

**This article about the Cricket Heritage Project will appear in the journal *Social History in Museums*. It follows on from a paper presented to the Social History Curators Conference in July 2008**

**Pubs, Post Offices and Police Stations: Bowling a Local Community Over with a Cricket Heritage Project**

**Peter Davies, University of Huddersfield**

Dear Dr Davies,

Having just visited Mellors Bar in Rastrick and seen the display of photos etc, I was inspired to contact you to congratulate you on taking the trouble to look into the history of our local cricket club and bring it to the attention of the younger generation. It is also a wonderful reminder of our youth, my dearly departed family and the bond that holds the community together.

Good luck with the project,

Karen Towell

(Feedback from the Badger Hill CC exhibition, Rastrick, 2005)

This project, and this paper, should be considered against the background of recent work on sport, history and heritage. In his book, *British Sport: A Social History*, Dennis Brailsford considers the social, political, financial and international significance of sport (Brailsford, 1992). We should also note the opinion of sports journalist Frank Keating. In 2007, under the heading, 'The omission of sport from social histories is a sure sign of authorial snobbery', he argued that the importance of sport is regularly underplayed by traditional historians. He wrote:

It is time to ponder a holiday reading list. Last summer I tucked keenly into two brick-heavy British social histories: *The Victorians* by A.N.Wilson, and Dominic Sandbrook's *Never Had It So Good (1956-63)*. Phew! But I went the full distance with both, each readable, scholarly books which enlighteningly furthered the education of this dunce on any amount of topics. On the one hand from Irish Home Rule and the Chartists to Disraeli & Gladstone, Gilbert & Sullivan, General Gordon & Mr Kipling; on the other from Suez and CND to Bevin & Bevan, Rab & Supermac and the life and loves of Christine Keeler. Both works were as engrossing as they were weighty - well, up to a point, for each short-changed you with an identically crass omission. The lit crits had raved about each as 'wide-ranging all-embracing' social histories, but neither offered a whiff of that compulsive opium of the people: sport. The chosen era of each author was tellingly fundamental for sport but each writer was utterly oblivious ([www.guardian.co.uk/sport/2007/may/08/comment.sport](http://www.guardian.co.uk/sport/2007/may/08/comment.sport)).

Recent years have also witnessed a number of high-profile exhibitions about sport, including Heroes of Sport (Manchester), Sport in Hackney and – a sign of the times – the Sport Online Exhibition (Liverpool museums).

As regards this specific project, on the heritage of cricket in West Yorkshire, we should first of all introduce the work of the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). Since 1994 the HLF has awarded over £4 billion to more than 27,000 projects across the UK. Many grants have been for amounts of less than £50,000, with many going to small community groups. Their biggest ever grant was £26 million to restore the historic Kennett and Avon Canal which runs between Reading and Bristol. In its official literature, the HLF states:

The Heritage Lottery Fund is the UK's leading funder of our diverse heritage and the only heritage organisation that operates both across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and

Wales, and funds the entire spread of heritage – including buildings, museums, natural heritage and the heritage of cultural traditions and language.  
([www.hlf.org.uk/English/HowToApply/OurGrantGivingProgrammes/YourHeritage](http://www.hlf.org.uk/English/HowToApply/OurGrantGivingProgrammes/YourHeritage)).

We were particularly interested in the 'Your Heritage' scheme, which offered grants of between £3,000 and £50,000 to support projects relating to the local, regional or national heritage of the UK. As the HLF stated: 'We welcome applications that help people to learn about, look after and celebrate heritage in a fun and enjoyable way.' It went on:

We have three aims which relate to learning, conservation and participation. To receive a grant your project must help people to learn about their own and other people's heritage. Your project must also do either or both of the following: a) Conserve the UK's diverse heritage for present and future generations to experience and enjoy. b) Help more people, and a wider range of people, to take an active part in and make decisions about heritage. Heritage includes many different things from the past that we value and want to pass on to future generations. Heritage projects might include: people's memories and experiences, histories of people, communities, places and events, cultural traditions, historic buildings and townscapes, archaeological sites, collections of items, archives or other materials, natural and designed landscapes, habitats and species, sites and collections linked to our industrial, maritime and transport history.  
([www.hlf.org.uk/HLF/Docs/ApplicationPacks/HG/HG%20AP%20Pre%20Application](http://www.hlf.org.uk/HLF/Docs/ApplicationPacks/HG/HG%20AP%20Pre%20Application)).

