



# OLD TRAFFORD'S CENTURY



A FEW weeks ago cricketers from every county of England gathered at Manchester for a dinner to celebrate one hundred years of cricket at Lancashire's stronghold, Old Trafford. Old Mancunians, Lancastrians, or just plain cricketers, will not want to miss the BBC recording of some of the speeches at this centenary dinner, which will be heard from YA and YZ stations at 3.15 p.m. on Sunday, July 28.

The first speaker, Viscount Monckton, President of the M.C.C., opened by saying that instead of tracing the origins of the Wars of the Roses, or commenting on the Yorkshire habit of beating Lancashire—developed as far back as 1850—he would far rather “remember the ghosts.” And as other speakers took the floor—among them Sir Norman Birkett and Freddy Brown—they also recalled the past, and the Lancashire players who made it great. Among these were A. H. Hornby, R. H. Spooner, A. C. MacLaren, Johnny Briggs, the Tyldesley brothers. As Thomas Moulton wrote, in *Bat and Ball*—

There's music in the names I used to know,  
And magic when I heard them, long ago.  
“Is Tyldesley batting?” Ah, the wonder still!  
... The school clock crawled, but cricket thoughts would fill  
The last slow lesson hour deliciously  
(Drone on, O teacher; you can't trouble me).

Writing of Old Trafford as he saw it when a boy, Neville Cardus in the *Manchester Guardian* last month said that in those days the first three Lancashire batsmen in the order of going in were MacLaren, Spooner and J. T. Tyldesley.

“No country has had an innings opened with so much mingled grandeur, graciousness, and swordlike brilliance as these three cricketers spread over the field day by day. They were my heroes, my gods, when I was a boy of

12, yet though I believed in the superiority of each over any other batsman alive or dead I was obliged to pray that they would not get out as I watched them facing the attack!”

Cardus himself had an opportunity to play against his “gods” some years later when he captained a *Manchester Guardian* Eleven in a match in which MacLaren and Spooner opened the batting.

In 1857 the Art Treasures Exhibition was held in Manchester, and on the cricket grounds that the Manchester team then occupied. The idea of using the grounds and surroundings was at first strongly opposed, but an agreement was reached and with it the shift to the present site as the home of the Lancashire team. Now Old Trafford,

once in a rural setting, still has enough open ground about to ensure good light, yet is only three and a half miles from the centre of Manchester.

Of Old Trafford a half-century ago Neville Cardus says that it was “in the country, surrounded by meadows. Stetford was a village. At the top of Warwick Road the Botanical Gardens was situated. . . Scene and atmosphere have much influence in making the style of a cricketer. . . It was against a green and pleasant atmosphere at Old Trafford that R. H. Spooner made the grass musical with his strokes. . .”

Because of the closeness of Old Trafford to the city (or, as some suggest, because it was a cricket ground), the Luftwaffe did extensive bombing damage in the last war to the pavilion and



SIR NORMAN BIRKETT



F. R. BROWN  
They remembered the ghosts



SIR WALTER MONCKTON

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some of the stands, which have required rebuilding and renovating. However, it seems there are still more than the usual advantages at Old Trafford where accessibility is concerned; for not only can the enthusiast sandwich the best part of an hour's cricket into the working day, those on the ground can also get away if necessary in the breaks between sessions of play. Neville Cardus confessed somewhere to this—his excursion between sessions being to get married.

Like Viscount Monckton, Cardus remembers the shades of the great: “The ground is full of ghosts. No cricket field has known greater players, greater games, rain or shine. Not the least of Old Trafford's distinctions is that W. G. Grace was unable to score a century there: he scored centuries everywhere else. The Lancashire (or the Australian) bowling was too good for him. . . The Lancashire stuff is not worked out, I hope, or diluted today. There is Washbrook still, as dominating as MacLaren himself. There is Statham honouring the fast bowling tradition established by Mold, Brearley . . . and Macdonald. There is Hilton, as Lancashire as Eddie Paynter himself, who was as great a Lancashire lad and player as any. And we have only to look at Tattersall to know that we are at Old Trafford, bone of Lancashire's bone.”