

# The off-comed-'un's cricket supplanted billet at Booth

**BOOTH CRICKET CLUB—PART I**  
THE year was 1903, and Whiteley Turner describes in the first chapter of his "Springtime Saunter" how he paused to admire the view from the top of Stocks Lane or Guide Stoop as he knew it.

He refers to Brackens Paper Mill in the valley below, Stoodley Pike on the far hill top, Oats Road Mills and Broadfold and he also refers to the many changes which had taken place in the Luddenden Valley during the preceding 50 years. Older people still call Stocks Lane top "Guide Stoop," although the stone direction post or stoop was removed some years ago, having become an obstruction to traffic. It is possible to stand on the same spot, however, and admire the same view than Whiteley Turner did 50 years ago and the present-day observer will probably feel that since the 1903 description there has been surprisingly little change.

Thus—Brackens Paper Mill has almost disappeared and the new mill built by Calvert can be seen in the village of Wainstalls. A few new houses can also be seen ahead but the area known as Broadfold appears little changed although no doubt there is greater girth around the trees.

### Snug

If the observer looks more closely, however, he will see a most notable change in the park. Between the house and the road, there stands a cricket ground, the home of Booth Cricket Club. So snugly does it fit into the park since it was made 16 years ago, that it might well have been laid out when the house was built.

There was a Booth Cricket Club in 1903, but the ground was a field at the back of the Woodman Inn, Whiteley. Turner must not have been interested in cricket or he would surely have referred to the ground which he would see as he gazed across the valley. Perhaps his lack of interest in sport was due to the loss of an arm as a youth and, though not surprising, it is unfortunate for the historians of Booth

Cricket Club that the helm of Whiteley Turner, who was such an authority on the area, is denied them.

There is enough evidence available to ascertain that Booth Cricket Club originated about the early 1880's and the first matches were played in a field at the north side of Tommy Lane, above Jerusalem Lane. The first officers are not known but it is fairly certain that they were members of the Booth Congregational Church and a local tradition is that the first cricket bat to be seen in the district was brought by William Ellwood who came out of the East Riding to be coachman to the Bracken family at Woodlands.

It must be remembered by modern teams visiting the pleasant

Booth ground to-day that 20 years ago Booth was indeed a place of the beaten track and in an area where for many generations the local game of "billet" had held sway. Unlike billet sticks, cricket bats had to be bought and the price was such that not many people would be in a position, even had they the desire to purchase one. In any case it is improbable that cricket was played anywhere in the Halifax area much earlier than this for neither Halifax nor King Cross can trace their origins back much earlier. The Halifax Parish Cup which is the oldest local competition still in existence, celebrates its 70th anniversary this year.

When cricket was wanting its popularity, some clubs were formed on the grounds which they still occupy to-day, but Booth Cricket Club were not as fortunate. The Tommy Lane ground was a most unsuitable patch of land for a cricket field and then a dispute with a farmer forced them to move camp to the Holmes, between Woodlands and the Paper Mill where subsequently Brackens constructed filter beds. Although this ground was level, it was very narrow and is reputed as having been a murderous place for flies in the evenings.

### Cattle grazed

Booth had one season here, and then returned to the old field, but the pioneer cricketers were far from satisfied. They levelled a pitch in Carr House field, behind the present Booth bus terminus. This field can be seen to-day, but it is said that it was never used because in the meantime they managed to rent the field at the back of the Woodman Inn. This was their home for many years, right up to 1942, in fact.

Booth did not have full control of the field, but a good wicket was produced. The outfield is never reputed to have been the same standard as the pitch for the

farmer used his field for grazing even during the season and older players recall an essential duty before each home game when they had to go round the field with a shovel and wheelbarrow. It was impossible for anyone in the village, however, little they were interested in cricket, not to be aware of the presence of the cricket field for most houses overlooked it and over the years almost every family had some connection with it.

### Ploughed

On washing days, housewives would have strict instructions that the washing water had to be left in tubs outside the houses and this

was used for watering the wicket when the players returned home from work in the evenings.

The cricket club became part of the village life and it was not surprising that when the field was ploughed up in 1942 and during the subsequent years, when it was apparent to all that cricket would never be played on that field again, no one even contemplated the dissolving of the club. Repeated offers to buy the motor-mower and other equipment by clubs still in being were rejected.

It was in 1948 that permission was sought and obtained to construct a cricket ground in the park at Broadfold and old players, officials and a few newcomers rallied round and were soon hard at work.

### Dug down

The slope of the land had to be reduced by cutting out seven feet at the top and tipping at the bottom. Several hundreds of tons of ashes were brought, a wicket laid, walls built, bats demolished and re-erected, turf laid, seeds sown and hundreds of hours of voluntary work put in.

After the first season the wicket had to be raised because it was not level and in 1950, after the ground had been in use for three seasons, it was decided that a further reduction in the slope was necessary. A scheme costing nearly £1,000 was undertaken and the money was raised by the donations and loans of members and friends.

Booth Cricket Club had a permanent home, however, and with a ground up to the standard of any in the local area. It was a great day for the cricket club in 1956 when the ground debt was finally cleared and they could look forward to the future with confidence.

(TO BE CONTINUED)



THOMAS OGDEN is called the last of the Booth billet players.



HAROLD BOARDALL Has given great service to Booth Cricket Club.

Now Murless is in line for a new record this year for winning prize money gained in one season by a racehorse trainer. The present record, £29,099 13s., was established in 1921 by Joe Lawson, who that year won 69 races with 24 horses. Murless has already passed the £75,000.