

## Harry Winrow – Nottinghamshire Cricketer 1938-1951-A Career Curtailed

**'In their own firmament like men of rhyme  
To their appointed heights the players climb'**

(G. Rostrevor Hamilton-Ode to a Cricketer-W.G.Quaife)

Cricketers, it seems, climb 'to their appointed heights', and then depart from the arena, leaving their career statistics as their permanent record. In the Collins Who's Who of English First-class cricketers, there are listed hundreds of players whose achievements were, to all appearances, moderate. But without those 'moderate players' there would be no 'great players', who themselves climb upon the shoulders of the moderate. The reader may wonder why I should concern myself with a career of one such player who appeared in only 113 first-class matches and scored only 4,769 runs. But there is more to Harry Winrow than those bare figures suggest.

In May 1950 I was aged 9 and, in time for the start of my prep school summer term, I was given my first cricket bat. It was a Gradidge Len Hutton autograph, and I was inordinately proud of it. However, before I had an opportunity of using it, one evening three days after my return to school, as I undressed for bed, the school matron noticed some spots on my back. She informed me that I had chicken pox and immediately dispatched me into isolation in 'the sick room', where I remained for 3 weeks. Distressing to me as that was, it was equally so for the school's more senior cricketers, because it transpired that I had started an epidemic, which resulted in the cancellation of cricket fixtures for the first and second elevens, for the first half of the term.

However, I received a consolation prize, the full value of which only became apparent to me much later. Someone lent me a radio, and I discovered cricket commentaries. I remember the details of those broadcasts almost as if they took place yesterday. Rex Alston was the commentator on the Surrey v West Indies match, which I see from Wisden was played on 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> 1950. The power of the tourists' batting was by then becoming clear, and they duly savaged a quite respectable bowling attack of Alec and Eric Bedser, Surridge, Laker and McMahon for a first innings total of 537 for 5, Weekes and Walcott dominant with a stand of 247. Surrey were joint county champions that year, and Rex Alston was again the commentator during the

August bank holiday weekend when they played Nottinghamshire at the Oval. The names of the players in that match became imprinted in my mind and have remained so ever since, in particular for some reason, those of Notts: Keeton, Simpson, Winrow, Hardstaff, Harris, Stocks, Harvey, Sime, Butler, Meads and Oscroft. By means of newspaper reports and Wisden I followed their respective careers, and they featured in table games of 'Disbat Cricket' and 'Owsthat' played against school friends, who also had their favourite county sides. Some of those Notts players achieved fame by virtue of long and distinguished careers such as Keeton and Harris, one of the best pairs of opening batsmen in championship history. Simpson and Hardstaff both made their mark as test match players, while Eric Oscroft on the other hand, played only 9 first-class matches, and in his 8 innings for Notts made a total of 8 runs and took 13 wickets at an average of 54.38. The left-handed Harry Winrow enjoyed his best season in 1950, scoring 1,459 runs at an average of 37.41 and coming 24<sup>th</sup> in the first-class averages. But after playing in the first two matches of the 1951 season, Winrow was demoted to the Notts 2<sup>nd</sup> eleven, and was unable ever to regain his place in the first team. Why, I wondered, had that happened? Only now do I know the reasons.

Frederick Henry (known as Harry) Winrow was born on 17<sup>th</sup> January 1916, the youngest of a family of 7 children residing at Manton near Worksop, Nottinghamshire. Harry's father William was an engineer employed at Manton Colliery, the family having originally lived in the Wigan area. He was described as small, plump and jovial. All the Winrow children developed a strong attachment to cricket, and Mrs Valerie Winrow (Harry's sister-in-law and wife of his brother William) told me that they had no strong interests in life apart from cricket and that it was to them "a religion". She described Harry as "reticent, not outgoing, but sociable in the right atmosphere". She said that during Harry's first-class cricket career she acted as "chauffeuse" for her husband William, who spent a great deal of his time watching Harry play. Another of Harry's brothers Robert played 5 matches for Notts between 1932 and 1935 as a left-handed batsman and slow left arm bowler. His career was unspectacular, except for the innings of 137 he played against Somerset in 1935, in which he took part in a stand of 220 with his captain George Heane – it remains the Notts record partnership for the 8<sup>th</sup> wicket. He was offered a 3 year contract but decided to leave the Notts staff at the end of the 1935 season.

