

Louis Hall - The Batley Stonewaller, by Martin Howe

It is an extraordinary fact that the longest standing Yorkshire cricket batting record is held by a man who made his debut for the club in 1873, the year that a county championship was first established, and only ten years after the formation of the county club. He is Louis Hall, and the record is for the number of times a batsman carried his bat through a completed innings in a first class fixture. Hall achieved this feat for Yorkshire on 14 occasions. He is followed in the Yorkshire list by (predictably) Geoffrey Boycott (eight times), Herbert Sutcliffe (five times), and Percy Holmes (three times). It is almost inconceivable that Hall's record will ever be broken.¹

Also remarkable to note is that while Boycott scored 103 centuries for Yorkshire, Sutcliffe 112 and Holmes 60, Louis Hall reached the 100 mark a mere nine times. This comparison immediately tells us something about the man. Louis Hall was a slow scorer. On only four of the 14 occasions on which he carried his bat did Hall make an unbeaten century. Four times, indeed, his final score was less than 40. Of course, the comparison also reminds us that wickets were much poorer in Hall's day, and that low scores, for teams and individuals, were much more the order of the day than in later years.

The family background

Louis Hall was born in Batley on 1 November 1852 the youngest of eight children of Thomas and Martha Hall. Thomas worked in one of the many woollen mills that had sprung up in Batley by the middle of the nineteenth century, specialising in "shoddy", woven cloth made from a mix of finely shredded rags and virgin wool and used for blankets, military uniforms, and other heavy-duty purposes. At the time of Louis' birth, four of his brothers, the youngest only nine years old, were also employed in the woollen mills, working long hours in arduous conditions. In this period of rapid industrial expansion in the UK, working men with ambition were able to establish themselves in business on their own account and, by the end of the 1850s, Thomas Hall had himself become a woollen manufacturer, albeit on a small scale (in 1861, the business employed four men and two boys). In due course the family firm of Thomas Hall & Sons was founded, with three of Louis' brothers involved in its management. At its height in the 1870s, the firm had three premises and was a significant employer in the town. But by this time Louis was embarked on a career as a professional cricketer although he did work on the merchanting side of the business, at least until he had established himself in the Yorkshire side, and thereafter very probably during the winter months. If Louis deliberately chose not to pursue a career in the family firm, he made a wise decision for the firm's main woollen mill was burnt down some time in the 1880s, and the firm seems then to have gone into decline and speedy oblivion. By then Louis Hall had become one of the leading cricketers of his day. How did it all begin?

¹ Records and statistics quoted in this article are from Roy D Wilkinson, *Yorkshire County Cricket Club First Class Records, 1863-1996*, (Limlow Books 1997). A summary and brief comment on the statistics will be found in the appendix at the end of the article.

Into the Yorkshire Side

Louis learnt his cricket at Osborne's School in Batley. He first came to local prominence with a team that went by the name of Rose of England and later became the Victoria Cricket Club. In 1871 he joined the newly formed Batley Cricket Club where his performances with bat and ball – underhand lobs or slow round arm – soon brought him to the attention of the county club.

His first appearance for a representative Yorkshire side was in a fixture at Scarborough in August 1872 when Eighteen Yorkshire Colts took on a United North of England XI, one of the travelling teams of professionals of the time whose leading light was Roger Iddison, then in his final season as Yorkshire's captain. Creditable performances in this game and for Yorkshire Juniors against Yorkshire Veterans at Bramall Lane in September led to his selection for the county side the following season. His debut in May 1873, at the age of twenty one, was against Middlesex at the Princes Ground, Harrow. His 37 in the first innings was described in *The Sportsman* newspaper as "one of the soundest and most careful exhibitions of batting ever shown by a young player" and to *Wisden* it was "a promising batting display that showed careful and good defence."² If these descriptions tell something of the batsman that Hall was to become, he had little success in the rest of the 1873 season. He played nine times in all scoring only 118 runs at an average of 8.42, with that 37 in his very first knock his best score of the season.

