

Walsden CC: Established 1870, and still doing the village proud in 21st Century

LIKE many cricket clubs, Walsden have not had a continuous existence since their first formation in the 19th century.

The current club, which has existed continuously since 1870, had at least two forerunners. There is evidence that a club was formed in 1856 and re-formed in 1862.

It is rumoured that prior to 1856 a club called White Scar existed in the village but no evidence has been found to substantiate this. Walsden's first recorded match was played on the land in front of the bandstand on what, since 1910, has been Centre Vale Park.

This was an away match against the second eleven of the Todmorden club which had been re-established in 1850. A double innings match was completed in one day, Todmorden 2nds (65 and 88), beating Walsden (42 and 26) by 85 runs.

Walsden have played on their current ground since 1870, but apparently had two former grounds in their



The legendary Frank Scott

By cricket historian Peter Davies

earlier incarnations in the 1850s and around 1862.

These were at White Slack and at Heights Houses. The latter was still used as a ground in the Todmorden and District Cricket League until it folded in 1959.

The current ground was formerly the site of Inchfield Mill dam and was leased to the club by E. Smith of Inchfield Villa. Back then, 137 members enrolled at that time and the ground was opened in a 16-a-side match on 23 July 1870.

A feature of cricket as popular entertainment in the 19th century was travelling troops of clown cricketers.

As Walsden's major fundraising event of 1871, 'XI Gentlemen of Todmorden and Walsden' played Mr Dan Rice's 14 Clown Cricketers at Walsden on 21, 22 and 26 July.

The clowns had little skill as cricketers but entertained the crowd with their witticisms and contortions at the fall of every wicket.

Walsden Cricket Club has been an integral part of the village community throughout its existence. Many local groups have used its facilities, including Todmorden Gun Club, who met monthly through the latter part of the 19th century.

The first ladies cricket match in Todmorden was played at Walsden on June 6, 1893, at a time when women were just beginning to strive for greater independence.

The match, between women of the Walsden district, provoked a predictably chauvinistic response from the male preserve of local journalism, the Todmorden Advertiser, which stated: "Whether those of the feminine gender are as fit to indulge in the good old English pastime as those of the opposite sex I do not care to argue, but evidently the fairer sex in the Walsden district... seem to think they are, as a match was played on the Walsden Cricket Club's ground...between members of the 'Petticoat Club'".

Strangely, Walsden's men have not played Todmorden in a league match since 1896. But often since then there has been a challenge match between the two and, until the last decade, these have been very competitive.



The 1962 side completed a triumphant double of Central Lancashire League title (shared) and Wood Cup

Rivalry was never more fierce than when the clubs were both in the Central Lancashire League between 1893 and 1896. After a Todmorden victory in 1894, one Walsden supporter was moved to verse:

"Play up, Walsden, heed not defeat;
Think not that Todmorden cannot be best;
The tide may turn when next you meet;
And bring you joy - entire, complete."

Local cricket clubs pulled their weight during the First World War.

Walsden played Todmorden to raise funds for the War Relief Fund in 1914, and in support of the Centre Vale Military Hospital in 1915 and 1916, the latter match realising the considerable sum of £50.

In 1916 the players were asked to forgo their usual half-pay broken-time payments for wages lost while playing. In the same year the pavilion, tea room and bowling green pavilion were insured against damage by air raid.

The club staged its own functions, including whist drives and dances, and in 1939 a 'gramophone concert' was held.

Arguably the most dominant per-

sonality in Walsden's history is Frank Scott, the local signalman.

In a long career he scored 6,175 runs and took 966 wickets, and his 1921 benefit fund raised £109 - a massive figure for the time and not bad for an amateur! His obituary claimed: 'He never bowled a wide or a no-ball'.

Frank began a family trail (initially through the Scott and then the Barker families) which continues to the present day. His son, grandson, and great-grandson have all captained the 1st XI while his two great grandsons have both recently made their first-team debuts.

The legendary Scott inspired both the name of the road alongside the ground - Scott Street - and the name of one of the three blocks of flats which overlook the ground - Scott House.

During the Second World War, the Home Guard, ARP and Air Training Corps all played games on the Walsden ground and the club provided a 'Don Bradman bat' to be raffled as part of the 'Todmorden Wings for Victory Week'.

A minute for 25 March 1946 states:

'That the secretary write [to] the Borough Surveyor re - seating from air raid shelters.'

In 1954 the Walsden 1st XI, inspired by West Indian sub-pro Everton Weekes, claimed their first major trophy, beating Middleton by 3 wickets in the Wood Cup final.

'A double of sorts' was the Todmorden News and Advertiser's understated verdict on Walsden's triumphant season of 1962. The club won the Wood Cup and became champions of the Central Lancashire League for the first time, sharing the title with Stockport after a dramatic final day.

Over the decades, Walsden's women members have made a massive contribution to the club's wellbeing. Likewise the club's overseas professionals, including Australian Trevor Chappell and Pakistani Mohsin Khan. Walsden have also entered the twenty-first century with an excellent website:

www.walsdencandbc.fsnet.co.uk.

With grateful thanks to Brian Heywood for his research on Walsden CC.