On the recommendation of the secretary of Worksop CC, for which he had played in 1932, at the age of 17 Harry Winrow was given a trial in the nets at Trent Bridge in 1933 and joined the county 2<sup>nd</sup> eleven the following season, while still playing club cricket for Worksop in the Bassetlaw League. He regularly opened the

batting in the 2<sup>nd</sup> eleven with considerable success, although his slow left arm bowling was hardly used. In the seasons 1934-37 Winrow continued to open the batting for Notts 2<sup>nd</sup> eleven and became one of its leading batsmen. However he was unable to break into the 1<sup>st</sup> eleven due to the side's strength in batting. That was particularly illustrated in 1937 when, among the first twenty batsmen in the national averages, Hardstaff, Keeton, G.V.Gunn and Harris stood second, twelfth, eighteenth and nineteenth. They were supported by other players of note, including Willis Walker and the captain Heane.

In the 1938 season Notts, handicapped by illness and injury suffered by some leading players, declined to 12<sup>th</sup> place in the county championship, the then lowest position in the club's history. Thus it was that Winrow made his first-class debut, playing against Middlesex at Lords, batting at number 5. The match was dominated by Bill Edrich's monumental 245 and Notts lost by an innings.

Nevertheless in the Notts first innings Winrow stood up well to the short-pitched bowling of Gubby Allen, and in a solid knock (including one impressive hook off Allen) he contributed 24 to a stand of 62 with Hardstaff, who top scored with 105. The Nottingham Guardian correspondent wrote that 'Winrow, though he was at times neglectful of opportunities, demonstrated on this his county debut the capacity to meet an emergency. He stiffened the side by staying 75 minutes when a rapid retreat was in prospect'. Winrow's next opportunity came on 4<sup>th</sup> June at Trent Bridge against Surrey, a match which Notts lost by 11 runs. He earned praise from the cricket correspondent of the Nottingham Guardian for his 'dogged perseverance' in his 'gallant task' in a 2<sup>nd</sup> innings knock of 34 in 90 minutes. 'His strokes were limited but he displayed courage full to overflowing against the fast bowling of Gover and Watts'. On the 11<sup>th</sup> June Notts' match against Somerset at Taunton produced the Nottingham Guardian headline 'Staples, Larwood and Winrow saved Notts from rout'. At the wicket for 140 minutes and last man out for 69 out of 161 'Winrow revealed the ability to face an awkward situation in confident style'. His 2<sup>nd</sup> innings (c Hazell b Wellard 0) was less successful, and the match was lost by 10 wickets.

In the damp season of 1939 Winrow's opportunities were again limited, and although second in the second eleven batting averages, he was selected for the first eleven only four times. In the last of those matches, against Gloucestershire at Trent Bridge, he was the top scorer in both innings with 39 and 38. It was a match dominated by Hammond's 153 and the bowling of Goddard, who took 11 of the 19 Notts wickets to fall on the last day and in the process took his 200<sup>th</sup> wicket of the season. The Nottingham Guardian commented that in

the first innings 'Winrow, who defended so stoutly, was not immune from criticism. He beat himself in trying to hit a 6 (bowled Goddard) when the ball just wanted playing'. The paper's headline following the last day's play was 'Notts go down without a fight - reckless batting'. Winrow was exempted from blame having 'played sound cricket and dispatching Goddard for two delicious fours'. By the end of the last season before the war Winrow had made a total of 310 runs in 21 completed innings. His batting average of 14.76 was modest, but at the age of 23 he had shown promise of better things to come, not least in displaying courage and determination with the ability to play attractive shots.

After wartime service with the RAF (in which he attained the rank of sergeant) Winrow rejoined Notts for the 1946 season. His opportunities were still limited, but among his 13 innings at an improved average of 32.83 were innings of 77 against Gloucestershire and 66 batting at number 6 against Middlesex, the latter in a stand of 120 with Heane, rescuing Notts from 58-4. Brief mention should also be made of his bowling – 21 overs, 1 wicket for 50, against the touring Indians. John Arlott remarked in his match summary that Winrow was the only bowler to trouble the Nawab of Pataudi on a placid Trent Bridge wicket, if only because his high-pitched slow deliveries were flighted above the sightscreen! In October 1946, frustrated by his lack of opportunities, he requested the Notts committee for immediate release with a view to joining Hampshire. That was refused, but he was offered an increase in his annual pay to £300. He did not accept that offer and boldly requested an increase to £350. and a county cap. He was offered £325. without the award of a cap, but in February 1947 he asked for a 3-year contract at a salary of £450. The Club minute book records that that request was refused, but he was told that his pay would increase if he was awarded a cap during the coming season. Apart from one early unsuccessful appearance, Winrow was unable to break into the Notts first eleven until the end of May when he made 73 at Trent Bridge against