After this ultimately disappointing season, Hall dropped out of the county side. He returned to club cricket for the following four years. He was engaged as a professional by Birstall Young England Cricket Club in 1875 and later by Cliffe End Club, Longwood. In 1876 he was coach at the Perth Cricket Club, playing just two games for them in one of which he scored 133.

One match was to catapult him back into the first class game. In 1878 he scored 79 for a Hunslet XVIII against the Australians (Demon Spofforth and all). Hall's 79 was the highest score against the Australians up to that stage of the season and it was enough, in the absence of George Ulyett, for him to be selected again for the county side against Surrey at the Oval. Hall, opening the innings with Ephraim Lockwood, scored a workmanlike 35. He played in nine games that season and finished second in the Yorkshire averages behind Ulyett, with 82 against Gloucestershire his highest score. By the following season, 1879, he was a regular member of the Yorkshire side and continued to be so until his retirement in 1892.

Hall was a thin, wiry man with a rather haggard face and a fierce, drooping moustache. He was known as the Batley Giant although he was not exceptionally tall. Maybe his upright stance belied his real height. Anyway, giant in stature or not, Hall scored 9,757 runs for Yorkshire in first class matches at an average of 23.28 with nine centuries. As batting averages of this period should almost be doubled for fair comparison with today's batsmen, Hall's figures represent a considerable achievement. He topped the

² Both quotations are from a biographical piece in *The Sportsman*, 5 December, 1878.

county averages in 1883, scored four hundreds in 1884 and exceeded 1,000 runs in the season in 1887, 1,120 to be precise at 38.62, with three centuries. One of these was Hall's highest score in first class cricket, 160 (out of 590) against Lancashire in 1887 (occupying the crease for a total of 6 hours and 40 minutes) when he and Fred Lee put on 280 for the second wicket. Against Middlesex at Bramall Lane in 1884, he just failed to achieve a century in both innings, his scores being 96 and 135.

For much of his career, his opening partner was the redoubtable and flamboyant George Ulyett. The pair had century partnerships in 12 innings and in 1885 against Sussex at Hove they had century opening partnerships in both innings, the first time this had been achieved for Yorkshire.

In 1892, Louis Hall's final season, he played in only eight matches and scored 173 runs at 11.53. Although he was to make one further appearance in 1894, Hall acknowledged that his time had come: "I was in bad form; there is no question I was out of all form. Besides, I was 40 years of age; my retirement was quite a just order" he was to say.³

Something should be said about Louis Hall the bowler. He bowled regularly in club cricket, topping the bowling averages for Batley CC on numerous occasions, and he has the distinction of being the first to bowl round-arm in the Heavy Woollen District of the West Riding.⁴ An occasional bowler for Yorkshire, mixing round-arm with tantalisingly slow lobs, Hall took only 15 wickets at 52.06 with seven of those being secured in the match against Lancashire in 1887 already mentioned (3 wickets for 23 in the first innings and four for 122 in the second). His bowling was hardly economical but sometimes it did serve to break a stubborn partnership. It should be added that Hall was an excellent fielder, particularly close to the wicket.

Hall was never to be capped by England, but in 1883, 1884 and 1885 he was selected for the Players against the Gentlemen although he had little success in any of his appearances. In 1890 Hall was included in *Wisden's* "Nine Great Batsmen of the Year" the citation commenting that his slow batting, while often found tedious by the spectators, was usually of immense value to his side.

The Batley Stonewaller

Louis Hall will always be remembered for his slow scoring. In his memoirs, Lord Hawke observes that his "impassiveness with a bat became proverbial" and he refers to him as Old Stolidity, perhaps a private nickname but one that seems more appropriate than the Batley Giant.⁵ A number of examples of his slow scoring will demonstrate that his reputation was richly deserved: Hall's debut innings of 37 against Middlesex occupied 100 minutes; in 1882 at Leeds he batted for 210 minutes while scoring 29 runs; against Kent at Canterbury in 1885, he went 70 minutes without scoring and took 165 minutes

³ Old Ebor (A Pullin), *Talks with Old Yorkshire Cricketers*, (Yorkshire Post 1898), p.222.

