

Clayton West CC

The earliest reference to cricket in Clayton West comes by way of an Elmley (Emley) C.C. membership card from 1877. It shows that fixtures were arranged between the clubs for 9 May and 15 September.

Clayton West resisted the rush to join one of the many new league competitions that were formed in the 1890s. In 1896 the club was still playing 'ordinary matches' against local teams.

Club spokesman Mark Firth comments: 'I've seen a map from the period which suggests there was a cricket field at the back of Scissett Baths; some people say that this was the club's first home, but it could just as easily have been the early headquarters of Nortonthorpe CC.'

However, by 1906 the club had joined the ranks of regular competitive cricket and were represented by two teams in the Dearne Valley League.

In 1920 the local league system was undergoing some major reorganisation. A number of clubs, including Clayton West, were set to form a Holme and Dearne Valley League. But at the last minute they were asked to join the ailing Huddersfield Central League.

The club landed its first piece of Huddersfield Central League silverware in 1929, the Holden Cup, beating Holmbridge in the final by 21 runs.

In 1936 the 2nd XI enjoyed their first taste of success in the new league, claiming the Tinker Cup. They beat Skelmanthorpe in a low-scoring final. In 1940, as war raged across Europe, the Holden Cup was again in the possession of Clayton West.

1968 was another great all-round year for the club. The 1st XI became Huddersfield Central League champions for the second time and the 2nd XI landed the Tinker Cup.

When the 1st XI became Huddersfield Central League Champions in 1975, it rounded off a hat-trick of successes, a feat which was covered in glowing fashion by the *Huddersfield Examiner*.

After a lack of toilet facilities threatened the club's future in 1980, the local community rallied round to resolve the situation.

In 1988 Clayton West were Huddersfield Central League champions. In the same year, the club was all set to play Holmfirth in the Sykes Cup.

Stalwart Firth takes up the story: 'The West Indian fast bowler Tony Gray was playing for Holmfirth and, obviously, we weren't exactly relishing the prospect of facing him. This was prior to the era when everyone wore helmets, but our skipper was busy ringing round trying to order some. Then the night before the big match we heard that Gray had been called up to play for the West Indies in a tournament in the USA. You could say we were pretty happy about this!'

When long-time player and supporter of Clayton West, George Hardy, died, he left the club some money to refurbish the tea room and dressing rooms. The work was finished in 1989, when George's widow, Ida, and her two sons, Michael and Martin, were present at the opening.

A new (small white) scoreboard also replaced the old one in the 1980s.

In the mid-1990s the club was able to put down an artificial wicket. The Yorkshire Cricket Association helped fund the development, and Yorkshire and England fast bowler Chris Silverwood was present at the official opening of the strip.

The 1990s began as they were to continue, with the 1st XI beginning a remarkable run of success by landing the Huddersfield Central League championship and the Allsop Cup double.

In 1993 the 1st XI were crowned Huddersfield Central League champions for the fourth season in a row, and in 1997 the 1st XI landed its second double of the decade, bagging the Huddersfield Central League championship and the Allsop Cup.

In all, Clayton West C.C. won the Huddersfield Central League a record 16 times, claiming the title on 10 occasions between 1986 and 1999, and winning it eight times in the 1990s.

When he's asked to explain this amazing success, club secretary Firth refers back in time: 'In 1984 and 1986 we won all the junior competitions, including the Walker Cup. This stood us in good stead; we already had the nucleus of a good senior side. In Stuart Rank we've also had a very fine cricketer, and this has helped attract other players.'

After a decade of unbelievable success, the club moved on from the Huddersfield Central League in 2000 and joined the Drakes Huddersfield Cricket League.

To say that a new challenge was needed would be an understatement as the 1st XI had captured eight league titles and three Allsop Cup victories in the previous 10 years, while the 2nd XI had claimed the Tinker Cup in 1999.

Firth comments: 'Moving into the Huddersfield League was a big decision, but we needed a new challenge and we've got no regrets.'

When the Foot and Mouth crisis hit rural England in 2001, many cricket clubs were affected. But with most Drakes Huddersfield League grounds situated in urban areas, only Clayton West felt the full effects of restricted access to the countryside and the club was forced to play many of its home matches at Dalton.

Today, the club's Back Lane ground stands as one of the most attractive in the area.