

How's Shat! - History of Skelmanthorpe CC by Paul Ellis

Approximately 3.7 kilometres separates Clayton West from the ground of Skelmanthorpe, a village steeped in industrial history with a rich textile heritage and a famous mechanical institute. This West Yorkshire area boasts picturesque landscapes and countryside, and has been home to many famous cricketers, including Ronnie Irani.

Although the current club was formed in 1892, Skelmanthorpe CC were playing fixtures in the 1870s on a field at the top of Huddersfield Road. Although the origins of the cricket club are unknown, their first recorded game came in 1876, the year Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone, against Emley. Skelmanthorpe won the fixture by 10 runs with Kilner top-scoring for the home side with 18 runs.

A year after the club was formed, Skelmanthorpe were the founding members of the Huddersfield Combination League which became a third division to accompany the Huddersfield & District and Huddersfield & District Alliance, the latter of which Shat were competing in against eleven other clubs. From an archived article in a Huddersfield newspaper in 1895, it shows Lepton Highlanders winning the Combination League by 2 points ahead of Nortonthorpe, with Skelmanthorpe stuck in mid-table of the Alliance League with two games of the season left to play.

At the end of the 19th Century, in the same year in which the Parish of Skelmanthorpe was created and Ferdinand Graf von Zeppelin invented the airship, Shat moved to play their cricket at Lidgett Lane in 1900. To this day, this still remains their home venue; just off the B6116, the club boasts an eye-catching ground with a small but perfectly conditioned pitch and an attractive pavillion which includes a small patio. Quite often, Skelmanthorpe attracts a strong attendance to every game with an entrance fee of just £1 per person.

Following a brief spell playing in the Dearne Valley League between 1910 and 1919, Skelmanthorpe joined the Huddersfield Central League in which they enjoyed substantial success. Their 1st XI's Holden Cup triumph in 1928 began a ten-year period of achievements before the beginning of the Second World War from Skelmanthorpe's First and Second team; the 1st XI were Central League Champions in 1930 and 1933 and Holden Cup winners again in 1937; the 2nd XI won the Tinker Cup in 1931 and 1934. Sadly, Shat's first Holden Cup victory came against Clayton West by 36 runs in a match played at Shelley.

After further success in the Holden Cup with victories in 1947 and 1949, Skelmanthorpe enjoyed arguably their most successful decade in the club's inaugural history. After constructing a pavilion which remains there to this day in 1952, Shat became Central League champions three times within four seasons, including back-to-back successes in 1954 and 1955.

From success, however, came a period of mediocrity which nearly resulted in the extinction of the cricket club. Prior to the near-fateful financial crisis in

1973, Skelmanthorpe only had 1st XI Huddersfield Central League Section 'B' championships in 1968 and 1973 to show for their efforts. At an annual meeting held in the Grove Inn, it was announced by secretary/treasurer Trevor Heeley that as the club house had not been completed, they were unable to host events such as discos which generated income of nearly £70; with rates as high as £64, Shat faced financial difficulty. They were forced to request a grant for rate relief from the Kirklees Council in 1975 to alleviate the situation; although it was pointed out at the time that the Council do not give rate relief, but that instead sports clubs could apply for grant-aid. Skelmanthorpe were granted a 100 per cent rate relief from the former Denby Dale Council, from which Skelmanthorpe came.

This proved to be a turning point in the history of the cricket club as the 1st and 2nd XI claimed League and Cup success, including the double for the 1st XI in 1981, before switching over to join the Huddersfield Cricket League in 1987. Success continued to flow as in their first season, the 1st XI became the Section 'B' champions; this was followed by another League and Cup double in 1990 and more League success in 1992.

Preparation for the start of the 1995 season took a turn for the worst as vandals wrecked the club's field a week before the season opener. In an unnecessary attack, vandals dug a 7 by 4 foot strip out of the practice wicket from the club's £5,000 all-weather pitch; this not only hindered net practices but left a gaping hole in the outfield meaning repairs were needed. Thankfully, this did not dampen the spirits at Skelmanthorpe as the groundsmen, aided by volunteers, worked effortlessly to fix this unforeseen problem, which they did admirably.

Fast-forwarding up to 2008, Skelmanthorpe finished one place above their local rivals in 8th, 6 points ahead of Clayton West. However, both traded away-day victories against each other, with Shat winning their opening-day fixture at Back Lane by 33 runs (A.Dani 79; P.Van den Berg 5-51), and Clayton West gaining sweet revenge at Lidgett Lane with a 113 run victory (R.Kaskiewicz 46no; J.Butterfield 5-19).