⁴ Old Ebor, *op.cit.* p.223.

⁵ Lord Hawke, *Recollections and Reminiscences*, (Williams and Norgate 1924), p.66 and p.76.

to score 12 runs; against Nottinghamshire in 1887, he spent 265 minutes accumulating a mere 40 runs. In an oft-quoted remark, A G Steel of Lancashire wrote of him "Nothing in cricket can be more dull or dismal than bowling to this batsman on a sodden wicket at Bramall Lane in a real Sheffield fog."⁶ Yet this is to overlook that Hall's defensive batting was often in the team's cause, as in the Kent match in 1885 just mentioned when the requirement was to bat out for two and a three quarters of an hour on a difficult wicket to avoid an innings defeat. His defiant innings was particularly praiseworthy in that Hall had suffered severe seasickness the previous day on the boat journey from Dublin after a match in Ireland. *Wisden* summed up his value to his side in its obituary in 1916: "It cannot be said that he was an attractive bat to watch – he was at times a veritable stonewaller – but in the Yorkshire eleven which included George Ulyett and William Bates, his stubborn defence was of priceless value. In match after match he kept up his wicket while one or other of those brilliant hitters demoralised the bowling." Not surprisingly, his defensive qualities could drive opposing bowlers to distraction. During the innings against Sussex when he carried his bat, scoring 124 not out, Walter Humphreys, a lob bowler, remarked: "I'd be glad to pay for the coffin in which to bury that Tyke."⁷

After his retirement Louis Hall attempted to explain his approach in conversation with Old Ebor (AW Pullin). "In local cricket in my early days I used to score as fast as most batsman. I cannot tell how I acquired a slow style. I suppose it was natural cautiousness. But I found afterwards it was of more value to my side than to myself, and I don't think I should adopt the same principle again." Asked why, he added: "It didn't suit the spectators for one thing; a man thus suffers in popularity however useful he may be to his side."⁸ There is evidence that Hall was capable of scoring more quickly than at his accustomed, leisurely pace when the need or opportunity arose. In one innings he astonished everyone, and perhaps himself, by hitting three fours and a two in a single over, and he once surprised WG himself when, playing for the United South of England against eighteen of Batley, Hall suddenly "woke up", hit him to square leg "clean out of the ground" and "kept it up for some time."⁹ But Hall's own description of his technique would suggest that such occurrences would be relatively infrequent. "My favourite style was playing forward, but I could hit to leg on occasion."¹⁰ But there is no doubting the value of his dogged batsmanship to the Yorkshire side of the 1880s.

A Man Of Character

Louis Hall not infrequently captained the Yorkshire side, usually deputising for Lord Hawke who had been appointed captain in 1883 but did not assume the post on anything like a full-time basis until 1886 (after all in 1883 he was still at Cambridge University). There is little doubt that it was Hall's personal qualities that commended him as captain rather than any cricketing know-

⁶ Quoted in Peter Thomas, *Yorkshire Cricketers, 1839-1939*, (Derek Hodgson Publisher 1973), p.72.

⁷ Hawke, *op.cit.* p.76.

