

Kiveton Park and Wales History Society
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ARTHUR DENNIS
OF
KIVETON PARK COLLIERY CRICKET CLUB

ROGER HEATH

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R. HEATH.

NOVEMBER, 1970.

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INTRODUCTION

If one was to ask people in the village of Kiveton Park who came into their minds when thinking of Kiveton Park Colliery Cricket Club, the vast majority of them would undoubtedly answer "Arthur Dennis." Young and old alike are aware of his existence. Anyone, these days, who goes to the Colliery ground on a Saturday afternoon will invariably see Arthur strolling around the ground delighting in a good performance from the only club he has ever been connected with, or, on a bad day, growling that cricket is not what it used to be. If he is not to be seen, then one can rest assured that he is watching the other team at their away match.

On most other days during the week he can be seen working on the ground, a familiar figure, sitting on the large cutter with an empty filter tip in his south, riding all the humps and hollows of a ground which, some forty years ago, he was instrumental in helping to complete.

It was in 1921 that Arthur first stepped on to the cricket field to represent Kiveton Park Colliery. For nearly 50 years he continued to play, and it is only in recent times that he has finally called a halt, after threatening to do so every year since 1960. In his 50 years with the club Arthur has played many parts. As a player, captain, grounds man, chairman or spectator-critic, he has earned the respect of everyone who knows and loves the game of cricket.

This book attempts, in its humble way, to commit to paper the many facets of Arthur's character and achievements which have graced the game he loves so much. Although it was as a player that he made his biggest impact as far as local cricket was concerned, his achievements as a hard working member of the club have probably, over the years, been even more valuable. It is always relatively easy for any club to find sufficient people who are both willing and able to turn out on a Saturday afternoon. But it is not so easy to find those people who are dedicated to their club and whose spare time is invariably spent working for that club.

Such people are worth their weight in gold and, if this be so, then the worth of someone like Arthur is beyond measure. Indeed, it has been said, in answer to the question "What has Arthur Dennis done for Kiveton Park Colliery Cricket Club".

"HE IS KIVETON PARK COLLIERY CRICKET CLUB."

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THE EARLY DAYS

“The fourth wicket fell at 55. However, G. Bass and A. Dennis took the score to 144 before G. Bass left after a splendidly hit 47. Dennis was now scoring rapidly, but at 212 he was out after a brilliantly compiled 88 which included fourteen 4’s. A. Dennis, who is only 18 years of age, got the majority of his runs on the offside.”

This paragraph in the Worksop Guardian of June 26th, 1925, highlighted the arrival of Arthur on the first eleven scenes. For it was on the afternoon of that year, that Kiveton Park Colliery Cricket Club, being two regular first team members short, had chosen to field on their own ground against Bolsover this promising youngster from the second eleven. Arthur had made his debut for the second eleven at the age of fourteen in 1921, strangely enough, also against Bolsover, scoring 10 runs. In the next four years his experience and technique were developed in regular second eleven cricket. Although not bowling overmuch during these four years, Arthur already had a minor reputation for being able to turn his arm over to good effect. Indeed, it is said that, a schoolboy, he was so fast that in his final year Anston had refused to play against Kiveton if Arthur played!

So it was that Arthur was being groomed for the big day when he would be in the first eleven with his elder brother, Sam. It can be seen from this Worksop Guardian report that, once given the chance, Arthur wasted no time in making an impression.

Not content with such an excellent start, Arthur followed this up on the following Saturday by going to Warsop and scoring 74. This sort of form seemed too good to be true and it is easy to imagine him walking round with his head in the clouds all day. However, after scoring 10 and 18 in his next innings, he was brought severely back to earth at Manton by bringing home his first ever first eleven “duck.”

The remainder of the 1925 season was a little interfered with by rain, but Arthur did manage to get in one more large contribution to his team’s effort when, on August 15th against Retford at home, he and his captain, Tony Widdison, figured in an unbroken century partnership which culminated in the winning hit coming in the last over. Tony made 72 not out and Arthur reached 69 not out, his third half century in his first season in first eleven cricket. Not only that, but he weighed in with 2 wickets as well.

So it was that Arthur could look back on his first season of first eleven cricket with immense satisfaction. Altogether, he had batted twelve times and scored 315 runs for an average of 28.63. He had bowled quite a lot towards the end of the season and ended with 10 wickets for 244 runs. It was understandable; therefore, that Arthur was looking forward to the next season with much enthusiasm. It was in 1926, the year of the General Strike, that Arthur, his brother Sam, and most of the other first eleven players spent most of their days up at the picturesque Park ground. Most of the team were young and these constant hours of practice were to bear fruit, because the summer of that year saw the writing of the brightest chapter in the history of Kiveton Park Colliery Cricket Club.

The season got off to a dreary start with a washed out fixture against Bolsover, but the omens were good after the next match. Kiveton went to Manton on May 8th. Never had Kiveton managed to get a win out of any fixture against Manton, but history-making was in the air that year, and at about 4.30 p.m. the points were in the bag and Manton had been beaten by, believe it or not, ten wickets! Indeed, three weeks later Manton were again the opponents, and another little piece of Bassetlaw League history was written when they were dismissed for 32 and lost once again by the biggest possible margin of 10 wickets.

Arthur himself had a mediocre season as far as results were concerned, scoring 185 runs for an average of just over 14 and taking 18 wickets at a cost of 370 runs. However, at 19 years of age he was an extremely useful

Arthur at the age of 18 in his first year with the First Eleven in 1925.



