

The Methodist Beginnings of Outlane CC, 1897-1919

By Dennis O'Keefe

A team called 'Outlane' was playing fixtures from at least as early as 1884. The 2nd August edition of *The Halifax Courier* that year advertised a game between Clifton Britannia and Outlane, with their respective second XI's playing at Outlane. The first XI fixture was also reported in the *Leeds Mercury* which was becoming something of a regional newspaper. The *Huddersfield Examiner Supplement* of 30th August 1884 reported a game against Thurstonland which strangely for two distant hilltop villages – perhaps there was a personal connection - appears to have been a fairly regular fixture, the two sides also playing each other in 1887 and 1888 (twice) at the very least. Outlane played a competitive fixture in 1887, the *Leeds Mercury* of Monday 11th July giving notice of its match in the first round of the Huddersfield District Challenge Cup at home to Paddock. Other fixtures for the club were also reported, including for season 1892, but none for 1893-96.

Especially with the knowledge that it was fielding two sides in 1884, the suspicion is that Outlane were playing more regularly than appearances in the press would suggest, and that they themselves didn't bother sending details to the newspapers – only occasional opponents doing so. Perhaps in an outlying and self-contained village it was neither necessary nor worth the effort to notify players of selection via the newspapers. But it also indicates an informal arrangement lacking a need to keep other opponents or a wider public informed.

Though playing simply as 'Outlane', the three scores which identify players: v. Thurstonland (1884 and 1887) and Helme (1887, 1st and 2nd teams) reveal several links with both the local chapel and its future cricket club. These included a 'B. Hoyle', almost certainly Ben Hoyle, who was to become both a chapel Trustee and a vice president of the established club.

In 1893 the Outlane Methodist New Connexion opened a new chapel, named 'Bethel', and an accompanying new school. Less than four years later, in 1897, the Outlane MNC Cricket Club was formed. This was in the centenary year of the formation of the Methodist New Connexion itself but it is extremely unlikely that this played much part in the venture. Far more probable was a desire for a more formal club than in the past, backed by the chapel's congregation and resources, with the capacity to embark on league cricket. Due to the huge popularity of the new leagues in the area it was increasingly difficult to find opponents for 'ordinary', that is, friendly, fixtures.

The first written record of the club is found in the 'Secretary's Book' (a cashbook) on 1st April 1897 and is an entry for the receipt of subscriptions to the value of £3/16/-. The club's rules had to be ratified by the chapel's Trustees – their acceptance being proposed by Ben Hoyle - which was done on 8th April. This is the only direct reference to be found to the cricket club in either the Trustees' minute books or those of the church leaders. It is clear, especially considering the games played informally in the 1880s and early 1890s, that the demand for cricket came from 'below' rather than 'above':

there is no evidence of any clerical involvement or even interest in the club, with no ministers holding honorific or even vice-presidential positions. This does suggest that by the end of the nineteenth century the promotion of sport by a Methodist chapel was no longer a remarkable or contentious issue for its ministers, which may not have been the case two decades or so earlier.

Though for Outlane MNC CC, the ministry was entirely 'hands off', the club was supported by several of the chapel's Trustees: some playing and others as patrons in the role of Vice Presidents. A number of the VP's had donated generously to the fund for the new chapel. The club also used the church's schoolroom for both meetings and social events.

Regrettably the rules of the club sanctioned by the Trustees have not survived, and it is not known if members of the cricket club were expected to be chapel members or otherwise linked to the church. We can be certain that if such restrictions on the club existed, they cannot have survived for very long in practice. Church membership alone could never have supported the club. In 1897 the total membership of Bethel Chapel was 96. Of those, only 24 were male - the same as the number of cricketers taking part in a twelve-a-side Married v Single match of that year. In that game, only half of the participants were church members. However, of the other 12, two were to become chapel members in 1899 and another six appear to be relatives of members. At its formation, at the very least, a strong chapel nucleus did exist in the cricket club. But the club expanded, and by 1900 were in the Huddersfield and District Junior League, putting out two sides every week. And by the start of 1909 season the club had 108 members which equalled that of the entire - and aging - church membership for 1908, of which only 30 were men, with another male 'on trial'. Records of chapel and Sunday school attendances do not unfortunately exist for this time but aside from the most diluted definition of chapel adherence the cricket club was an 'open' one. In 1908 - the first year for which we have minutes - none of the chapel members were officers or committee men, only four (out of a total of 41 cricketers) played in that season's fixtures, though six were Vice Presidents (out of a total of 24).

It seems reasonably certain that the club's first game took place on 20th April 1897, when the cashbook revealed that the princely sum of 1/5½d had been taken in gate receipts. The first match reported in the *Huddersfield Examiner* was that of 15th May - the contest in which the 'Marrieds' were defeated 29-47 by the 'Singles'. In the following season Outlane MNC CC played in the Huddersfield & District Junior Alliance. The club's first league match resulted in a victory over Honley Moorbottom Congregational at Outlane, by 44-37. Gate money amounted to 2/10½d.