Essex batting at number 6, in the words of the Nottingham Guardian having 'batted charmingly as though to illustrate the folly of depriving spectators of his stroke play'. It must be admitted here that in 1947 the Trent Bridge wicket was for the most part a batsman's paradise, only 3 of Notts' 14 home matches being finished. However that against Kent (18<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> June) did result in an innings victory for Notts after Winrow dominated a 5<sup>th</sup> wicket partnership with Tom Reddick of 244 in an unbeaten innings of 140. He was rewarded with the award of his county cap together with a 3-year contract on the same salary as other capped players. Two weeks later Winrow followed that with a brilliant not out 109 against Sussex at Hove, featuring his strong on-driving, leading to a Notts victory by 7 wickets. Then in August Winrow, in a then Notts record 6<sup>th</sup> wicket

partnership of 303 with Peter Harvey, saved Notts from almost certain defeat by Derbyshire, scoring an unbeaten 204. Winrow finished the season with a batting average of 44.70 and for the first time scored over 1,000 runs. His slow left arm bowling, though expensive, provided the only support to the opening attack of Butler and Jepson. The Notts yearbook for 1948 commented that 'if he could bowl a better length and put a bit of devil into his deliveries he is still young enough to take a prominent place among the great Notts all-rounders'. That hope was not to be fulfilled, but Winrow did make important contributions to two Notts victories, taking 6 for 65 against Surrey at the Oval and 5 for 70 at Northampton. At the Oval his victims included Fishlock, Squires, Barling and Errol Holmes. At Northampton, according to Wisden, 'Winrow tempted the tail-enders into indiscretions'.

Unfortunately Winrow's 1947 form with bat and ball was not repeated in 1948, and that season was also a very poor one for Notts, weak in bowling and inconsistent in batting. The only bowling highlights for Winrow were his 6 wickets in the match against Warwickshire at Trent Bridge, which resulted in a win for Notts by 8 wickets and his 5 for 18 in Notts' victory over Derbyshire also at Trent Bridge. Those performances apart it seems that opposing batsmen were no longer tempted into indiscretion by his high-tossed deliveries.

Winrow's brilliant batting of 1947 was forgotten, as his batting average for 1948 was halved. He made an unbeaten 83 out of 179 in 3 hours 10 minutes in a low-scoring match at Trent Bridge, lost to Hampshire by 2 wickets. His only other notable innings came in the following match at Leicester, when he top-scored with 73 in a Notts first innings of 212, in which he shared a stand of 110 with Hardstaff.

The 1949 season was slightly better for Winrow and for Notts. His batting average improved to 25.72, and he scored one century, an unbeaten 105 in the drawn match at Trent Bridge against Hampshire. Nevertheless he was unable to regain the form and confidence so evident from his batting in 1947. That was illustrated by John Kay of the Manchester Evening News in his report on the drawn match between Lancashire and Notts in July 1949. Kay stated that 'Winrow has few profitable strokes in his bag'. He added that Winrow 'appears destined to take over from Harris, in that he possesses an obstinate streak that bodes ill for bowlers, but his range of scoring strokes has no relationship to the repertoire of Harris'. In July 1949 Winrow was offered a further 3 year contract at £500. p.a., although he unsuccessfully requested £550. The minute book records that in March 1950 he asked for a benefit, but no decision on that was made.

Clearly Kay had not seen Winrow in 1947, and he would certainly have changed his opinion if he had the opportunity of observing Winrow in 1950. In Notts' second first-class match against Sussex at Trent Bridge

Simpson and Winrow took full advantage of a perfect wicket to make a stand of 243 in 130 minutes. The correspondent of the Nottingham Guardian reported 'Winrow has started the season brilliantly, outscoring Simpson and completing his century with a 6, and I do not expect to see anything better. Winrow at the start of his knock overworked the pull, but it is a stroke he favours. There were occasions when he used it to punish deliveries a foot outside the off stump. It came off, but as his innings matured, his stroke play was exceptionally good, some of his off driving equalling that of Simpson in its power – about as big a compliment as can be paid to him'. Winrow's unbeaten 188 was followed by an innings of 75 (an impressive display according to Wisden) in the next match against Leicestershire. Early in June a stand of 124 between Winrow and Hardstaff at Ilford sent the Nottingham Guardian reporter into raptures – 'this was a feast of batsmanship for the connoisseur, and the ease with which Winrow struck the ball away, particularly on the leg side could not be improved upon'. Early in July in the match against Derbyshire at Ilkeston Winrow again outscored Simpson in a second wicket stand of 181, 'exhibiting stroke play of an elegance and charm which few left-handers today can emulate, being exceptionally strong on the leg side'. In a rapid second innings of 34 he hit Derek Morgan for 5 fours in one over. A week later, against Kent at Trent Bridge, Winrow again took the limelight in an attractive 127 with a variety of strokes, according to Wisden.

