

## The Dawning of a New Era: 1945-66

By Jon O'Shea

Having been well and truly established as a growing force in Calderdale cricket in the period between the two world wars, Northowram Methodist CC – as they were then known – were reborn in the aftermath of the wartime period. When league cricket was formally suspended in 1938, the club had periodically continued to play local rivals if and when sufficient personnel were available for selection. Regular organised cricket, however, only returned to the agenda when the club again competed in the Halifax & District Amateur League during the 1945 season.

That summer was a busy one for the Methodists' players as they also competed in midweek evening competition: the Red Triangle League and Cup, alongside the likes of Sowerby Bridge, Elland and Illingworth. Then, in 1946, the club reached the Collinson Cup final, losing out to Churchill Redmans, a now-defunct team founded by the Halifax machine-tool firm of the same name. Following their successful re-integration into competitive cricket, the Methodists, led by then club president the Reverend J.Goldsborough, successfully applied to join the Halifax Parish Cricket League.

The club's annual report for 1947, composed by secretary Mr Andrew Greenwood (also the village butcher), tells of the committee's pride at attaining a place in the Halifax League and "very sincere thanks" is extended to all "past and present members and supporters". Club membership at this time stood at a healthy 64 after a successful attempt to boost numbers after the war. The report also documents a Mr P.McCoy as winner of both the first team's batting and bowling average prizes, and future club president Walter Howden is similarly rewarded for his efforts with the second XI.



Significantly, in his foreword Mr Greenwood acknowledges, too, that the existing pavilion and refreshment kiosk (a simply-converted chicken hut) would need to be totally removed due to the urgent requirement to commence development of the club's Hedge Top Lane ground. He goes on to state that, though such ambitions would fully tax the resources of the club, they would be essential to "bring a bright prospect for the future of cricket to our village".

In these post-war years the ground was also enhanced by the infilling of two redundant quarries which were maladroitly positioned at one end of the field. Running water was also installed for the first time. And, perhaps most significantly, a

junior (under-18) section was then established to enable youngsters in the village to gain essential experience of competitive cricket. In order to maintain this impressive forward momentum, in 1952 the club took the bold step of purchasing its hitherto rented Hedge Top Lane premises from the Coley Hall Estate for the substantial fee of £600.

The club then underwent a second seismic shift when their ties with the Methodist Church were permanently severed. This came about because the club committee had arranged a Christmas raffle (at which alcohol was also allegedly consumed!) in order to raise funds, which was considered by the Church to be contradictory of the strict Methodist doctrine. As they no longer had any binding religious connections, the committee subsequently elected to re-name the club Northowram Hedge Top.

However, by the time current club president Harry Andrew joined Hedge Top at the dawn of the 1960s, rumours were circling in the village that the club was on the verge of folding. A much-needed influx of players including Harry and talented pace bowler Alan Kellett – who all threw themselves into building upon the solid foundations already in place at Hedge Top Lane – not only kept the club afloat, but also brought about a sharp upturn in fortunes on the playing side. From a team struggling manfully in the second tier of the Halifax League, Hedge Top suddenly emerged as a force to be reckoned with, surging somewhat surprisingly to the 1961 2nd Division title.

Better was to follow as the team which has since been widely recognised as the greatest in the club's history first went on to claim the Parish Cup in 1965 with an unexpected triumph over favourites Triangle, and then proceeded to win the Halifax League 1<sup>st</sup> Division title for the first time the very next year. The team was captained during this golden period by the hugely talented ex-Lightcliffe star Alan Butterworth, who former Hedge Top wicketkeeper and chairman Ian Spencer believes was "one of the finest batsmen ever to grace the Halifax League, let alone Northowram Hedge Top."

That team, under the patriarchal guidance of President Walter Howden, went unbeaten in the league throughout the entire 1966 season, and were unlucky to be halted at the semi-final stage of their Parish Cup defence by Booth CC. Hedge Top gained a measure of revenge, however, by sealing the title in style with a four-wicket victory at Booth's recently opened Broad Fold Park ground. Certainly, these triumphs marked an as yet unsurpassed on-field pinnacle for the club, and firmly established Northowram Hedge Top as a name to remember.