



# RITE OF PASSAGE

***Keith Frankish – commended***

In later years, Tom Dockery would reflect that his childhood ended on Saturday 12 August 1972 at Sprotton village cricket ground, Yorkshire. He was 11 at the time and was there to watch his father's team, Thurby, play Sprotton in the local league. Tom's father, Les, was a serious and well-respected man, who was both a parish councillor and a churchwarden. Les lived for cricket and had brought Tom up to love the game and its traditions. "Play hard but play fair," was his motto.

The match that day was hard-fought. Thurby and Sprotton had a vendetta going back decades, and this fixture was especially important since both teams were contending for the league title. Tom's epoch-making moment occurred during the second innings. Thurby had batted first and made 160 – a decent score on a poor wicket. Les had made 36. Sprotton had started well in reply, putting on a hundred for the loss of only three wickets. But a middle-order collapse had left them struggling on 120 for 7, with only one serious batsman, Bill Blunkett, left.

Tom was watching from the boundary, standing behind his father, who was fielding at cover. Blunkett was on strike, and Ted Parkin, the Thurby village teacher, was bowling. Parkin was a solid medium-pace bowler, who usually maintained a good line and length. So when he sent a loose ball short of a length down the off, Blunkett took full advantage, skipping forward and executing a perfect cover drive. Les Dockery couldn't get down to it in time, and the ball shot past him, racing towards a point on the boundary near Tom. Les hared after it with a speed that belied his 42 years. It was a close thing, but at the last moment, Les threw himself forward and flicked the ball behind him as he somersaulted over the boundary. The batsmen were taking a third run. Les leapt up, seized the ball, and sent a zinging return to Parkin, who whipped off the bails while Blunkett was still a yard from home. The Thurby fielders erupted with joy.

But Tom had seen something, something his father must have missed. He had seen the ball cross the whitewashed boundary line before his



father's fingers had reached it. He had to tell Dad. He would want him to.

"Dad!" he called, "Dad!"

Les turned, a broad smile on his face.

"The ball, Dad," Tom went on, "It crossed the line."

The smile vanished, and his father stepped quickly towards him.

"You didn't see, Dad. It was a boundary."

"No, no." Les shook his head firmly.

"Yes, it went over. Only a couple of inches, but it did..." Tom faltered.

And then it happened. His father did something that forever changed Tom's view of him and the well-mannered, fair-playing, grown-up world he represented. He came right up to Tom, leaned in close, and, in a Yorkshire accent suddenly much broader than usual, snapped, "No, it f---ing didn't!"

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