

Sowerby Bridge CC

Founded: 1852

Ground: Walton Street

Former Ground: White Windows, Fore Lane, Burnley Road

Nearest Landmark: The River Calder trickles by on one side of the ground

Nearest Other Clubs: SBCI, Sowerby St. Peters

League: Halifax

Former Leagues: Central Yorkshire League

Greatest Moment: 1904 – the club's first Parish Cup triumph

Local Hero: Fast bowler David Pickles – played 41 times for Yorkshire in the post-war years

Bizarre Fact: A campaign was started in 1947 to return Walton Street to its status as a cricket venue after wartime requisitioning. The War Office relented – but only in 1951!

A set of 'Rules' exists which was adopted by Sowerby Bridge Cricket Club on 26 April 1852, at what appears to be its inaugural general meeting.

This club is probably the one referred to in the 'History of Sowerby Bridge Cricket Club' which was published as part of the Handbook of the Sowerby Bridge Carnival & Rosette Day in 1925.

It played at White Windows and was disbanded some time before the current Sowerby Bridge CC was formed in 1877.

Rule 6 specified that 'any Gentleman desiring to join this club, shall communicate his intention in writing', so membership was clearly restricted to those of higher social status.

In the period between this club being disbanded and the formation of the current Sowerby Bridge CC, cricket retained a strong presence in the town.

A group which was 'composed in the main of manufacturers' sons and of the gentry in the neighbourhood.....played the game on land in the vicinity of the present Willow Park'. This team was known as Sowerby Bridge United, but was also given the nickname the 'shirtneck lot' because of their social status.

Its main rival was Sowerby Bridge Church Institute CC, alternatively known as the 'smock lot'.

The current club was (re-)formed in 1877 and began playing on the Walton Street ground. Some of the earliest members of the club are listed in this account of its history and they included:

Messrs. W.A. Sutcliffe, now of Westfield, Frank Clay, of Wood View, Hollins Lane, James Clay Horsfall, John Wood (who played several times for the county), and the late John D. Wilson, who was probably the first president.

Few details of the original club have survived, but in that first season of 1852 it played in two matches against Halifax Albion.

In the second of these early fixtures, according to the Halifax Guardian, the 'batting of messers Sutcliffe, Hartnett, and Sorby on the Sowerby Bridge side was very good, and the fielding of the latter gentleman at cover point and longfield repeatedly received the applause of a numerous assembly who were at the ground to witness the sport.'

At the close of play Halifax Albion had scored 80 and 38, while Sowerby Bridge, after reaching a modest 36 in their first innings, were 26 for 5 at the close of play. No-one in the Sowerby Bridge team managed to reach double figures.

The original club played at first at Fore Lane - between Sowerby Bridge and Sowerby - and another venue in the town, just off Burnley Road.

It was stated, in the History of Sowerby Bridge Cricket Club, published in 1925, that:

In the early years...a heavy roller was purchased from Mr. Albert Siddall, Engineer, and although this roller has since been many times repaired it is yet one of the most useful articles under the heading of 'ground tackle'. Fitted with strong shafts, it can be used either drawn or by manual help.

Some of the present younger members of the club sometimes wish a small motor was attached to it; but perhaps that sentiment is too typical of the present day youth, where it clings to the line of least resistance. If a word of advice be needed here on the point, let it be known that an extra hour upon a playing pitch with the use of the heavy roller may mean a couple of hours longer for our side at the wicket on a Saturday afternoon.

In conversation with some of the older players, one learns how in 1894 the Club achieved distinction in winning its way into the final round (sic) of the Halifax Parish Cup competition. In the semi-final game with Holy Trinity rather heavy scoring took place.

The club moved to its current headquarters in the period immediately following the end of the Great War, and purchased it in 1936.

The original Walton Road scoreboard was erected in 1934; today, a simple scoreboard is incorporated into the frontage of the new pavilion.

During the Second World War, the Walton Street ground was used by the War Office as a detention barracks or prisoner-of-war camp.

One barracks official remembers: 'During the war I was stationed at the detention centre, where the cricket ground is now. The ground itself was tarmaced for a parade ground, and two mills on either side of the entrance housed the gym, workshop, sleeping quarters and sergeant's mess'.

Approximately two hundred soldiers were held there. One morning one of them broke away and swam across the river and escaped. Someone went after him and caught up with him at the Friendly Pub.

As such, the club had to find an alternative venue for its wartime fixtures, and so it lodged temporarily at Sowerby St. Peters CC, up the hill in Sowerby village.

Because of the 'merging' of the two clubs between 1939 and 1945, when the War finally ended, some Sowerby Bridge players switched to the St. Peters club and some players from St. Peters moved in the opposite direction.

For the duration of 24 years, between 1961 and 1984, Sowerby Bridge competed in the Central Yorkshire League.

Sowerby Bridge won Division 3 of the League in 1965 – the first year it had run – under the captaincy of Brian Lawrence. They won it again, with T. Martin as skipper, in 1972 and 1973.

It was decided to burn down what was left of the changing rooms. The black smoke brought a visit from the local constabulary

Walton Street is famed for its water hazard – the river that runs nearby, and which engulfs many a cricket ball – but in 1992 it suffered the ultimate in natural disasters.