At Sherwood after making 33 not out as captain of the Second Eleven. August 8th, 1959.



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member of this successful side and his 4 for 28 against Bolsover and 47 runs against Creswell were match-winning efforts. Indeed, in his early years, Bolsover must have been sick of the sight of him!

In the early evening of August 21st, 1926, pandemonium broke loose at the Park ground when John Gunn, the former Nottinghamshire batsman, was given out LBW for 84 and Kiveton Park had beaten Retford by a margin of 1 run. Some minutes later the result of the match featuring Mansfield, their nearest rivals, came through and Kiveton Park Colliery Cricket Club had gained their first ever Bassetlaw League Championship, a proud moment for Arthur and the rest of this very young side - a side which whilst standing on the threshold of greater deeds, was destined to be, within a very short space of time, severely shattered.

This photograph shows the Championship winning side of 1926.

Back row:

G. Starr, T.Parker, A. Clark,
Alvin Dennis, L. Collins,
A Robinson.

Middle row:

H.S. Turner, W. King, J.A.
Bolton, W.Bass,
W. Padgett, A. Bass,
G. Bass, J. Sissons,
Arthur Dennis, A. Noble,
E. Smith, F. Aldershaw.

Seated:

G. Ross, W. Rodgers,
A. Sissons, A. Widdison
(captain), W. Sissons,
S. Dennis, J. Widdison,
O. Ilsey.



THE RESPONSIBILITY INCREASES

One has only to examine the players making up the first eleven on April 30th 1927 to see that something was amiss. The eleven players on that date were Sam Dennis, Laurie Woodall, Joe Widdison, George Bass, Arthur Dennis, Tony Widdison, Wilf Chambers, Archie Pogmore, Walter Padgett, Harold Peat and Percy Parker. Of this side, only seven had played in the previous year's Championship side.

Of this Championship side, George Bass had left to play for Marsden in the Huddersfield League, Bill Rodgers had returned to Firbeck, Bill Sissons had been badly injured playing soccer in the winter of 1926-1927, and Albert Bass was in poor health and not able to play regularly.

So it was that, when the whole of the Bassetlaw League were anticipating that Kiveton Park Colliery would be a great force in local cricket for years to come, circumstances were to decree otherwise.

With the departure of these players, more pressure was thrown on the remaining members of the 1926 championship side, none more than on Arthur himself. Opening bowler, George Bass, had left and Arthur was given the job of opening the bowling. For the first time, the pressure was on, and at 20 years old and as fit as a fiddle Arthur really let himself go and enjoyed every minute of it. Although not yet as accurate as he was to become later, he was extremely hostile and, on a wicket giving him any help at all, he could be extremely dangerous. Twenty four wickets was his haul for that year, and another half century against Worksop at Kiveton showed people that the additional pressure of opening the bowling had not blunted his appetite for runs.

When 1928 came along the club had built itself another reasonable side but, under the surface, things were not quite as settled as would appear. Bob Spencer, a retired police inspector who had arrived in the previous year, had a disagreement with the club. As a result he promised that he would break up the first eleven and, as good as his word, he took Laurie Woodall, Harold Peat, Fred Stocks and John Sissons away to play for the Sheffield City Police.

So, once again, a promising side had been broken up. However, the "old school" of Sam and Arthur Dennis, George Bass, Albert Sissons, Tony Widdison and the two older members, Walter Padgett and Joe Widdison, were still the foundation of the club,

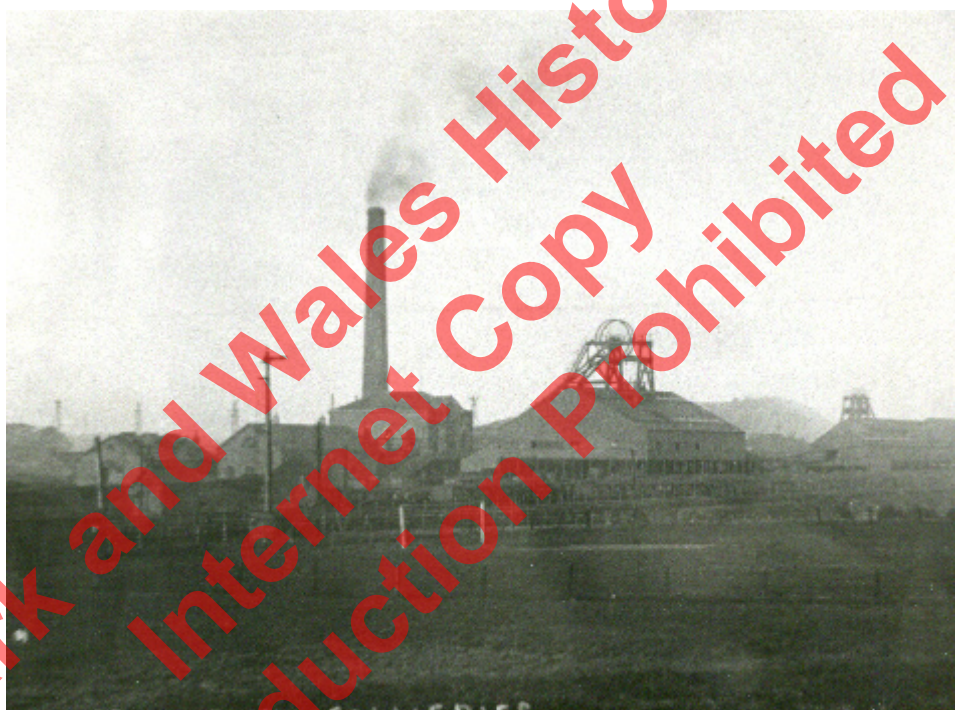
Arthur himself, now 21 years old, began in 1928 to fulfil the promise of the preceding years. In fact, it was in this year that he bowled more overs in a season than at any other time in his career. His analysis of 266.3 overs, 80 Maidens and 36 wickets for 614 runs speaks for itself, and with 382 runs for an average of 22.47 he was now developing into one of the best all rounder in the Bassetlaw League. His highest score that year came from another classic innings of 83 at Mansfield in mid-July.