It was against this background that the project was conceived. The aim was to explore and celebrate the cricketing heritage of Calderdale and Kirklees, linking it implicitly to the social history of the area. In 2004 'The Cricketing Heritage of Calderdale & Kirklees' project received a £43,400 grant from the HLF and also benefited from an in-kind contribution of £7,000 from the University of Huddersfield.

Cricket is a fundamental part of the local cultural tradition. Yet often, the heritage of grounds, and the societies that shape them, is neglected. Clubs in Calderdale and Kirklees act as a focal-point for community life. It is not just that local men play for senior sides, but children turn out for junior sides, women often help on the social side, and many elderly people take on administrative roles. There is also high ethnic-minority involvement.

The project has been managed by the University of Huddersfield in association with the Trinity Insurance Halifax Cricket League, the Drakes Huddersfield Cricket League, the Arrow Huddersfield Central Cricket League and West Yorkshire Archives. Since 2004 it has had many public outcomes, including the following:

- Over 100 exhibitions staged about local cricket.
- Electronic cricket archive established at [www.ckcricketheritage.org.uk](http://www.ckcricketheritage.org.uk).
- Archives set up at Halifax and Huddersfield town libraries.
- Oral history interviews conducted and broadcast on project website.
- Cricket heritage walks devised and now downloadable.
- Activity packs for schools created and distributed.
- Four annual Pennine Cricket History conferences held.
- Accredited 'Bat & Ball' evening course staged at the University of Huddersfield.

Throughout, the main argument has been that cricket is not simply a game, but also a key part of the social fabric. One only has to visualise the 'typical' English village, complete with church, pub...and cricket ground.

As regards exhibitions, there were two main strands. At Tolson Museum (Dalton, Huddersfield), Bankfield Museum (Boothtown, Halifax), Colne Valley Museum (Golcar, Huddersfield) and Dewsbury Museum, traditional exhibitions in traditional surroundings were staged (see [www.calderdale.gov.uk/leisure/museums-galleries/index.html](http://www.calderdale.gov.uk/leisure/museums-galleries/index.html) and [www.kirklees.gov.uk/community/museums/museums.shtml](http://www.kirklees.gov.uk/community/museums/museums.shtml)). These were three-dimensional displays which showed off some of our best finds in terms of objects and artefacts – bats, balls, trophies and the like.

But in project publicity, slightly more emphasis was placed on the 'non-traditional' exhibitions. These were two-dimensional and did not contain artefacts but – significantly, given the main aims of the project – they were erected in novel community locations such as pubs, post offices, police stations and churches, community centres, restaurants, garden

centres, supermarkets, leisure centres, hospitals, Islamic centres and swimming baths, as well as libraries and smaller museums. We tried to pick the exhibition venue with the nature of the exhibition in mind (eg. a Caribbean restaurant for a display about the heritage of West Indian cricket and cricketers in Huddersfield) and we encouraged the cricket clubs to reclaim their boards at the end of the exhibition so they could use them in their own clubhouse or pavilion. Here, in the heart of the local community, the project was in its element.