⁸ Old Ebor, *op.cit.* p. 222.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

how. He was a non-smoker, teetotaler and Methodist lay preacher, rare qualities among the rumbustious group of professionals that made up the Yorkshire team in its formative years. It was said, flippantly no doubt, that Lord Hawke's task as captain was "to lead a team of nine drunks and a chapel person."¹¹ His Lordship was more charitable when he looked back on his early years in charge, suggesting that the players had been "much maligned" and that he would rather say the team "had suffered from the injudicious hospitality of friends."¹² Whatever the cause of his fellows' shortcomings, Lord Hawke may well have been not far from the mark in observing that Hall was the first teetotaler to play for Yorkshire.¹³

His religion was very important to Louis Hall. Harry East suggests that "among his cricket tackle would be found a Methodist hymn book, and probably a copy of John Wesley's sermons."¹⁴ Whether the remark was intended to be taken seriously or not, there is a ring of the truth about it. Hall was not a man to leave his principles behind when he entered the pavilion. He was more than just a life-long practising Christian and a regular chapel-goer. As noted, he was a Methodist lay preacher, and later in his life he held a number of offices at Hick Lane Wesleyan Chapel in Batley. One of these offices was Poor Steward in which capacity Louis Hall applied his energies and influence to assisting the poorer members of the congregation. It was said of him that he was "one of the Good Samaritans of the athletic world."¹⁵

In Lord Hawke's view, "the moral character of my men is of infinitely more importance than their form."¹⁶ This was brought home to the unfortunate Bobby Peel when in 1897, in the course of a match at Chesterfield, he was summarily dismissed from the field, and subsequently from Yorkshire, for being, shall we say, somewhat worse the wear for drink. In contrast, Lord Hawke described Louis Hall as a "gentleman professional" adding "higher praise cannot be given."¹⁷ Even discounting for Lord Hawke's snobbery and prejudices (by today's standards anyway), Louis Hall clearly was a man of integrity and moral rectitude, as upright a character as can ever have set foot on a cricket field.¹⁸

This was not enough however for him to believe that he should walk when he knew that he was out. He recounts that in one of the innings in which he carried his bat, for 124 against Sussex in 1883, a ball brushed his gloves in passing to the wicketkeeper, Henry Phillips, but there was no appeal.

¹¹ Sir Derek Birley, *A Social History of English Cricket*, (Aurum Press, 1999), p.135.

¹² In his Introductory chapter to Rev.R S Holmes, *The History of Yorkshire County Cricket, 1833-1903*, (Archibald Constable 1904), at p.3

¹³ Hawke, *Recollections and Reminiscences*, *op.cit.* p. 75.

¹⁴ Harry East, *Laughter at the Wicket: Echoes from the Golden Age of Yorkshire Cricket*, (Whitehorn Press), 1980, p.32

¹⁵ This in the course of the address by Rev H M Nield at Louis Hall's funeral on 26 November 1915.

¹⁶ Hawke in Holmes, *op.cit.* p.6

¹⁷ Hawke, *Recollections and Reminiscences*, *op.cit.* p. 66.

¹⁸ There was a touch of inverted snobbery in Louis Hall's character. He named his eldest son and daughter Harold Londesborough and Edith after Lord and Lady Londesborough respectively. His Lordship was a great benefactor of Yorkshire cricket and President of Scarborough CC on whose ground Hall was playing for Yorkshire when his first son was born in September 1879.

Throwing the ball back to the bowler, Phillips enquired "I say, did you touch dat?" Hall replied that he did, leaving Phillips to add "Drat me if I didn't tink so."¹⁹ Modern batsmen would no doubt empathise with Hall, modern wicket keepers be astonished at Phillips' restraint. The incident helps to give the lie to any view that it was an unwritten rule of cricket before modern times that batsmen would walk when they knew they were out. It also reminds us that Louis Hall played cricket the hard way, the way that was to become the Yorkshire trademark.