1929 was an even better year for Arthur. Two unbeaten half centuries against Bolsover and Dinnington, and 5 for 21 against Creswell were some examples of his worth to the side. However on July 6th, 1929, Arthur was to achieve his best ever bowling analysis. Shireoaks were the visitors that day and as usual brought a good side. Kiveton had always had difficulty against them, but on that day Arthur was at his superlative best. He achieved his first ever hat-trick and finished with the fantastic figures of 8 for 15.

He completed the season with a personal record of 42 wickets at an average of 15.5, and 398 runs for an average of 26.53. He was batting at number three or four regularly now as well as opening the bowling; so it can be seen from his achievements in terms of figures that the increased responsibility was only serving to improve his performance.

1930 saw the final match ever to be played on the picturesque Park ground, a ground which had seen some great players, great performances, and also the rise and fall of a great Championship winning team. It had also seen the arrival of a young man named Arthur Dennis. He it was who, among other young players, had given immense pleasure to the many supporters who had made a day out of Saturday by visiting the Park with their picnic tea and giving full support to their local team. He it was too who was to be instrumental in the rebuilding of the club at its new home, and who was to be vital to its continued running for years to come.

Kiveton Park Colliery, 1920s



A NEW HOME

In 1928 the members of Kiveton Park Colliery Cricket Club were becoming increasingly concerned with the position of their beautiful Park ground. Mr Evans, the owner of the farmland on which the ground was situated, held no real interest in cricket and as the club had no rights as far as the land itself was concerned, there was considerable doubt as to the length of time that the club had left in occupation. In addition, cattle were being allowed to stray on to the ground and these points, plus the fact that it was quite a distance from the bulk of the population of the village, eventually persuaded the club to attempt to find pastures new.

The Kiveton Park Coal Company Ltd. was approached for help in finding new premises and a piece of land adjacent to the colliery was offered to the club. This was accepted and, in 1929, work began on converting a large area of mainly waste land into a reasonable Bassetlaw League ground.

A few workmen from the colliery were taken away from their regular duties and given the job of laying the ground. One of these was Arthur Dennis. With the aid of tubs from the colliery the land was gradually cleared. Tons of rubbish were tipped on to the ground, topsoil was replaced and seed sown. The pavilion from the Park ground was dismantled, transported to the new ground and rebuilt on the site occupied by the present score box. Thousands of hours of labour it took, but, with the help of a tremendous amount of voluntary labour from the remaining members of the club, the ground was completed in time for the start of the 1931 cricket season.

It is quite likely that the ground was played on too soon as the soil had had little time to settle, and the grass was probably not thick enough to support a full cricket season. However, played on it was, and for a couple of years the wickets at Kiveton Park did not have a good reputation. But Arthur did not mind bowling on them at all!

THE GREAT YEARS

The 1931 season began with Sam Dennis receiving the first league ball to be bowled on the new ground. Arthur himself was longing to bowl on these new helpful wickets and had the honour of bowling the first ball by a Kiveton Park bowler.

Strangely enough, however, he only managed 22 wickets in that first season. However, another two unbeaten half centuries against Mansfield and Retford confirmed his all-round ability.

This year also saw the return to the club of George Ross after a year at Worksop and also another good year for Arthur. He achieved his best bowling analysis to date of 28 wickets at a cost of only 12.82 runs each, 5 for 25 against Creswell at home being his best individual performance. It was in the first match of this season that he achieved another ambition by scoring his maiden century. It was the only century in the Bassetlaw League that day, and so was the first League century of the season and was achieved despite, according to a newspaper report, "a persistent drizzle".

However, if Arthur had achieved his share of success in the past seven seasons, the next two were probably to be his finest ever. He was, at the age of 25, in his prime and was probably bowling faster than at any other time in his career. His 51 wickets in 1932, which were to remain as his biggest ever haul in one season, were the result of sustained hostility and cost him only 12.07 runs each. He followed this in 1933 with another 38 wickets. Not that his batting suffered either, for, in the same two seasons he was scoring 740 runs for an average of 26.43, including another century, this time against Warsop. In addition to this he had 7 for 29 against Dinnington in a Kiveton Park Charity Cup match in 1932.

It was during these years that he received his first representative honour. On four occasions in all he was selected to play for the Bassetlaw League against Sir Julien Cahn's XI at his beautiful ground at Loughborough Road, Nottingham.

