

## Cricket Crazy Centre Vale

By Stephen J.Dobson 2006

(Drawing on the excellent book, *Cloth Caps and Cricket Crazy* by Freda, Malcolm and Brian Heywood, published by Upper Calder Valley Publications 2004, and personal memories.)

There are many sports for all to play  
Which I have tried throughout my days  
But Cricket is the best of all  
To test one's skill with bat or ball  
On a summer's day, warm and hazy  
No wonder I am cricket crazy!!!

All one needs is a beautiful flat field  
Set amongst some rolling hills  
And one could search for many a long hour  
And yet find nothing to rank with ours  
In one of Yorkshire's finest Dales  
What could compare with Centre Vale!!!

Cricket's been there since days long gone  
Established by Sam Fielden, son of John  
Its rules were published in 1839  
And introduced some punitive fines  
So players who didn't turn up to play  
Would rue the cost for many a day

Now he would see, who took a look  
At the Heywoods' comprehensive book  
That TCC was then a club to know  
And Centre Vale became a place to go  
So our home ground staged a match between  
The North and South of England teams

The match was scheduled to last 3 days  
With the main attraction being the brothers Grace  
The South was captained by WG  
Whom a full 2000 turned up to see  
The North batted first and got 201  
For the South, WG scored but a single run

On the final day, before lunch was eaten,  
The North collapsed and were soundly beaten  
To placate the crowd a new match was arranged  
In which WG batted like a man deranged  
He smashed the ball tremendously hard  
Over the National School, into the churchyard

Although Tod's all in Yorkshire now  
Not long ago this wasn't so  
The Boundary followed the underground road  
Of the river across the emerald green sward  
A batsman, in Yorkshire, could top-edge a hook  
And in the Red Rose County might the catch be took

Tod benefited from its border position  
By setting aside its Yorkshire tradition  
To play regular cricket with Lancashire teams  
At a standard which surpassed all dreams  
The famous Lancashire League was under way  
It remains at the top of league cricket today

Our Centre Vale ground can proudly boast  
That it has played the genial host  
To professional cricketers from distant lands  
Who raised the standard and filled the stands  
Such as Walcott, Weekes and Richards too  
The very best: a cricketing Who's Who

Most clubs preferred a bowling pro  
Since they could bowl all innings through  
So they hired Charlie Griffiths and Wesley Hall  
So fast, one could hardly see the ball  
Those yet to bat were pale of face  
And the toilet was their favourite place

For charging in to bowl, like wounded bison  
Came Gilchrist, Lindwall, Donald, Tyson  
Brave amateurs stood there, inwardly quaking  
But some soon found that they stopped shaking  
As the pro overpitched and they played a drive  
Unsurpassed by any man alive!!!!

The spinners were all the very best  
Who had proved their worth in many a Test  
There was Tayfield, Gupte and Warne too  
Mysterious things could they make the ball do  
Many amateurs tried to give the ball a clout  
Because their minds were full of doubt

But, as the ball leaves the bowler's hand  
The batsman must read the bowler's plan  
He must firstly judge the length and turn  
And use his feet, as he'll soon learn,  
For those who camp within their ground  
Won't last long when Shane's around!!!

A memory beside which most others do pale  
When neighbouring Bacup came to Centre Vale  
The buses were late in arriving that day  
And the Bacup fans found to their dismay  
That Weekes was out for a measly score  
He hadn't seen Sunderland's double-arm action before

Tod's very best season was 1954  
When Jim Burke was the Todmorden pro  
Batting was thought his strongest card  
And opposing bowlers found it hard  
To dismiss him from the playing field  
Before he'd gained a hefty yield

His bowling quality was not well known  
But on Northern pitches, green not brown  
He seemed to get some subtle spin  
Some said he threw, cos they didn't win  
118 wickets, a prodigious haul  
At 7 runs each, as I recall!!!

1954's celebrated double success  
Was won through good teamwork and great finesse  
Those who played in that great year  
Must now be fully listed here:  
Moncrieff, Brownbridge, Hazeltine  
Ingham, Sunderland, Crabtree and Dean  
Houghton and giant Ivor Martin  
Dawson, Crowther and little Frank Saul  
Heywood, Fielden, Walker and all  
These are names we'll forever recall

Not many clubs can fairly claim  
To have two bowlers who made their name  
For England, against the best they played  
And their record cannot be gainsaid  
Shackleton and Lever served the country well  
Let's hope others will follow; only time will tell

With a few memories of the ground I'll conclude  
Like the barracking, which was amusing, but crude  
Meat pies, teas and all those bottles of pop  
Coming under wasp-attack whilst removing the top  
Perhaps one of their forbears stung WG Grace?  
Isn't Centre Vale such a magical place!!!