The caring side of Louis Hall's character can also be seen in his attitude to his fellow players. This is illustrated by the story of his benefit. The future of many a professional cricketer would depend on the amount of money raised in his benefit match. Hall's benefit fixture was scheduled for the 1889 season. Now Hall had a tremendous admiration for Billy Bates, a dashing and stylish batsman with whom Hall often opened the innings (they put on 182 against Sussex in 1886, a Yorkshire record at the time). In one of cricket's many minor tragedies, Bates was blinded in one eye in the nets at Melbourne in 1888. The Yorkshire Committee awarded Bates a testimonial match in 1889, and, in order to increase the chances of its success, Hall suggested that his benefit should be put off for a year. His generosity rebounded on him. The match in 1890 against Surrey was ruined by rain and was a financial disaster. In a relatively rare act of generosity of their own towards an employee, the Committee agreed to cancel the match as a benefit and to stand the loss themselves, awarding Hall the Surrey match at Bramall Lane in the following year. This match was also affected by rain and raised £570 for Hall's benefit, the fourth largest for a Yorkshire player to that date, and about the average for the time, but still a trifle disappointing (£570 in 1891 would be worth about £40,000 in today's money).

Given his background and attitudes, it is no surprise that, in due course, Hall was to become chairman of the Yorkshire Cricketers' Benevolent Fund. For an annual subscription of a guinea (£1.05), a player was entitled to a weekly payment from the Fund of 30 shillings (£1.50) during the season and 15 shillings (75p) in the winter in the event of illness or injury, and to a pension if personally disabled. The sums may seem small to us, but £1.05 in 1890 would be the equivalent of about £73.50 today, hardly a weekly benefit to be sneezed at. The scheme was certainly a major step forward in the responsibility that the Committee accepted for the welfare of its professional players. In assessing the contribution of the Fund, Hall remarked, with some justification: "With regard to old cricketers, I think the county is now in a position which should enable it to prevent the layers of the foundation stones of Yorkshire cricket ending their days in poverty."²⁰

Life after Playing for Yorkshire

After retirement, Hall became cricket coach at Uppingham School (the school had no fewer than 15 playing fields) and he ran a sports shop in the town.

¹⁹ Old Ebor, *op.cit.* p.221.

²⁰ Old Ebor, *op.cit.* p.227.

What the schoolboys made of this unbending, deeply religious man has to be imagined. But he was a patient, tactful coach and he was certainly well equipped to teach his charges the techniques of defensive play. Hall was also nominated by Yorkshire to the umpires list, and he umpired first class games for a few seasons in school vacations. It is interesting that in the same conversation in which he recounted the failure to walk incident, he bemoans, apparently without appreciating the irony, the difficulties of the umpire's job: in his experience (and words) "it has got to be a very tickling point, has umpiring. Play is very, very keen all round."²¹ Modern umpires would say that Hall should see it now!

On stepping down from the Yorkshire side in (effectively) 1892, he played occasionally for Sheffield United Cricket Club (along with several other Yorkshire professionals) but primarily for Batley Cricket Club, a force to be reckoned with in cricket in the West Riding.²² He continued to play for Batley until after his 50th birthday.

But with his days as a professional cricketer over, Hall followed in his father's footsteps and went into business in the textile industry, in his case as a wool merchant. He also became increasingly involved in public life in the town. He was elected to the Batley Borough Council in 1904 as a Liberal. He was to hold his seat for nine years until failing health forced him to give it up in 1913, and "a more conscientious and painstaking councillor never occupied a seat on the Batley Town Council."²³ He served on a number of committees, most notably as Vice-Chairman of the Finance Committee and, predictably perhaps, as Overseer of the Poor. It was noted that he was "a most careful guardian of the expenditure of the ratepayers' money"²⁴ – wholly in character, one has to feel.

In his final years, Louis Hall lived in Morecambe, believing that the sea air would be good for his health. He died there on 19 November 1915, aged 63 years. At his funeral in Batley, attended by many notables from the worlds of cricket, business, Methodism and local government and politics, many tributes were paid to the man, his character and his achievements. But Louis Hall's lasting - probably everlasting - memorial will be that he carried his bat for Yorkshire on 14 occasions.