Sir Julien was a devoted supporter of cricket and these matches were arranged by him for a number of years. Large crowds used to attend and were usually well rewarded by a good contest between the cream of local League cricketers and an international eleven, which often contained many players of test standard. Sir Julien himself used to play, and it could be guaranteed that if he managed 15 or 20 runs, the bar would be thrown open for a longer session after the match! One has only to examine the names of the players in order to appreciate the calibre of cricket that was being played. For example, on June 13th. 1933, the two teams for this fixture were:

Bassetlaw League XI

J.B. Hall	(Worksop and Notts.)
H. Higham	(Dinnington)
W.Hunt	(Warsop)
A. Dennis	(Kiveton Park)
W. Herbert	(Warsop)
D. Jones	(Worksop)
E. Dann	(Dinnington)
C.E. Edwards	(Thurcroft)
J. Pearson	(Mansfield)
B. Higham	(Shireoaks)
G.W. Bass	(Whitwell)

Sir Julien Cahn's XI

F. Newman	(Surrey)
S.D. Rhodes	(Notts.)
R.C. Blunt	(New Zealand)
Sir J. Cahn	(Notts. C.C.C.)
R.W.V. Robins	(Cambridge Univ. and Middlesex)
D.P.B. Morkel	(South Africa)
G. Summers	(South Africa)
C.R. Maxwell	(Notts. Middlesex and Worcestershire)
T.B. Reddick	(Middlesex and Notts.)
G.F.H. Heane	(Notts.)
P.A. Gibb	(Cambridge Univ. Scotland, Yorkshire and Essex)

Arthur more than held his own in this illustrious company. Indeed, in the match featuring the above two teams he helped David Jones put on 77 for the fifth wicket, finishing himself with 29 runs to his credit.

He was now really at his peak and had a fearsome reputation on most grounds in the League. His temperament was renowned and it was a common sight to see Arthur, having just had a catch dropped off his bowling or having just had a lucky boundary scored off him, trundling back up his run, shaking his head and muttering in a tone just loud enough for the offending party to catch!

Sam Dennis, although vice-captain and elder brother, used to dread the thought of dropping a catch off Arthur's bowling. In fact, it is rumoured that before the start of the match he would get down on his knees and pray to the East that no chances would come his way. On one occasion whilst Sam was making his fifth attempt to catch the ball in the slips off an edge from Arthur's bowling, Albert Swaby put him out of his misery by leaning over from second slip, picking the ball out of the air and putting it in his pocket. Albert says that the look on Arthur's face was enough to make Sam finish cricketing there and then!

Sam did get the last word on one occasion though. Arthur, obviously with some subtle plan up his sleeve, moved Sam from first slip to forward short leg. His first ball after this move was a full toss just outside the leg stump and it was duly punished in no uncertain way. When the dust from Sam's evasive action had settled, Arthur was to be seen with his hands on his hips, glaring at his brother. "Does tha want a bloody bucket," were the words that greeted Sam as he picked himself up. However, he still had the presence of mind to reply "If tha bowls another like that, I shall need a bloody coffin."

Albert Swaby too came in for his share of barracking as a slip fielder and on one occasion was fielding there whilst Arthur was bowling at Eric Sykes of Bolsover and Derbyshire. It was a particularly fast wicket that day and Albert was probably a yard or so deeper than usual. Sykes got an edge to the ball and George Bass, once again standing up to Arthur, slightly unsighted Albert, who valiantly dived forward in an attempt to make the catch. His fingertip just touched the ball which flew on its way and disappeared over the boundary for four.

“Who does tha thinks bowling, Larwood?” greeted Albert on his return to normal posture.

Albert had begun to play regularly in the first eleven in 1930. He and Arthur were usually batting numbers three and four and Albert was mercilessly harangued by Arthur if he played a bad shot. He gained some revenge however when Kiveton played Dinnington one year. Ted Dann came in to open the innings for Dinnington. Before coming out to field, Sam Dennis and Albert had evolved a plan. Ted Dann had a reputation for giving a chance down to deep square leg early in an innings, and their plan was to play to this. Roger Wigmore was the usual square leg fielder but was none too hot at the art of catching and was therefore moved elsewhere. Albert casually strolled to his new position and sat down on a nearby seat trying to look as inconspicuous as possible. Everything seemed to be working to plan as Ted Dann surveyed the field and did not appear to notice Albert. The only problem was that nobody had told Arthur of the plan. He started off on his run and then, suddenly, when halfway to the wicket, he stopped. Something was wrong. There was no sign of the familiar figure of Albert crouching at slip. Slowly his eyes started to search the field. At first he did not find his target but eventually his eye settled on him, his finger was raised and Albert was beckoned slowly to his usual position. Roger Wigmore returned to square leg and the game was started. In the very first over Ted hooked a shortish ball from Arthur straight to Roger who promptly grassed it! Albert could not get rid of the smile of satisfaction on his face for weeks afterwards!

Arthur’s verbal attacks were not limited to his own players however. Opposition batsmen and umpires came in for their share of treatment. Alf Rose, who used to captain Creswell, once asked Sam in his most gentlemanly tones, “Would you mind asking your brother to curb his impetuosity?” Even if Sam had been able to pronounce it, his reply would no doubt have been the same! It was not worth the trouble to tell Arthur that; so Alf was met with the reply “Tha’d better ask him thissen Alf.”

However, not all Arthur’s energy was being expended in verbal onslaughts. Some of the best batsmen in the League would not relish facing him on a bad wicket. It was on one such wicket in the early days at the new ground that Bill Capstick, the Harworth wicket-keeper, congratulated Sam Dennis and Albert Swaby on a fine courageous stand and then added, “I shan’t be here long against Arthur.” When his turn came to face him, he lasted about four balls!

