

History of Clayton West CC by Paul Ellis

The first sign of existence of a cricket club came in 1877 with two fixtures between Emley with the first fixture played in Clayton on June 9th. Although the archive did not record the exact score, a membership card from Emley shows this game ended in a draw, with the return fixture on July 7th also resulting in a draw. Despite the formulation of a range of new League competitions during the 1890s, such as the West Riding and Huddersfield & District Alliance leagues, Clayton resisted the temptation to join the masses who quickly signed themselves up to compete against each other. Instead, the club continued to play fixtures against local teams, including a game against Bretton West in 1896.

A decade later, Clayton West decided to enter the world of competitive cricket as they joined the Dearne Valley League in 1906 with two representative teams. Archived records show that Clayton West finished 7th in the Senior League and were champions of the Second Competition, with both Leagues consisting of ten clubs. This would prove to be the first of many in the trophy cabinet at Clayton West.

Arguably, the turning point in Clayton West's history came in 1920 as their switch to the Huddersfield Central League led to unrivalled success in the League and Cup. However, things could have been much different as Clayton were close to being involved in the formation of a Holme & Dearne Valley League as the local leagues underwent a major revamp. Their decision was changed at the last minute thanks to an invite to the Huddersfield Cricket League, which at the time was in need of an uplift.

In the same year the Wall Street Crash hit America, Clayton West picked up their first piece of silverware since moving to the Huddersfield Central League. Lidgett Lane, home of local rivals Skelmanthorpe, hosted the Holden Cup Final between Clayton West and Holmbridge which saw Clayton win by 21 runs, Bedford top-scoring with a knock of 35 and Green's bowling (3-15) providing the foundations for victory. Seven year later, the 2nd XI also enjoyed their first success, beating Shat in the Tinker Cup, ironically by the same score line as the 1st XI, which made victory taste even sweeter!

Away from events in the Second World War, Clayton West continued to be victorious on the cricket pitch, winning the Holden Cup in 1940 and back-to-back in 1942-43. Their first Central League title soon arrived in 1946 as Clayton began to assert themselves within their new affiliation. This was confirmed in their 29 run defeat of Penistone 'B' in the 1953 Holden Cup in which Wray and Gibson hit admirable knocks of 57 and 64 respectively.

Despite being relegated from the Central League, this did not stop Clayton West completing a League and Cup double in 1958 when they became Division 'B' Champions along with winning the Central League knockout competition, the first season in which it was renamed the Allsop Cup, against holders Shelley. Clayton proved their 'bouncebackability' was not a one-off in 1964 as relegation was followed by promotion back to the Central League as

Champions of Division 'B'. From this point onwards, Clayton West C.C. did not look back.

Consecutive Central League titles in 1967 and 68 set the tone for what was to come in the next thirty years. A hat-trick of League titles soon followed between 1973-75 in a superb feat for the cricket club which gained recognition in the local press; The Huddersfield Examiner labelling Clayton as "the supreme title tamers." A year later, all of the cricket club's success at Back Lane nearly came to an abrupt end. The land which Clayton West still sub-lets to this day was joint-owned by the National Coal Board and a local farmer; however, they were offered a chance to play their home fixtures on a new site on Litherop Lane by the Council. The projected move away from Back Lane looked a distinct possibility with the required finances needed to construct a flourishing cricket field far beyond that of a local village cricket club. Amidst the indecision, very little was done to improve the existing facilities at Back Lane which had become subject to criticism from the Huddersfield Cricket League.

Once these issues were settled, Clayton West got back to what they do best - playing good, successful cricket. Becoming Central League champions again in 1986 and 1988 led up to unarguably the most successful decade of the cricket club's history. Before this came the sad news that long-time player and supporter George Hardy had passed away; such is the gratitude the club and George shared for each other, he left Clayton some money in which to refurbish the tea room and dressing rooms. George's widow Ida and two sons, Michael and Martin, were in attendance at the opening of the new facilities which were completed in 1989.

As mentioned previously, the 1990s will be a decade to remember in the history of Clayton West C.C. The cricket club were Central League champions four times in a row between 1990-93, the first of which in 1990 was a League and Double. After winning the League again in 1995, Clayton West went on to win the League title in three consecutive years between 1997-99, the first and last a League and Cup double. This decade saw eight League titles and three League and Cup doubles - a superb achievement!

Unsurprisingly, Clayton West holds the record of Huddersfield Central League titles with 16 to their name. Despite their unrivalled success, the cricket club sought for a new challenge and made the decision to join the Drakes Huddersfield Cricket League in 2000. It is fair to say that Clayton West have found the going much tougher in their new surroundings, although preparations for the 2001 season were far from ideal. Clayton were the only club affected by the Foot and Mouth Crisis which hit rural England; as most Drakes Huddersfield League grounds are situated in urban areas thus were not affected by the epidemic. As a result of restrictions to the countryside, Clayton were forced to play their home fixtures at Dalton. When they did return to their Back Lane home, the cricket club were forced to change their traditional 'local rules' in 2002 to fall within League regulations regarding boundary hits. Prior to this change, batters who came to Back Lane were made aware of the 'local rules' which stated that a ball hitting the boundary

fence on the full was a four rather than a six; in order for the umpire to signal a six, the ball had to clear the fence.

Clayton West remains unsuccessful in terms of trophies since their switch to the Drakes Huddersfield League. In 2005 the club suffered the indignity of finishing rock bottom of the Drakes Premiership, winning only 2 of their 26 fixtures and 20 points adrift of Kexborough in second bottom. After missing out in the Conference Play-Off Final in 2006, Clayton made no mistake second time around in 2007, returning to the Premiership after a 22 run victory over Broad Oak. Despite a season in which consistency continued to elude Clayton, the cricket club finished the 2008 campaign with their Premiership status intact in 9th. With a platform to build on ahead of the 2009 season, which starts with a home fixture against Barkisland, Clayton West hope to bring back the glory days to the Back Lane faithful.