The key issue was audience. In line with HLF philosophy, we wanted to reach the widest audience possible. There was no point staging the exhibitions initially in cricket club pavilions because only cricket folk would see them. We wanted non-cricket folk – mainly, young people, old people, women and children - to take an interest and learn more about the social history of local clubs and their community role. Hence, our incursions into pubs, post offices, police stations and other community locations. The approach was one of outreach and evangelism: we'll come to you! (With part of the grant we appointed a Community Outreach Officer – Rob Light, who was studying for a Phd on nineteenth-century cricket in the West Riding). By the same token, we wanted to be accessible and anything but predictable in the way that we designed the exhibitions. This meant an emphasis on images rather than text, on 'novelties' and 'gimmicks', and the local, social context rather than simply local cricket history.

We also wanted to engage actively with local people. So, we publicised the exhibition launch events heavily in the local community and generated as much media interest as possible. We issued an open invitation to the launch events and were pleased by the response. What is more, we styled the launch events as 'surgeries', at which local people could seek expert advice on documents and artefacts in their own possession; we put on light refreshments with the help of the clubs involved; we sold project merchandise; we made a special effort to educate our hosts about the exhibition (eg. the landlord of the pub which was hosting the display, so he/she could enlighten others when we had departed); and we left feedback sheets at the exhibition venues for local people to complete.

So, during the summers of 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008 we staged more than 100 community exhibitions on the theme of the heritage of local cricket. On reflection, it is possible to identify the problems we encountered and the benefits to emerge from the process.

The problems started immediately. Should we give each club/village its own exhibition? Or should we take a chance and reduce our workload by staging 'area' exhibitions? (The obvious danger being that local cricket people would 'boycott' an 'area' exhibition being staged in a 'rival' village). In the end we chose the first option, and did not regret it.

As we travelled round, the problems started to mount. Some pub landlords had trouble visualising what we had in mind, and we had to reassure some of them that our wall displays would not interfere with their pool tables and slot machines. In the local police station we were greeted with the words: 'We're more than happy to accommodate your display but you do realise it will be vandalised by the kind of people who end up in here, don't you?' On a more general plane, we had a constant problem: which adhesive to use? Venues were understandably worried about their walls – so should we use bluetac, Velcro, sellotape or even pins? It was a dilemma that simply wouldn't go away. We also had to plan our launch events so as not to clash with other functions: quiz night in the pub, ladies group in the church, a busy shopping night in the garden centre.

In the end, there were some hugely positive things to come out of the community exhibitions. First, the reaction of local cricket club people:

From David Thorpe, Golcar CC

Thanks very much for all your efforts to put together the exhibition. I thought it was excellent and will be much valued in the future. Using the launch of the exhibition to bring together old players was a success as they all enjoyed chatting and reminiscing about old times...How did the Leymoor launch go? I should have gone down to the Walkers Arms because it was where I started playing cricket but I will call in during the season. Thanks again.

From Harry Marsden, Flockton CC

Many thanks for [the exhibition launch] tonight. You have done a great job and there is something there forever, many many thanks, brilliant.

From Keith Hudson, Bridgeholme CC

Can't thank you all enough or put properly into words what it means to me to have this background on the club I've enjoyed right from childhood. Just for background I've lived next to BCC all my life, only moving house once - next door - to the house nearest the ground. I love it here. Last year I passed a landmark for me, passing 10,000 runs at senior level, a fact I would not have even noticed if we hadn't been doing this work. Once again my heartfelt thanks.

From Dorian Brooksby, Illingworth St. Mary's CC

Absolutely fantastic! Many congratulations for your superb work re: Illingworth CC (and indeed the whole Cricket Heritage Project). I really enjoyed the [launch] session this evening and will spend further time at the library in the next few days. I will spread the word to all our present touring members to make a visit and will try to set up a 'Visitors Book' for comments too...I'm sure the committee will be writing to you in due course...Do keep in touch. Best wishes for the remainder of your work.