On another such wicket, Reggie Pepper of Worksop was having a torrid time against Arthur. A few weeks previously he had stroked some eighty runs off Kiveton Park bowling but, on this occasion, it was Arthur’s turn to be on top. It was one of the few occasions when George Ross actually stood back to Arthur and Reggie was struck on all parts of the body in a frightening spell of fast bowling. Finally he was put out of his misery by having his off stump cleanly snapped in two by a ball of extra pace. Poor Reggie picked up one half of the broken stump and set off back to the pavilion. George had caught the other half high to his right and handed it to him as he went, saying gleefully “You’d better take this half as well, Reggie”. Reggie staggered to the pavilion, his bruises beginning to ache, his natural stutter worsened by his frightening experience and, as he passed Arthur, he smiled ruefully and uttered the immortal words, “B-b-b-bloody glad to go, Arthur.”

Not all the stories about Arthur concern his batting and bowling, however. He and Albert Swaby must hold the record for the most runs ever scored off one ball in the Bassetlaw League. On the mammoth ground at Harworth one day, they not only scored NINE runs off one ball, they actually had to run them all! An on-drive by Albert did not quite reach the boundary and an attempted run out was eventually tried as Albert went for a fifth run. The ball missed the stumps and shot off to an unattended part of the field at the opposite side. Four more runs were completed by the near exhausted pair and one wonders whether another record was created for the length of time a match was held up to enable the batsmen to recover their breath!

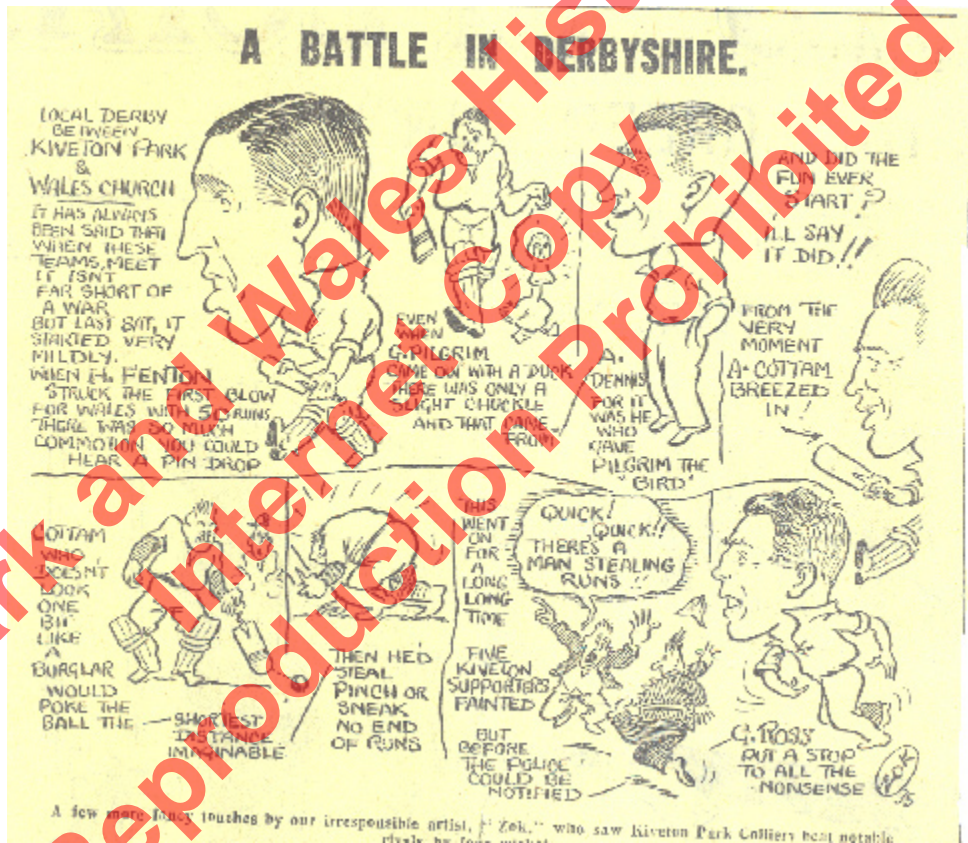
So, as the Second World War approached, Arthur was playing at his peak. The thirties were probably seeing more top class League cricketers than any other decade and there was none more well known in the Bassetlaw League than Arthur Dennis.

First Eleven at Kiveton Park - 1936

(Umpire unknown):
G. Ross, K. Watts, H. Parkin,
W. Noble, R. Luton,
(inset - A. Swaby)
C. Rhodes, A. Widdison, S.
Dennis (captain),
A. Dennis, S. Atkinson,
E. Noble.



"Zok" seems to have caricatured Arthur to perfection although his geography is a little haywire.



CLUB CAPTAIN

In 1937 Arthur was appointed vice-captain of the first eleven. Since before the Championship year, apart from three seasons, Tony Widdison had been captain, but the club, at their Annual General Meeting, decided that it was time for a change. Sam Dennis, who had himself been vice-captain since 1929, and captain for one year in 1931, was given the job and Arthur was made his deputy. He had now spent twelve years playing first eleven cricket and was a regular representative of the League side, so his experience had developed sufficiently to take on this task.

His first season as vice-captain resulted in another 34 wickets and 307 runs for an average of 20.46. This was the tenth season in all that his batting average had been in excess of twenty, a further indication of his consistency.

The war years saw a restricted Bassetlaw League programme and, like most local cricketers, the lack of regular match practice resulted in a drop in performance. However, when the war ended another milestone in his career was to be reached. For, soon afterwards, Sam Dennis decided he was getting too old for first eleven cricket and Arthur was given the job of captaining the club which he had represented for so many years. His enthusiasm for the game was still high, an indication of this being the fact that it was not long before he made his young daughter, Dorothy, change over to a left-handed batter when he was practising with her in the back-yard at home

He was now in his forties and had lost some of the pace with which he had gained such a fine reputation. However, in its place, there was now a quarter of a century of experience, and this was to be a priceless asset over the next decade.

