

Nominated for the Cricket Writers' Club Book of the Year award

"Chronicles the county's fall from grace after winning seven County Championships between 1959 and 1968 – and the bitter divisions it caused. The book interviews former players, committeemen, supporters and opponents including Boycott and Durham bowling coach Alan Walker, who ran him out during his final innings, in 1986." – **GazetteLive.co.uk**

"The story of a 'civil war' at one of England's most illustrious cricketing counties has been told in a regional daily journalist's new book. Many of the former players, supporters and committeemen Stuart approached for interviews were reluctant, not wanting to rake up the past. Fortunately some, including Boycott himself, were more willing." – **HoldTheFrontPage.co.uk**

"The story of how Yorkshire ripped itself apart between 1968 and 1986. The book ends in 1986 because so did Geoffrey Boycott's career – with a run-out at the Scarborough Cricket Festival that left him eight short of 1,000 First-Class runs for a 24th consecutive season. Whether he liked it or not, Boycott was invariably at the centre of Yorkshire cricket's civil war." – **TheNorthernEcho.co.uk**

"For a glimpse of Yorkshire's old methods of breaking in a player, it's worth looking at Stuart Rayner's excellent new book *The War of the White Roses*." – **Simon Briggs, Sunday Telegraph**

"Fifteen from '16 – the best cricket books of the year. Yorkshire were a shambles in the 1980s, more of a debating society than a cricket club, as an enraged captain of that era, David Bairstow, once observed. An objective and authoritative account of the politicking in Yorkshire's civil war that will serve as a reference for years to come." – **David Hopps, ESPNcricinfo.com**

"Admirably comprehensive and even-handed account of Yorkshire's years of strife. Rayner persuaded enough of those involved in the period to contribute to give his book extra substance, and his assiduous use of source material is apparent on every page." – **ESPNcricinfo.com**

"Rayner has done his homework – this is not just a Boycott-blaming exercise. He follows in depth the travails of a club run by blunt-speaking but finger-worrying men, who made terrible mistakes. 4 stars." – **The Cricketer**

"I read this book with the phrase 'exactly what it says on the tin' ringing in my mind. If the thought of re-visiting the battles that raged around Yorkshire dressing and committee rooms from the final years of Brian Close's captaincy to the retirement of Geoffrey Boycott has the slightest appeal, this book that must be compulsory reading." – **The Cricket Statistician**

"Rayner's open-minded approach delivers a thorough history of Yorkshire's disharmony, from the dysfunctional committee that was overthrown by advocates of Boycott, to the controversial dismissal of Ray Illingworth after he had helped Yorkshire to lift their first major trophy in 14 years." – **All Out Cricket**

"Revisits this turbulent time with a different agenda, to tell the story from a neutral's perspective, without taking sides, without casting judgements. He has done an admirable job in that respect. The account has enough substance and depth to be recommended as the definitive, detailed account of what happened in those turbulent years." – **Backspin**

"Charts Yorkshire cricket's civil war, centered on batting great Geoffrey Boycott over 30 years ago, remarkably coincides with renewed hostilities in the county over his attempt to join the board. Yorkshire director of cricket Martyn Moxon's fierce opposition to Boycott since they played in the same team in the Eighties is revealed in *The War of the White Roses*, written by Yorkshire expert Stuart Rayner." – **Charles Sale column, Daily Mail**

"One of the best cricket books in a while. Even though I lived through it, cannot help thinking 'How did that happen?'" – **PeakFan's Derbyshire Cricket Blog**

"*The War Of The White Roses* – the story of Yorkshire CCC's civil war – would make a great film: cricket's version of *The Damned United*." – **Mike Lewis of the Cambrian News**

"As Geoffrey Boycott prepares to take on the Yorkshire cricket establishment once more a new book examines the biggest clash between them." – **Craven Herald**

"*The War of the White Roses* chronicles the in-fighting which followed Yorkshire's fall from grace. In 1968 they won the Championship for a seventh time in ten years but refused to give Illingworth a contract, and Fred Trueman announced his retirement." – **Scarborough Review**

"A good buy for anyone who has followed Geoff Boycott's stint with Yorkshire." – **RajeshKumarCricketStatistician.com**

"As a Lancastrian I certainly started out keen to read this book, but I was surprised at just what a grip it took on my attentions. That can only be as a result of the quality of the writing which is impressive." – **Martin Chandler, CricketWeb.net**

"There seem to be no half measures of people's feelings towards one of the most successful opening batsmen in the history of the game: either a like or dislike but Rayner has interviewed a broad spectrum of people whose reminiscences make for a compelling and wholly fair read. One hopes that, after this initial book, Stuart Rayner will bring further books to our shelves." – **Andrew Roberts, Cricket Statistics**

“Excellent!”

The Telegraph

THE WAR OF THE WHITE ROSES

Yorkshire Cricket's Civil War
1968–1986

Stuart Rayner



Contents

Introduction and Acknowledgements	9
Foreword by Chris Waters	14
An Era Ends, An Error Begins	17
'You've Had A Good Innings'	31
The Chosen One	49
'A Giant Among Pygmies'	61
Club Before Country	78
The Purge	94
Turning Point	113
Back to Fire the Bullets.	130
An Alternative Emerges... Slowly	142
The Cruellest of Sackings	156
'Oh Christ, They're Back!'	176
Caught in the Crossfire.	194
Pantomime by the Seaside	208
Player-Manager	227
Champs and Chumps	240
Revolution	257
Power Without Responsibility.	278
Counter-Revolution	296
Finally, Boycott is Out	317
Postscript	333
Select Bibliography	341
Index	345

1

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

THE WAR OF THE WHITE ROSES

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 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 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

THE WAR OF THE WHITE ROSES

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,' argued 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 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 recalled 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 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.

THE WAR OF THE WHITE ROSES

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 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, Yorkshire's 12th man that day, 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 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 under-appreciated. 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.

THE WAR OF THE WHITE ROSES

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 [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 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

THE WAR OF THE WHITE ROSES

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. '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 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 told me 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 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 about his departure. Illingworth’s sympathetic team-

THE WAR OF THE WHITE ROSES

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.