

Dr Peter Davies from the Department of History at the University of Huddersfield has been reconstructing the history of local cricket as part of a pioneering £50,000 Cricket Heritage Project being sponsored by the Heritage Lottery Fund and the University of Huddersfield. Working in tandem with research assistant Rob Light, he has been unearthing old photographs, archive documents and other sources relating to the rich local history of the sport. Here he turns the spotlight on Parish Cup heroes Southowram.

Yet another chapter in the Southowram success story



Earlier success . . . the Halifax League Second Division Champions in 1992

SOUTHOWRAM Cricket Club is one of the success stories of today's sporting scene in Calderdale.

Founded in 1978 and therefore much younger than most of its rivals, it boasts an idyllic ground, excellent facilities and an impressive honours board, added to at the weekend with the club's superb Parish Cup success.

Although the club are the 'new boys' of local league cricket, they have interesting and intriguing predecessors in the hilltop village still famous for its quarrying industry.

For centuries, Southowram has been famed for its quarrying or 'delving'. At one time the precious stone was actually mined, leading to the village acquiring the nickname 'Klondike'. Later, steam cranes perched precariously on the edge of quarries became a characteristic Southowram sight.

The example of Southowram helps us to understand the role played by churches in the expansion of cricket in late Victorian England.

All of the village's teams had a church or chapel link. There were

teams from the Methodist chapels and both of the Anglican churches, St Michael's at Bank Top (now demolished), and the Southowram Parish Church, St Anne-in-the-Grove, formed their own teams.

Of the various precursors to today's Southowram C.C., the St Anne's Church team had the longest and most chequered history.

It probably began in the 1880s and in its early years the team was sometimes referred to as 'St Anne's Church Choir' or 'Southowram Choir'.

Southowram is a village of lost cricket grounds. Some of the fields used over the years were gobbled up for quarrying, but many remain. In its early years the St. Anne's team played at Cross Platts, close to the church.

From the 1890s to the 1930s, Southowram's various cricket teams (there were by this time quite a few) are reported to be playing at grounds in Law Lane, Pinnar Lane and West Lane.

There is also evidence that at one time cricket was played on a ground adjacent to the now

demolished Yew Tree House, in the heart of the village.

In 1891 the Halifax Parish Cricket Challenge Cup Committee appraised the grounds of all the clubs that had entered the competition. Here is their description of the Southowram St. Anne's pitch:

This field adjoins Greenwood's Quarry near the Pack Horse Inn. It measures 125 x 100 yards and has a laid crease 30 x 20 yards, a good though small pavilion and seating for about 60. Both crease and outfield are good though the later is somewhat uneven in contour.

At this period there was a quarry called Greenwood and Marshall at Milking Hill. If this is where the 1891 ground was, then it would be remarkably close to the location of the present pitch, developed in the 1980s.

Southowram St. Anne's were regular entrants in the Halifax Parish Cup in the 1890s, although the team enjoyed little success, usually losing in the first round or even the preliminary round.

Southowram St. Anne's had little success over the years, with a

second placing in the 1899 Akroydon League being one of its best achievements.

During its 50-year-plus existence, the Southowram St. Anne's team played in a number of different leagues. In the late 1890s they had a stint in the Brighthouse Cricket League.

In the early 1900s Southowram St. Anne's tried their hand in the Halifax-based Akroydon League:

In 1899 a St. Anne's team is sometimes, though not always, referred to as Southowram St. Anne's Band of Hope. This suggests the church and team had come under the sway of the most influential temperance movement of the time.

Between 1907 and 1915 there was a Halifax and District Church League for teams connected with Anglican churches in the area.

Southowram St. Anne's took part in this competition, winning it in 1914. A team from the now-demolished St. Michael's at Bank Top also played in the Church League.

Southowram St. Anne's had several spells in the Halifax Amateur Cricket League - the last

being from 1916-20 - and also played in the Halifax and District Cricket League up to 1922, when the Club was a founder member of the Halifax and District Amateur Association, created in 1923 as an amalgam of the Amateur and District Leagues.

The 'Saints' played on until 1929, latterly sharing a ground with the village's Methodist team until a lack of support caused the St. Anne's club to fold after some 50 years.

By the end of the 1920s Southowram St. Anne's had gone into terminal decline. But the village's Methodist cricket team would stay in business until the eve of World War Two.

Having earlier played in the Halifax and District Nonconformist League, the team usually known as Southowram U.M.C. (United Methodist Church), moved into the Association in 1925.

During the 1930s the United Methodists team was sometimes referred to solely as 'Southowram' in match reports such as this one from 26 April 1930.