For the years from 1945 to 1953 most of the club records have, unfortunately, been destroyed. However, the facts which are available show that, whilst not achieving the level of his performances in the thirties, he was still a useful all-rounder.

His final personal triumph was in 1952 when he won the Bassetlaw League bowling averages with the figures of 118 overs, 37 maidens, and 29 wickets for 191 runs, an average of 6.59. Although the league averages are usually won with more wickets than Arthur captured that year, it must be borne in mind that he was then 45 years old, which is "getting on a bit" for a pace bowler. That year a league record was set up when Albert Swaby won the league batting averages, this being the first time that both winners had come from the same club. On February 21st, 1953, Arthur and Albert went along to the Town Hall at Retford and proudly received their awards. There has seldom been a more popular winner than Arthur, most people realising that this was a reward for a sustained piece of accurate pace bowling over a period of 38 years.

For most of the time since the Bassetlaw League had been formed there had been only two divisions, one for first elevens and the other for second strings. In 1952, in an effort to streamline the league, a decision was reached which split the first division into three sections. In that year Kiveton Park Colliery finished in a sufficiently high position to qualify for Section 'A' and, whilst not setting the new section alight, they managed to hold their own in that section in 1953.

However, 1954 saw a black cloud appear on the horizon and, despite Doug. Cope ending the season with 406 runs and 45 wickets, the team was relegated to Section 'B'. This was followed shortly afterwards by relegation to Section 'C' and Arthur, who had been with the club when they were at the top of the tree, took this ignominy harder than most.

He was now at the stage when he was obviously thinking of finishing playing. He had played for the club for nearly 40 years and, although disappointed about the fall from grace over the past few years, he realised that it was time for a change of leadership. Although the first eleven did not achieve very good results in Arthur's reign as captain, one has only to study the names of the players in the team to understand that a fairly rapid change was taking place in the club. Many of the members were coming to the end of their career and the younger members were not experienced enough to fill their place adequately.

On a Saturday night early in the 1959 season, Arthur, who had obviously had something on his mind during the match at Ransome and Marles, called at Creswell on the way home with the rest of the team. He walked slowly over to Albert Swaby and quietly told him that he had "had enough" and intended to resign from the captaincy.

When one considers the glories of the past years it is ironic that Arthur's departure from the first eleven scene should take place in a quiet car park and away from the familiar ground of his own club. That he made the right decision is unquestionable; whilst Albert Swaby, who took over from him, was leading the first eleven back into Section 'A', Arthur himself, far from retiring from the playing scene, was acting out the final chapter in his own glorious playing career.

First Eleven at
Bridlington - 1949

T.G. Redfearn, R. Wigmore,
G. Rhodes, G. Ross,
L. Cheshire, E. Aldous,
S. Dennis, E. Noble, L. Easy,
R. Rear, A Swaby,
A. Dennis (captain),
E. Chapman, R. Clarke.



A NEW LEASE OF LIFE

In 1959 Ken Smedley resigned as captain of the second eleven and the club approached Arthur with a view to asking him if he would take over the position. It was only a short time since he had said that he had “had enough” but he could not resist having another go. At this time the second eleven were languishing at the foot of Division 2, Section ‘C’ of the Bassetlaw League. The talent was there but it needed welding into an effective force. A blend of youth and experience was at hand but the team was unable to get good results. Lack of team spirit was apparent throughout and Arthur was given the job of putting this right.

Results were almost immediate. Team spirit took a turn for the better and the second eleven at last began to fulfil its potential.

In 1960 the Bassetlaw League had decided to split Division 2, Section ‘C’ into two sections, so creating a new ‘D’ section. That year, only Arthur’s second full season as second eleven captain, saw him “manage” the team into the top half of the section, so avoiding the ignominious drop into Section ‘D’.

The following year more success was to come his way when he skippered the side to runners-up position behind Gainsborough Britannia 2nd XI, so obtaining promotion to Section ‘B’. Not content with this, the same two teams did a carbon copy act in 1962 by finishing in identical positions at the top of this Section.

So, in just over three seasons, Arthur had taken his new charges from the foot of the Second Division to Section ‘A’, a section which has always had a reputation for good class second eleven cricket, and a section which was to supply, for years to come, an exhaustive training ground for new young members of the club.

Arthur thoroughly enjoyed himself during these years and earned the respect of many players, some of whom were destined to be a force in the first eleven in future years, and some who had been in that position in years gone by.

Not that he was content with sitting back and letting others do all the work; in fact, there was nothing he liked better than to get “into the fray” once again, and he would often do so to good effect. On many occasions he would pick up a wicket when a pair was “sticking”, and he was still a useful batsman. Indeed, the second eleven of that time could well have reversed its batting line-up and opened with Arthur and Peter Cooper!

He well remembers the occasion when, in 1963, after being 5 wickets down for 14 runs and needing 115 to win against the old enemy, Gainsborough, this time in Section ‘A’, he climaxed a magnificent fight-back by, in the last over, straight driving a huge six into the back of the Northolme football stand. This straight drive, always a favourite shot of his brought him to 30 not out, was the winning hit and was, in fact, instrumental in the relegation of Gainsborough back into Section ‘B’. In a way he was sorry about this for he really used to enjoy the “needle” which these matches always created.

For many players these years in the second eleven were most enjoyable. Results were good, team-spirit excellent, and the standard of cricket played was very good. Much of the credit for this must go to Arthur who took a struggling team and, in a short time, made an effective fighting force of it.