In mid August at Coventry, in the absence of Simpson and Hardstaff, Winrow played a grand forcing innings of 99 with a 6 and 11 fours, making his runs out of the 145 scored while he was at the wicket, against a Warwickshire attack including Pritchard, Grove and Hollies. Those three bowlers took 108, 97 and 144 wickets respectively in 1950 and were to play a large part in Warwickshire's championship winning side in 1951. In the next match at Bournemouth Winrow again distinguished himself in partnership with Simpson, making a faultless 65 out of 134 before being unluckily run out. Notts overall had a poor season in 1950 with 4 batsmen (Simpson, Hardstaff, Harris and Winrow) towering above their colleagues according to Wisden and the bowlers providing little support to their highest wicket-taker Harold Butler. Thus their last match, against Essex at Trent Bridge was to decide the destination of the championship wooden spoon. It was affected by the weather, with no play being possible on the second day. Consequently the issue was decided on first innings, with Notts needing to score 289 on the last day. Simpson and Winrow opened with a brisk partnership of 123, Winrow contributing 57, and Notts achieved their goal with 5 wickets in hand, Winrow ended the 1950 season with an aggregate of 1,459 runs at an average of 37.41, in 24<sup>th</sup> position in the national first-class batting averages, no mean achievement, finishing above such prominent players as Jack

Robertson, George Emmett, Tom Graveney, Jack Crapp, Doug Insole, Jeffrey Stollmeyer and Charles Palmer. At his best Winrow stood up well in comparison to his more illustrious county colleagues Reg Simpson and Joe Hardstaff. It might be argued that he had the advantage of an easy batting wicket at Trent Bridge, but analysis of his scores shows that he made an almost equal number of his runs away from home, including scores of 97 and 99. After his best season, at the mature age of 34, he could look forward to 1951 with confidence and expectation.

The Notts 1951 season began with a rain-affected match against Kent at Gillingham. With a draw inevitable on a lifeless wicket Winrow made an unbeaten 64 in 3 hours. After this steady though unexciting start Winrow took his place in the Notts side at Trent Bridge against Surrey. Batting first in conditions assisting seam bowling Notts lost their first 3 wickets for 8 runs, including Winrow lbw to Surridge for 0. Facing a first innings deficit of 266 Notts batted better in their second innings, but they were unable to prevent Surrey winning by 10 wickets. Winrow, lbw for 21, was one of five victims of Jim Laker. Winrow had not made a brilliant start to the season, but on the strength of his form in 1950 Notts supporters must have been surprised to see that he had been omitted from the side to play Hampshire at Bournemouth, a match which Notts lost by 16 runs. In fact his career as a first team player was over. Winrow appeared regularly in 1951 and 1952 for Notts second eleven, in which he was one of its principal batsmen, particularly in 1952 with an average of 48.60. He must have hoped to regain his first team place, as he refused an offer of £750. for termination of his contract at the end of 1951 and instead insisted upon remaining on the Notts staff until its expiry at the close of the 1952 season. In August 1952, after further negotiation with the Notts committee, he was granted £300. in lieu of benefit. He emigrated to South Africa, where he had already accepted the offer of a coaching post in the winter of 1950-51. He had previously assisted Bill Voce at the Trent Bridge indoor cricket school. He was based at East London, where he owned a shoe shop, and he became a first-class umpire, president of the Border Umpires Association and an executive member of the Border Cricket Union. He returned to England during the summers of 1953 to 1956 to play cricket for Ind Coope at Burton-on-Trent, and in 1953 he scored 219 for Ind Coope out of a total of 404 in the Breweries Cup Final at Burton. He died in hospital aged 57 at East London on 19<sup>th</sup> August 1973.

