

Sowerby Bridge people paid up with a smile to save cricket ground

Sowerby Cricket Club—Part III

Good cricket clubs are always trying to improve their amenities and material progress has been the policy of the Sowerby Bridge officials right back to 1877.

Many items—large and small—stand out in the memory of older members and one thing which can be regarded as a major development is the handsome score-box.

An extract from the secretary's report of 1934 is worth recording. He said "Our thanks are especially due to our president Mr. E. B. Clay and Mr. G. L. Lawrence for the way in which they persuaded the public to subscribe to the erection of the new score-box which I think everyone will agree is a great asset to the club."

The biggest project of all, however, was the purchase of the ground in 1936. For some time the owners of the ground, Shepherd and Blackburn Ltd. had been anxious to sell and the stage was reached when the cricketers had either to vacate or buy. It was understood that another party had made an offer, but a purchase price of £1,000 was a tremendous sum for the cricket club to raise. Undeterred and heartened by the enthusiasm and lead given by Mr. Clay, the committee tackled the job of raising the substantial sum necessary.

Money rolled in

Many schemes were set in motion and amounts both large and small were raised but the greatest money-spinner was the subscription list supported by most people in the area. The enthusiasm was such that the money rolled in. In a little over 12 months, the necessary amount had been raised and Sowerby Bridge had an open space in perpetuity for the youth and cricketers of the

town. It was a great effort by Mr. E. B. Clay and his supporters.

In the meantime the team had not been idle and their playing performances in the 1930's will never be forgotten.

It is history now how they came so near to winning the coveted Yorkshire Council title for in 1935 they won the Bradford Section and for the second time in three years figured in the Yorkshire Council championship semi-finals and final. For amateurs competing against teams with professionals it was a great achievement. There were those who gave Sowerby Bridge no chance in the final against

ROUND AND ABOUT IN LOCAL CRICKET

Castleford who were a most powerful club in those days, but the doubting Thomases nearly had to eat their words. Sowerby Bridge came within an ace of winning.

Requisitioned

Sowerby Bridge have also had their struggles against adversity and no history would be complete without reference to the events that took place when soldiers arrived at Walton Street after

Dunkirk in 1940 and when in 1941, the ground was requisitioned as a military detention camp. It was a bitter blow to a club who only a few years before had struggled to raise £1,000 to buy it but patriotism was such that there were no complaints at the time. No one could foresee, however, that the "occupation" would last ten years. There were many heartaches and frustrations before the club managed to cut the "red tape" and return to a ground,

surrounded by high barbed wire fences and locked gates and looking anything but a cricket field.

Mr. J. R. Sutcliffe, president in 1951, gave a great lead in persuading the War Office to release the ground. A large sum of money was raised for ground renovation and there were gifts of new dressing and other accommodation. Mr. E. B. Clay will also never be forgotten by the Sowerby Bridge Club and in 1949 in appreciation of his 21 years as president a presentation was made by David Lawrence (captain of the club's youth team) of an inscribed silver salver.

Good servants

The club has had many other good servants. Jack Hartley played for the club from 1925 to 1956 and was also a useful committee member. Tim Helliwell is another Sowerby Bridge personality, and George Copley (with two sons now making a name for themselves with Halifax) is another. Ben Halthwaite now enjoys his umpiring duties as much as he used to enjoy playing. Always keen on coaching young players, they have had help from (among others) Len Stansfield, Jack Crossley (sen.), Jack Crossley (jun.), and Harry Cooke.

Many fine players have graduated at Sowerby Bridge. Among them are Trevor and Kenneth Copley, Claude Helliwell, David Pickles, Edgar Sutcliffe, Geoffrey Mitchell, David Lawrence, Brian Stockton and Norman Vine. This would indeed form the nucleus of a grand team if all were to return to Walton Street.

Mark of approval

Diekie Rothwell was another character and his humbugs for the players who did well will always be remembered. The name of George Lawrence is a byword

in Sowerby Bridge cricket and George Mitchell is well known throughout local club cricket and beyond. These two have been rewarded this year for their services to Sowerby Bridge Cricket Club by honorary life membership.

No party was ever dull when W. E. Nicholson was about, who besides being a humorist was also a good club batsman. The Thompson family served the club well and C.W. had a spell as president.

The club have won many honours including the Parish Cup, but the last time they won this trophy was as far back as 1921. Due to Yorkshire Council commitments, however, they have not found it always possible to enter.

Help in hard times

Sowerby Bridge deeply appreciate the co-operation of Sowerby St. Peter's who allowed them to play home matches on their ground from 1941-47. In 1948 and 1949 all games were played on opponents' grounds. The second team had a spell on the Copley ground and then on the grammar school field in Albert Road.

Nowadays, revenue is a difficult problem for the matches are not bringing in the amount required to run the club and at least £400 per annum is required to balance accounts.

Several present officials have been in office since before the war and are now getting to that stage in life when they would like to retire from the struggle. The work of the captain, Norman Ashcroft, must not be forgotten. He has had the difficult task of leading the team through a most trying period and he also does good work as a committee member.

It is on such as he and the secretary, Mr. W. Todd, that the club relies for the future, and it will be no fault of theirs if palmy days do not return.

WELL-KNOWN AT WALTON STREET—AND BEYOND



NORMAN TODD
Sowerby Bridge first-teamer and committee member. Joined present club from Illingworth.



BEN HALTHWAITE
When he finished his playing career he became an umpire and stands in Yorkshire Council matches.



DAVID PICKLES
Left Sowerby Bridge on a climb to the Yorkshire first team. His county "call" came in July at Scarborough.