When he finally decided to retire as captain at the end of 1965 he had played cricket for the club regularly for more than 44 years, hardly ever missing a Saturday. Since that year, he has occasionally turned out for the second eleven, so stretching that period to almost half a century. His retirement as skipper was, despite the fact that he was now nearly 58 years old, a blow to the second eleven.

Many of the players who played under and respected him would testify that this last chapter in his playing career was no less of a success than his earlier years. Players such as Roy Batty, John Rhodes, Terry Andrew, Roy Smedley, myself and others who are still actively engaged in playing cricket for the club, and the many who have since retired or left will, in the future, look back on these six short years and remember them as some of their most enjoyable.

Second Eleven
at Manton - 1959

E. Barber, E. Batty,
R. Clarke, E. Pogmore,
E. Towe, R. Heath,
W. Clarke, S. Field, V. Ellis,
A Dennis (captain),
J. Bass,
P. Wethersby.



Second Eleven at
Sherwood - 1959

E. Batty, R. Clarke,
R. Pickering, R. Smedley,
R. Heath, D. Higham,
S. Field, P. Wethersby, A.
Dennis (captain), J. Bass,
V. Ellis.



HOW GOOD WAS HE?

“Arthur Dennis and Ted Dann were, in my opinion, almost certainly the two best cricketers ever to play in the Bassetlaw League. In fact, if Arthur had played for a more fashionable club, I am sure that he would have been hammering on the door of the Yorkshire County team”.

These words come from one of the finest batsmen to play in the Bassetlaw League, Harry Higham of Shireoaks and Dinnington. Harry had to face him on numerous occasions as opening batsman for Dinnington when Arthur was at his peak, so he is speaking from experience at first hand. Describing his attributes, Harry says: “He had genuine pace both through the air and off the wicket, moved the ball away from the right-hander and consistently pitched just short of a length. He would have been ideally suited to limited overs cricket as it is known today. If I have any criticism at all to make of him as a cricketer it would be that, on occasions, when he had been punished for bad balls by being hit for four, he would think that it was his off-day and ask to be taken off. He had not enough faith in himself. He really was better than he thought he was.”

Arthur had a strange habit of allowing his bowling arm to fall very low behind his back before delivery. However, he was a “sideways-on bowler” with basically a classic action. An away-swing was the result of this beautiful action and he could really use a new ball. This, together with his ability to use the seam as well, made him an extremely difficult bowler to face.

George Ross, who for some years kept wicket to him, holds him in very high regard. Arthur’s accuracy meant that George would only rarely be seen standing back to him. He likens him to two famous players, Ted McDonald of Australia and Lancashire, and Les Jackson of Derbyshire and England, both in action and ability. Such comparisons may seem exaggerated, but George is quite serious when he says that if Arthur had been handled in a better fashion in his earlier days and had managed to keep a better control of his temperament, he would have been one of the best bowlers in England’.

Arthur’s brother Sam, who for some years was his Captain, had great faith in him as a bowler. “His economical action meant that he took very little out of himself and he could bowl all day if necessary.”

With some 800 first eleven wickets to his credit at a cost of about 14 runs each, his bowling record speaks for itself. However, to a certain extent, it is misleading.

His early years were spent bowling on the true wickets of the Park; indeed, it may be this fact, plus the number of genuine class batsmen whom he faced, which made him realise, very quickly, the necessity for accuracy. Although, in the early days at the new ground he had some help from the wickets, it was not long before they settled down and accuracy was again a vital factor in his value as an opening bowler.

Such was his consistency that it may be argued that he did not really get his fair share of wickets. Often, failing to score off Arthur due to his accuracy, a batsman would take extra risks when facing the other bowler and would get himself out in doing so. So it is apparent that the stark figures of his bowling analyses over the years do not really tell the whole story of his ability.

As a batsman he had an excellent technique. His main strength was on the off-side, his driving always being of a high standard. Some 7000 runs in his first eleven career was the end result of about 30 years cricket.

He reached the century mark on 2 occasions (plus one further ‘ton’ in a friendly match) and achieved 28 half-centuries. As with his bowling, consistency was his strong point, and many were the times when he would

come home with two or three wickets and twenty or thirty runs.

For years Arthur batted at number three or four for the first eleven, and there is no doubt at all that this position was on merit. For a few years in the early thirties the first four batsmen for Kiveton Park Colliery were Albert Sissons, Sam Dennis, Albert Swaby and Arthur Dennis, and there would be few attacks in the Bassetlaw League who would relish bowling at such an excellent quartet as that.

The very fact that, on half a dozen occasions, he represented the Bassetlaw League against top-class opposition, and more than held his own, is one indication of his ability.

Taking his bowling record and batting record separately, Arthur would without doubt be remembered as an excellent cricketer, and he would probably have been selected for League representative honours, just for one ability alone. But when one considers that he did both and performed to such a high level for so long, it is easy to appreciate the words of some of his contemporaries when they say that he was possibly the finest cricketer ever to play regular Bassetlaw League cricket.

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EVERY BLADE OF GRASS

For years after the opening of the new ground, George Starr had been responsible for the upkeep of the wickets. With the help of many of the other members of the club, Arthur Dennis included, George had managed to get the ground into reasonable condition. Inevitably, though, it eventually got too much for him and when he finally retired from the job someone had to be found to continue with this most important task.

Arthur it was who stepped forward into the breach. He had helped to lay the ground some 20 years previously and had played on it regularly since then, so he knew every blade of grass! From then until the present he has spent most of his spare time tending the ground where he himself played most of his cricket.

