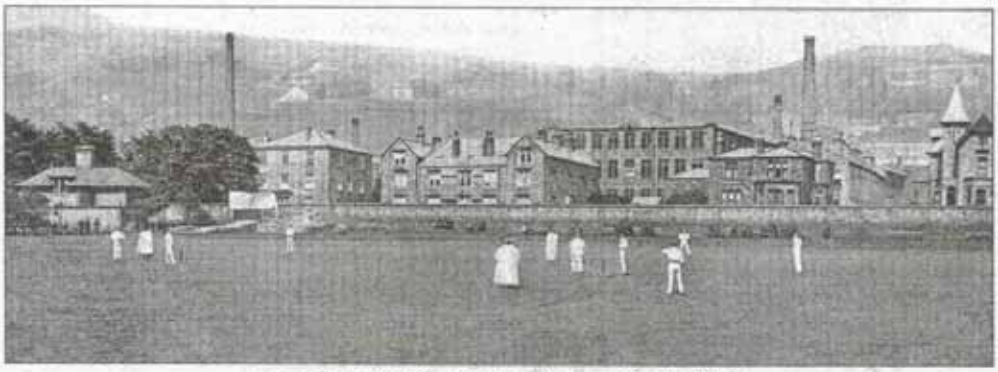
By **Peter Davies**



A match is played on Todmorden's ground in the 1890s

Fires, floods and trophies

ALTHOUGH the first recorded match played by Todmorden Cricket Club was against Littleborough on Monday, August 20, 1839, we know that a fledgling club had been in existence since at least 1835.

In 1837 the club moved from its first home at Shoebroad and for a brief time played at Old Shop Meadows.

However, in 1836 an act of parliament had approved the Manchester to Normanton railway line, which included a viaduct that ran right through the new ground.

A new venue was quickly found and in 1839 the club moved to its current location at Centre Vale.

At a special meeting of Todmorden CC in 1841 it was passed, 'that this club be broken up'.

Although the demise of the early club is difficult to explain, events over the next decade were to secure the long-term future of cricket in the town.

They revolved around the Fielden family who purchased the Eccles Holme Estate, which included Centre Vale, in 1843. The purchase was made by John Fielden who, after piloting the 10-hour bill through parliament in 1847, died in 1849.

The Fielden Estate then fell into the hands of his cricket-mad son Samuel who immediately set about reforming Todmorden Cricket Club.

In 1864 the ambition of Todmorden Cricket Club was demonstrated when, on April 19, a decision was made to form 'a special committee for the management of an All-England match.'

Staging this type of 'big match' cricket, against leading touring XIs, had been a common way of attracting prestige for clubs in the area since the 1840s.

In 1874, this sequence of major matches led to Centre Vale hosting its only first-class match when the club staged the North versus South fixture.

Despite a phenomenal run of scores over the preceding month, it was the bowling of W.G. Grace that inspired a South victory by an innings and 30 runs.

He took seven for 25 as the North were dismissed for 46. The early finish, at 1pm on the final day, could have meant a financial disaster for Todmorden. But a second match was hastily arranged for the afternoon...and a surplus of £57 1s 2 1/2 d. was made for the club.

Although it was one of 13 clubs that formed the first North East Lancashire Cricket League competition in 1891, Todmorden did not compete in the league's inaugural season.

This was the forerunner of the current Lancashire Cricket League (the competition was renamed in 1892) and it was formed following a meeting at the Bull Hotel, Burnley in 1890.

Joining a league was now paramount if the club was to maintain a prestigious list of fixtures, and consequently Todmorden became a member of the new South East Lancashire League.

By 1896 the South East Lancashire League had become the Central Lancashire League, and in that year, after finishing in second place for the previous three seasons, Todmorden became champions.

The 1896 season was also Todmorden's last in the Central Lancashire League.

In 1897, seven years after being involved in the birth of its predecessor – the South East Lancashire League – the club played its first season of Lancashire League cricket.

The club celebrated its 30th season as a member of the Lancashire League in 1927 by winning the championship for the first time.

In 1954 Todmorden First XI completed the Lancashire League and Worsley Cup double for a second time. On this occasion the club's professional was Jim Burke, an Australian who played for New South Wales and represented his country in 24 Test matches.

After some disappointing seasons, Todmorden were rejuvenated by two events in 1971.

The first was the adoption of the limited-overs format by the Lancashire League, and the second was the appointment of Lancashire and Leicestershire player Peter Marner as pro.

In the 1990s Todmorden Cricket Club were plagued by a disastrous run of fires.

In 1990 the tackle shed, which had been originally built when the club staged a match against the United England XI in 1874, was burned down.

And an accident at a bonfire, being held at Centre Vale, took place in 1997, before the pavilion was set alight the following year. This last fire was caused by an electrical fault in the kitchen and smoke damage meant that virtually the whole building had to be refurbished.

In 2004, after years of painstaking research, a unique and wonderful book chronicling the history of Todmorden cricket from 1835 to 1896 was published. It was written by long-time Todmorden CC devotees – the Heywood family, Malcolm, Freda and Brian.

● With grateful thanks to Brian, Freda and Malcolm Heywood for their research on Todmorden CC.

The 1954 league and Worsley Cup winning Todmorden CC side, (back, from the left): B Fielden, M Heywood, J Hazeltine, J Burke (pro Australian), J Ingham, R Crabtree, and (front) K Walker, J Crowther, H Dawson (cpt), F Saul, C Sunderland.

Right - a report of a flood which hit the club in 1982

DEVASTATING BLOW TO CRICKET CLUB

LIFE MEMBER Leslie Forester in action on the all covered cricket field.