

“SPORT IS IMPORTANT AND CRICKET IS IMPORTANT”

Hayley Street and Megan Wainwright – two 3rd Year Public Relations students working on the CK Cricket Heritage Project – talk to project leader Dr Peter Davies



Dr. Peter Davies, a senior lecturer at the University of Huddersfield and founder of The Cricket History of Calderdale and Kirklees Project, gives us an insight into life behind the project, what it involves and what’s next. The project began in 2004 after Peter received a £43,000 grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund and a £7,000 grant from the university. Its purpose is to explore and celebrate the local history and culture surrounding the sport. Since its inception, the project has grown massively and now Peter wants to encourage others to get involved...

Tell us about yourself and your background.

I was born in Bolton and grew up in the Manchester area. I am a big cricket fan and a big supporter of Lancashire County Cricket Club. I have played cricket, watched cricket, read about cricket and written about cricket. When I got the opportunity to apply for this money it was very exciting because it was like a bit of a dream really to do that as part of my job.

Since getting the money in 2004, I've had an absolutely fantastic time and I never thought that cricket could be treated in an academic way. It's been really, really fantastic.

Tell us a little about the project itself.

Well, it started in 2004 and the main thrust of it is that there are 100 local league cricket clubs in our area and we are researching the history of each one. So, we've picked up things like photographs, bats, balls, minute books and scorebooks. We have now presented that back to the communities on the website and through exhibitions. We are just trying to reconstruct a history that has been lost really and say, "This is really interesting, this is really important". We've met many, many fantastic people on the way and every village I go to now is very poignant because I understand what makes that village tick and that cricket's really important. I've recently moved house and I've moved to one of these cricket villages so it has really affected my life quite a lot really.

What first inspired the project?

Well, I used to play but I got injured. Instead of playing I just started to wander around different grounds and I used to meet people and write about what I had seen. Then one of my colleagues, Tim Thornton, said, "You should apply for some money and make this into a big sort of academic project". So I did! I got the money and it was really fortuitous really. People say to me now, "Do you miss playing?" and I don't, and that shows how much this has filled a really big gap for me. It's been really important.

Has there been a lot of interest in the project?

Well, I've been really, really pleasantly surprised and at clubs people have helped us massively. We've made lots of great friends. Every Saturday in the summer I go round grounds and I meet people I really get on with and who have helped us. I think people love nostalgia, they love history and I think they're quite pleased that some academics have helped them to understand their history. If you're involved in a cricket club you're very busy; you're fundraising, you're washing the plates, you're mowing the ground... And I think they've appreciated the fact that the university has sort of stepped in to help, if you like.

Why do you feel the project is important?

I think it's important because sport is important and cricket is important. I think too often sport is neglected as being a bit trivial, a bit silly and a bit "oh you just run around and play". I know a lot of serious academic people would say that. Part of the whole thing about this is that we're saying that sport is crucial to villages and understanding how society works. I think that's why it's important.

Is the project ongoing?

Definitely, until I die in about 60 years time!

How has the project evolved since the beginning?

Well, for 18 months we had a research assistant, called Rob Light, who was fantastic. We've had dozens and dozens of students help in different ways. We've had PR students, we've had history students, we've had geography students, we've had sports journalism students

and they have all picked an angle. So, it's evolved because different people have been involved, different talents, different skills and it's been really good to see them use them on the project.

What about events?

We normally have an annual conference which is a big event; it's a bit of a gathering. We have exhibitions each year about different clubs and different themes. We've had an evening course where people can study local cricket, we've had work shops, we've had exhibition launches and we've had academic things. We've also had stalls in the middle of towns, publicising what we're doing. So yes, it's been really important to get out there and show what we're doing.

How can people get involved?

They can log onto the blog or the Facebook site, which two PR students have very kindly created. They can volunteer to take photographs or contribute old material. They can also volunteer to add things to our website. You know, whatever people's talents are, they can use them.

What does the future hold for the project?

There are a hundred clubs so there is a lot to go on! The website is fantastic but we've still got loads and loads to add. I just want it to be a living, growing, organic thing where people contribute as and when they can; I just keep pushing it and involving people. I think it's really important.

If you are interested in the Cricket History of Calderdale and Kirklees Project, feel free to visit the website at www.ckcricketheritage.org.uk where you will find all the research that has taken place so far and any recent news. You can also now become a follower of this project on Facebook – just search for Cricket Heritage of Calderdale and Kirklees. If you would like to get in touch with Peter, he can be contacted via email at p.j.davies@hud.ac.uk, via telephone on 01484 472405 or, alternatively, through the project blog site at <http://ckcricketheritage.blogspot.com>.