He has done this with very little help from the other members of the club. Although he has had help with the rolling, marking out, and cutting of the outfield from time to time, basically his work on maintaining the square itself has been carried on alone. Indeed, it is doubtful if he ever wanted any help with this! Although ever grateful for help in rolling the ground, to a certain extent he has resented interference with the actual wickets themselves. This is quite understandable when it is considered that his 20 years care and nurturing could be ruined virtually over-night by innocent ignorance on the part of other people.

When one considers that the task has been carried out without the aid of some of the expensive equipment which other, more fortunate, clubs may possess, and the fact that they are not the easiest of wickets to maintain due to the preponderance of clay at one end of the ground, his achievements may be regarded in an even brighter light.

Over the years, the wickets of Kiveton Park Colliery Cricket Club have gained a reputation for being among the fairest in the Bassetlaw League. Rarely of a dangerous nature, they usually offer encouragement to the bowler but are still true enough to allow the batsmen to play their shots with confidence.

An indication of this fairness is illustrated by the fact that two of the finest cricketers to play in Bassetlaw League cricket have had some of their best successes on this ground. Mike Smedley always thought highly of the playing surface in his time with the club, and although Arnold Thompson may have jokingly said, from time to time, that he would like to dig them up, he has had his fair share of wickets on the same ground.

The unquestionable knowledge of wickets in general, and his own in particular, stood him in good stead in his years as captain of the first and second elevens. In addition, the club has benefited enormously from this knowledge and indeed, although the club would have been able to struggle on without him, there is little doubt that his efforts in this direction have resulted in a better ground for cricketers to play on, and consequently a better cricket club for Kiveton Park.

TEA IS SERVED

Although it may be stretching things too far to apply the cliché, “behind every successful man, there is a woman” to the case of Arthur, it would be remiss to let the opportunity of mentioning his wife slip by.

In September 1939, Arthur married Marjorie Aldous. For years she and her cousin Vera had been keen supporters of the club, and it is said that they used to jump up and down on their seats when Arthur took a wicket!

Arthur had met Albert Swaby off the train at Kiveton Bridge Station and told him that he was getting married on the following Saturday and that Albert had been given the honour of being the best man. Whilst waiting in church for the arrival of his bride, Arthur turned to Albert and said, in the tone that he used when grumbling at Albert when they were batting together, “I’d rather face Butler (Harold Larwood’s understudy) than go through this.”

From then until the present, Marjorie has been regularly engaged in organising and helping with the supply of teas to twenty two hungry cricketers. Her date loaf, “cricketers’ bread” to many of the playing members, has been one of the most popular items on the menu, although, strangely enough, she herself has never liked it! For what must be almost a record number of years she has operated cheerfully, without receiving as many thanks as were possibly due to her. Often taken for granted, together with the other ladies who have helped with the teas over the years, she has nevertheless come back for more to carry on with a most valuable job. For that, Marjorie herself warrants a place alongside the many other people who have served the club unselfishly for so long, and for which the club will be eternally grateful.

A DEBT IS OWED

Arthur's activities with the club are now restricted to being acting, unpaid groundsman and Chairman (since 1963). In the latter capacity his experience and wise words of counsel still play their part in the club's efforts to better itself.

If one was to create a roll of honour of people who had given their time for the benefit of the club, many names would spring to mind. In addition to the playing members, such people as Harry Turner, one of the main instigators of the formation of the Bassetlaw League, George Star, groundsman for some 30 years, Eddie Noble, first eleven scorer for nearly 30 years, Albert Clark, Bill Whitfield, Harold Chambers, and many others have given their all for the club.

No-one could argue that the name of Arthur Dennis should not appear on the same list. It is he, probably more than any other, who has helped to keep the club on its feet and who, it is hoped, will be with us for many years to come. In its efforts to become one of the best clubs in the Bassetlaw League the club still needs the services of Arthur and people like him; although if anyone of the same calibre comes along, this shall be a lucky club indeed.

Both on the field and behind the scenes Arthur's services have been, and still are, invaluable. Past, present and future generations of cricketers with Kiveton Park Colliery Cricket Club may recall many things concerning their time with the club, but few will fail to acknowledge the huge debt of gratitude that is owed to Arthur Dennis.

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POST SCRIPT

It is 37 years since I wrote the first introduction to this little biography. Since then, much has changed. Arthur himself died in at the age of 88. His widow, Marjorie, now 91, survives him.

We are now in a new Millennium and Arthur would not recognise the landscape around the cricket ground where he spent so much of his life. The Colliery itself finally closed in 1995 and the land on which it stood has been landscaped, providing a much more pleasant aspect for players and spectators alike.

He would be very impressed with the amount of work carried out by club members around the ground and in the pavilion and with progress made on the playing front. The Club is now well established in the higher regions of the Bassetlaw League and has developed an enviable reputation for developing the cricketing talent of the village's youngsters.

As an acknowledgement of its own history, the Club still retains the name of Kiveton Park Colliery Cricket Club and has, in prime position in the redeveloped pavilion, a photograph of the last match played in front of the old colliery on the day prior to final demolition.

It is appropriate that the work of the History Society in Kiveton Park has helped to create an opportunity for this book to be republished in the year in which Arthur would have reached the age of 100.

Perhaps he is looking down on us all, having a bit of a moan when things are not going too well but fiercely proud of the progress made by the Club he served so loyally for so long.

ROGER HEATH

NOVEMBER 2007