

Money Matters: Club Accounts Across the Years

By Jon O'Shea



Dear Friends,

The Committee have much pleasure in submitting their report for Season 1947. The past year has marked our 25th Anniversary as a Cricket Club...now we are proud members of the Halifax Cricket League, an achievement for which we extend our very sincere thanks to past and present supporters.

So begins Northowram Methodists CC's annual report for 1947. Remarkably though, the club's archive can take us even further back. With the club's original cash book from the 1920s having also survived the passage of time, the opportunity exists to re-visit Northowram's affairs both 60 and 80 years ago. With the best part of a century having passed, these documents provide a valuable insight into the previous means and machinations of the club now known as Northowram Hedge Top.

1947 marked a particularly significant time in the club's history because, as can be gleaned from the above extract, it was the year in which Northowram Methodists joined the Halifax Cricket League. The club had gained its 'Methodists' moniker due to the merger of the Wesleyan and Ebenezer churches in the mid-1930s, and at this time in the club's history a steadfastly religious outlook was characterised by the presence of one Reverend J. Goldsbrough as club president.

Secretary H.A. Greenwood's acutely formal foreword to the report also leaves little room for doubt as to the major influence of the church in club cricket at the time:

The coming of a new season is a time for reckoning the score of the past, we look back to recall what we have to be thankful for and what we have to repent of. Gratitude evokes penitence, and penitence enhances gratitude.

The introduction also goes on to recall the traumas of the recently-ended World War II:

That future with all the uncertainties which it holds, with all the medley of hopes and fears which it may realize is now approaching. We may have good cause for fear, for indeed the times are still difficult.

The financial statement for 1947 shows that various club-backed social events brought in the most income (almost £72), memberships and 'special subscriptions' garnered £38, and the sale of refreshments earned nearly £25. The fact that subscriptions were more profitable than refreshment sales signifies the lack of amenities available at the Hedge Top Lane ground in that era. By way of contrast, this past season (2006) bar receipts topped £20,000 (with a profit in excess of £7,000), an increase which shows just how far the club has come in the intervening 60 years.

Also mentioned in the report is the success of the club's post-war membership drive, a healthy membership of 64 is heralded "an outstanding success." Most notable though, is the overwhelming amount of space afforded to the advertising of local services which include Ross Bros., Fish, Fruit & Vegetables. who courteously promise 'Civility & Reliability' and E.Hirst Village Stores in Towngate, Northowram, who astutely declare: 'Old and New Customers Welcome.' Elsewhere, Madame A.Raynor's 'Shop for Good Quality Household Linen and Dainty Lingerie' showed a prescient awareness of retail diversification by offering a library from which the Good Book could be obtained "for leisure moments."

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Having been established under the aegis of the local Methodist church in the aftermath of the Great War, Northowram's financial report for 1927 was issued in the club's original name, Northowram Wesleyans CC. A look at the cash book tells us that, due to lack of immediate social facilities, club income at this stage was largely based on members' subscriptions and regular collections. Nonetheless, a locally-held whist drive and dance evening did prove the chief fundraiser for club coffers that year. Fortunately, chocolate sales also brought in the not inconsiderable sum of just under £2!

Most entries in the 'Expenditure' column are for the purchase of new playing equipment (a newly crafted bat costing £1 and 4 shillings and balls 6s), though Hedge Top Lane's annual field rent of £5 paid to the Coley Estate and insurance fee of 19s 3d also made a significant dent in the profits. Of course, local cricket clubs have rarely been the source of great money-making potential, but the undoubted benefits of engendering community spirit, at a time of great uncertainty, through cricket would have been uppermost in the thoughts of the Methodist church.

Although the club's relationship with the church then foundered in the early 1950s, Northowram continued to admirably uphold that Methodist ideal of cricket as a form of social cement. More than anything else, what these fascinating reports reveal is that without the considerable input of the local community, Northowram, from Wesleyans via Methodists through to Hedge Top, could not have possibly survived let alone continued to thrive as they have done.