Sources additional to those cited in the text

Rev. R S Holmes, *The History of Yorkshire County Cricket, 1833-1903*, (Archibald Constable, 1904)

Anthony Woodhouse, *The History of Yorkshire County Cricket Club*, (Christopher Helm, 1989)

²¹ Old Ebor, *op.cit.* p.224.

²² The oldest surviving cricket competition (the Ashes apart) is the Heavy Woollen District Cricket Challenge Cup, established in 1883 and originally confined to clubs located within a six mile radius of Batley Town Hall (now a 15 mile radius).

²³ *Batley Reporter*, Obituary, 19 November 1915.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

Derek Hodgson, The Official History of Yorkshire County Cricket Club, (Crowood Press, 1989)

Anthony Woodhouse, A Who's Who of Yorkshire County Cricket Club, (Breedon Books, 1992)

Ric Sissons, The Players: a Social History of the Professional Players, (Kingswood, 1988)

Wisden, various issues.

Louis Hall's Career Record for Yorkshire:

Batting

Season	M	I	NO	Runs	HS	Avge	100s	50s	Carried bat
1873	9	14	0	118	37	8.42	0	0	0
1878	9	16	3	351	82*	27.00	0	2	1
1879	17	29	6	284	56*	12.34	0	1	0
1880	16	26	4	354	66	16.09	0	1	0
1881	18	28	1	475	77	17.59	0	1	0
1882	24	44	8	526	37	14.61	0	0	0
1883	18	29	9	821	124*	41.05	1	3	1
1884	20	31	1	941	135	31.36	4	2	1
1885	21	33	5	797	87	28.46	0	2	3
1886	21	40	4	975	92	27.08	0	9	2
1887	20	32	3	1120	160	38.62	3	4	2
1888	20	38	3	735	129*	21.00	1	1	2
1889	16	31	2	773	86	26.65	0	4	1
1890	20	37	6	669	64	21.58	0	4	0
1891	17	32	2	623	67	20.76	0	3	1
1892	8	16	1	173	47	11.53	0	0	0
1894	1	1	0	22	22	22.00	0	0	0
Totals	275	477	58	9757	160	23.28	9	37	14

Bowling

Wickets	Average
15	52.06

Occasions when Louis Hall carried his bat through a completed innings

Date	Score	Of Total	Opponents	Venue
1878	31*	94	Sussex	Hove
1883	124*	331	Sussex	Hove
1884	128*	285	Sussex	Huddersfield
1885	32*	81	Kent	Sheffield
1885	79*	285	Surrey	Sheffield
1885	37*	96	Derbyshire	Derby
1886	50*	173	Sussex	Huddersfield
1886	74*	172	Kent	Canterbury
1887	119*	334	Gloucestershire	Dewsbury

1887	82*	218	Sussex	Hove
1888	34*	104	Surrey	The Oval
1888	129*	461	Gloucestershire	Clifton
1889	85*	259	Middlesex	Lord's
1891	41*	106	Nottinghamshire	Sheffield

Source: Roy D Wilkinson, *Yorkshire County Cricket Club First Class Records, 1863-1996, 1997*, and private information from Mr Wilkinson (Hall's year by year batting record).

Statistics in other sources differ from those in Wilkinson. The reasons for the differences are invariably different views on which matches merit the designation "first-class" and, in some cases, on whether a genuinely Yorkshire side was involved. Thus Rev. R S Holmes, *History of Yorkshire County Cricket, 1833-1903* (1904), records Hall as carrying his bat on 17 occasions. One of these was against Leicestershire and two against Warwickshire but neither county was of first class status at the time. D Hodgson, *The Official History of Yorkshire County Cricket Club* (1989), while noting 14 occasions of Hall carrying his bat, records him, with Holmes, as scoring as many as 12,079 runs for Yorkshire and taking 33 wickets. The statistics in Hodgson and Holmes include matches against minor counties such as Staffordshire and Cheshire and sides such as Lascelles Hall and North Riding. Wilkinson explains the basis of his figures in the Introduction to his volume.