How did it come about that in 1951 Notts dropped and then ignored one of their best players, and continued to do so in 1952, despite the club finishing last in the championship table, a man who was aged only 35 and apparently at the height of his powers? For a long time it seemed to me incomprehensible – what had

gone wrong? The Playfair Annual for 1951 included in its first-class batting averages a column recording the number of catches taken by each player. In the case of Winrow it recorded that his catches in 1950 had totalled 3 – a hint perhaps of the area in which his problem might lie. In 1979 Peter Wynne-Thomas produced his Nottinghamshire Cricketers 1919-1939, in which states in his section on Winrow that his career was hampered by poor fielding. However many first-class players have continued to play for their counties regardless of their lack of expertise as fielders. Among countless examples of that was Alf Dipper, Gloucestershire opening batsman between 1908 and 1932 – his obituary in the 1946 Wisden reads ‘Dipper never fielded well, and this weakness limited his selection for big occasions to one Test’. On one occasion the great Gloucestershire spin bowler Charlie Parker (himself a poor fielder and restricted to playing in one test match), was heard to remark, as Dipper and two colleagues, equally moderate as fielders, lumbered after the ball, ‘there go my bloody greyhounds’. Another player, whose obituary also appeared in the 1946 Wisden, was Percy Perrin of Essex, described as the best batsman who never played for England. The explanation was ‘inability to field with any spark of speed’. Nevertheless he continued to play for Essex until the age of 52. In the modern era 2 players, Phil Tufnell and Monty Panesar, represented England despite their lack of fielding ability, although I believe the former did later show some improvement. In Winrow’s case there must surely have been some other reason for his rejection by Notts. I think that was the change in captaincy from Bill Sime (1947-1950) to Reg Simpson. Sime, a barrister and later a judge, was said by Tom Reddick, the Notts player and coach, to lack the gifts essential to a leader. His easy-going style of captaincy was in contrast to that of his martinet predecessor George Heane. Reports in the local press during the 1950 season complaining of the side’s poor fielding, including on at least one occasion that of Winrow, seem to indicate that Sime did not have the will or the inclination to check it. When I met Joe Hardstaff’s son Air Commodore Joseph Hardstaff in 2010 I asked him if he knew Winrow. He described him as ‘an absolute gentleman’, who would spend hours bowling to the young Hardstaff in the nets at Trent Bridge, and as a genial and encouraging coach. Hardstaff told me that Winrow ‘had no throwing arm’ and was in the habit of jokingly pretending to throw down the stumps from his position in the covers. Such behaviour, if it was tolerated by Sime, was no laughing matter to the new captain Simpson. In 2008, at my request, Peter Wynne-Thomas, the acknowledged expert on Notts cricket, asked Simpson about his memory of Winrow. His laconic reply was ‘a good bat but a terrible fielder’. It seems that any memory he might have had of his successful batting partnerships with Winrow in 1950 was not uppermost in his mind, and that for some reason they did not get on well together. As captain Simpson was a



co-opted member of the Notts selection committee, and in all probability his views influenced the committee against Winrow's reinstatement in the first team, despite Sime being a fellow member. (Winrow's numerous requests for increases in pay, in contrast to other established players, cannot have endeared him to the committee.) Also in 2008 I had a telephone conversation with Arthur Underwood, who played 14 times for Notts first team between 1949 and 1954. He remembered Winrow as unathletic and a heavy smoker but a good conversationalist and drinking companion. He was more welcoming than some other established players – 'you didn't speak unless you were spoken to' according to Underwood. John Clay, who succeeded Simpson as captain in 1961, told me that when he joined the Notts first team in 1948 he did not find them to be a happy side. He said there was a clique of players, who had played regularly before the war, and who did not make life easy for newcomers. In contrast to the genial Sime, Underwood found Simpson as far from easy-going and maintaining an altogether stricter regime. He was not surprised that Winrow did not last long under Simpson's captaincy. For the first time in their history Notts fell to the bottom of the championship table at the end of the 1951 season, but that did not propel Winrow back into the side in 1952. It was clear that its weakness was not its batting but its bowling, with only one player (the leg spinner Peter Harvey) taking 50 wickets. That situation (not helped by the bland Trent Bridge wicket) was not to be remedied until the advent in 1953 of the Australian leg spinner Bruce Dooland.

In retrospect Harry Winrow can be seen as a player who was, at his best, an attractive batsman equal in ability to many of the acknowledged good cricketers of his day, but who sadly was brought down at the height of his achievements by his own failings. As a congenial drinking companion and conversationalist there could be no greater compliment to Winrow than John Arlott's reference to him (in a 1971 match programme) as one of a select group of cricketers who used to join him at the Trent Bridge Inn at the end of a day's play, telling their stories of cricket and cricketers, past and present.