags spilling bats covered in tape and sweaty pads and boxes in the fearsome piles of fag ends.

Appleby called for a runner. He was 50 years old, 17 stones, greying wiry hair, wearing old creamy-yellow whites and bearing a well-oiled Gradidge bat, tiny compared to his bulk. He’d opened the innings batting for Eden Valley Cricket League team Hawksdale, who were a mix of public school masters and ordinary Carlisle

men – plus Appleby – against an eleven from nearby village Scotby.

Appleby averaged about 12 runs an innings most seasons – not bad if you looked at the list of averages and runs accumulated on the rough old wickets of the Sheepmount, where teams rarely got much more than 100, and often a lot less. Anyone watching who knew much about cricket could see he hit the ball surprisingly deftly for such a big man. Orthodox, watchful glances through the gully were his most common shots. He didn't get many off his legs, being slow to play across his girth and wincing as he twisted his knees to reach anything on the on side. His highest score ever was 62 not out. I knew this well, as official scorer, aged ten, hunched over the book wearing my peach poodle boucle jumper, stonewash jeans and light blue striped Puma trainers. Dad had only ever scored a couple of half centuries. He'd missed 15 years of prime playing time while in the Royal Navy, and maybe he'd never have been much good anyway. He took it seriously though. At his age and with his knee, he eked out the runs, every one precious.

I marked the singles into the scorebook under the batsmen's names, crossing off the total score and filling in the bowlers' analyses. Because that's what scoring is. I also hung the black metal squares painted with white numbers up on the knee-high scoreboard. There was space for runs, wickets, overs and final score but there was no room for individual scores. I knew them though, pencilling little landmarks in my book. Appleby edged into double figures with a cut slid to the third man boundary, misfielded. Past

12, above his average. Past 20, which would get him a mention in the paper. Past 30 with a second four, a leaden-footed drive, bumping all along the ground just in front of square, for once. Scotby's fielders knew he'd score mostly singles – Appleby had been around a long time. But he had a bit of guile and aimed to miss the fielder, like his hero WG Grace's books had told him to. The outfield was too poor for much hit on the ground (and Appleby always hit on the ground) to get to the boundary. He played each ball on its merits. He was seeing off the decent opening pair of bowlers, so the other batsmen could have a go at the lesser ones. There was a near run-out, as Appleby refused a (not very quick) quick single with a gruff 'no' after the impetuous batsman at the other end had set off. The fielder's throw missed the stumps and no more quick singles were attempted. The younger players waiting to go in murmured a moan.

He was painfully slow. 'Run up,' Renyard shouted, but Appleby couldn't. Batsmen at the other end hit out and got out: 'He can't run; you'll have to twat it.'

Appleby battled on. Renyard, due in next and chain-smoking B&H, asked me: 'How many's y'Dad got?' I knew straight away – 46. Renyard said: 'Why didn't you bloody say!' half joking. 'Fotty-six Edgar!' he shouted. Appleby acknowledged with a raise of his paw. The Scotby bowler lolloped in and bowled a long hop. Appleby stretched outside off stump and wafted it towards the bench. The ball bobbed across the bumpy outfield with a fielder chasing hopefully. The ball beat him and rolled to my feet. I stopped it with my Puma and kicked the ball through

the fag ends to Scotby's fielder. Then I marked off the runs, 120/6, added them to the bowler's analysis and then, finally to Appleby's long line of ones, with the odd four – 50 not out made up of 38 singles and three boundaries. That's 38 times 22 yards run, almost exactly half a mile, I worked out (in my head). Plus the runs he limped for the other bloke. No twos or threes, not just for Appleby, but for the fella he was batting with too. Appleby couldn't run them anymore. Definitely no sixes. The players clapped. 'Will done Edgar! D'yu wanna come off?' He didn't. He just looked knackered. 'He's knackered', said Renyard. 'He's killing himself. He can't do it anymore.'

A few minutes later (OK, quite a lot of minutes later), on 55, it was over. Renyard was at the other end by now. He ran over to Appleby, who had put his bat down and rolled up his trouser leg. Renyard spat into his sweaty palm and rubbed Appleby's swollen, purple left knee. It didn't help. The captain put his arm round Appleby and they stumbled off, RETIRED HURT 55 NOT OUT, I wrote in the scorebook.

Appleby couldn't field: 'It'll have to be you, Matthew.' Who has no fielding skills to speak of. And is wearing a peach poodle boucle jumper.

The next season, Appleby was down at the Sheepmount rolling up his trouser leg showing off two long scarlet scars on either side of his left kneecap to anyone who showed a passing interest. But he wasn't playing anymore. He was now just a fan.

Hawksdale, 1978: Martin Shepherd, Ian Henderson, Billy Farren, Kevin Graham, Jimmy Skinner, David

Hawksdale

Oliver, Peter Henderson, Duncan McEwan, Neil
Cunningham, Don Renyard (captain), Edgar Appleby,
Billy Dixon.