Second, their 'novelty' got people talking and got the media on our side. The exhibitions were everywhere and the joke was that even if you got arrested during the summer of 2005 you would see a display in Huddersfield Police Station! One person we met after the wave of 2005 exhibitions told us: 'I saw a few of your displays, mainly in pubs actually. By the end of the summer I'd really come to appreciate what you were trying to do: researching the story of cricket clubs, collecting photos and documents, and then offering the same material back to local communities in the form of your displays.' This was exactly our thinking – and it tied in with the HLF's 'Your Heritage' philosophy.

Third, the venues enjoyed hosting the exhibitions. This was the reaction of Armitage's Garden Centre in Huddersfield when we approached them about hosting two heritage exhibitions:

Dear Dr Davies

My name is Jo Dales and I am responsible for all the marketing for Armitage's Garden Centres. As such, your letter regarding the Heritage and History of Shelley and Birchcliffe Cricket Clubs has been passed to me. At this stage, we are interested in your project but would like to understand a little more about the commitment we would need to make. I wonder whether it would be possible for you to meet me at the garden centre in Birchcliffe to discuss the following in a little more detail: size of the exhibition, type of information on display, the launch event. I am always at Birchcliffe on a Monday and would be happy for you to contact me to agree a time for us to meet. Alternatively, we can discuss the above issues over the phone...

Kind regards

Jo Dales

Everything progressed smoothly, Ms Dales agreed to hosting the two exhibitions, and we invited her to the launch event. This was her reply:

Thanks for getting back to me so quickly. I am sure either Sharon or myself can be there for your launch. However, the coffee shop won't be open but we could look at a small pre-prepared buffet at nominal/no cost depending on your requirements – and for a nice mention in any PR activity!!!! Will the press be attending? Let me know what you think.

This message demonstrated that the host venues were taking the launches seriously and were also keen to get as much out of them as possible.

Many of the venues had never played host to an exhibition before we approached them and in some unquantifiable way we sensed that they enjoyed the role. They were now 'official partners' of the university and the HLF. And where, say, a village had four pubs, the one staging our exhibition felt a little bit special. From our point of view, this was very exciting: taking the university and the cricket project into communities which previously would have had little or no contact with the 'academic world'. Put simply, it was great PR. It showed that we were passionately interested in our locale.

Fourth, we discovered a massive appetite for 'the past'. Local people seemed to have an unquenchable love for old documents, village stories, and team photos with the odd unidentified player on them. As university academics, we were interested in themes, patterns

and the social history of sport. But we weren't immune from going in for a little bit of folksy nostalgia where we felt it could 'hook' people into taking an interest in an exhibition. (In a couple of villages, specific individuals seemed to dine out on the fact that their faces appeared in some of our photographs. This seemed to be a source of great local pride!).

Fifth, our exhibitions had some unforeseen consequences. Golcar CC used the exhibition launch event as a good opportunity for a full-scale reunion; while Hopton Mills CC were delighted and dismayed in equal measure when the landlady whose pub was hosting their heritage display revealed that up until that point she had not been aware of the club's existence! Greetland CC moved their boards on to the local school, while Denby CC switched theirs to the local school before having them professionally framed and hanging them on the interior walls of their club pavilion. And finally, the exhibitions could be visited online. All the materials were re-presented on the project website so local folk could peruse their favourite items at a click of their mouse ([www.ckcricketheritage.org.uk](http://www.ckcricketheritage.org.uk)).

It was a fascinating and stimulating experience to plan, research and then oversee the staging of the community exhibitions of 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008. And there are more planned for the future!

#### Bibliography

D.Brailsford, *British Sport: A Social History* (Cambridge, 1992).

[www.calderdale.gov.uk/leisure/museums-galleries/index.html](http://www.calderdale.gov.uk/leisure/museums-galleries/index.html)

[www.ckcricketheritage.org.uk](http://www.ckcricketheritage.org.uk)

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[www.hlf.org.uk](http://www.hlf.org.uk)

[www.kirklees.gov.uk/community/museums/museums.shtml](http://www.kirklees.gov.uk/community/museums/museums.shtml)

Personal correspondence with contacts at cricket clubs and exhibition venues