There seems to be little to suggest that as a church side, Outlane players were any less keen to win or better-behaved than those of secular clubs. League cricket was embarked upon in its second season when the club entered a team in the Huddersfield and District Junior Alliance, and there was internal competition with in 1904 prizes awarded for batting, bowling, fielding and catching. A measure of the intensity with which these club awards were

pursued can be gauged by the resolution taken at the start of the 1908 season that 'the umpires decisions with reference to the Fielding Prize be placed in envelopes and kept sealed until the end of the Season.' On the behavioural side, in 1908 the club secretary had to write to the League 'apologising for the conduct of W. Atkinson in the match against Netheroyd Hall'. Mr Atkinson subsequently received a two-match suspension. The first team had two points deducted in the 1908 season 'for playing an illegible man', according to the *Examiner*, and the second team incurred a similar penalty in 1913. And also in 1913 a proposal was carried by the committee that 'we put notice up requesting members to use better language.' To be fair to the chapel, though, whatever influence it may have had must by then have been carried out through diminishing representation.

The club remained in the Junior Alliance for just two seasons. In 1900 it transferred to the Huddersfield and District Junior League, being now in a position to field both 1st and 2nd XI's on a weekly basis. The league demonstrated the contribution of religious support for cricket, by consisting predominantly of church clubs. By 1902, the club was also putting out a junior eleven.

In 1904 the Outlane MNC first team came the closest it ever did to winning the H&D Junior League, being runners-up to Highfield Congregational by just one point. In 1907 the second team managed to turn the tables – in the clubs' only success in this league - besting Highfield's 2nd XI, but only following a play-off having tied on points in the league's Second Division. Outlane won a low-scoring game by 12 runs, having batted first totalling 41. John Burkinshaw was Outlane's top scorer with a crucial 15, and Herbert Balmforth took five wickets for the victors.

From its foundation until 1929, the club played on a field directly opposite the Bethel Chapel on New Hey Road. Up to 1900 the ground was rented from a chapel member and farmer Thomas Hoyle. Hoyle must have sold the ground to the Huddersfield Poor Law Union, which was the club's landlord from 1901. The Union built a Children's Home next to the cricket field in 1904. As described in the club's excellent brochure *Outlane Cricket Club Centenary Year 1897-1997*, written by Mike Mullany and Andy Wray, the club had some remarkable battles to fight to maintain a home, which has demonstrated its underlying durability. The ground was commandeered for food production during the Great War and the very existence of the club had been threatened, with the pitch in danger of being turned permanently into allotments. Then in 1928 the Outlane Golf Club acquired the orphanage and its land and the following year the cricket club was evicted, moving to nearby Cote Farm – the second of its three homes. The former Children's Home became the clubhouse of the golf club, and is now the Old Golf House Hotel, a sand wedge distance from the M62 motorway. The motorway that was to cause the club so many problems from the late 1960s until 1974

Unsurprisingly, throughout the nineteenth century Outlane was not an easy place to reach. What must have been an enabling factor in the creation of the cricket club is seen in the entry of the word 'Tram' under expenditure on 27th

May 1897. The tram in question would have been one of the steam trams which had been linking the village to Huddersfield since the end of the 1880s. Electric trams did not arrive in Outlane until 1901.

As with nearly all cricket clubs, especially at the time, funding was a problem. The club probably had no more trouble collecting subs than others, though in 1909 it had to 'name and shame' 15 non-payers. The village itself was largely at that the mercy of the prevailing conditions of agriculture and the now declining textile trade. And by 1899 its rent had increased to £8 p.a. Its social and sporting events were of crucial financial importance. But they also came to play a role in the life of the still largely isolated community of little more than 1,000 people. As noted in the *Centenary* brochure, a concert held in 1897 generated £8-10-6d, a third of that year's income. As well as regular concerts and supper and social evenings, the club hosted annual gala and sports days – a regular and highly popular feature of local cricket clubs at the time - whose highlight was a walking competition from the club to Nont Sarah's and back, an example of what the *Huddersfield Examiner* regarded as the contemporary 'walking craze'. In 1903 when raising money for a new 'tent' (pavilion), the £10-4-9d made on a concert was augmented to the tune of £11/12/2 through the sports and gala day. For the occasion, the club had commissioned the Outlane Brass Band – which figured in national competitions – for £1/10/-, and it had spent even more, £1/10/10, on prizes for the various races and other sporting contests.

The Rev James Edward Roberts, a vicar in neighbouring Longwood, wrote in 1923 that in Outlane towards the end of the nineteenth century the 'chief social centre in the village for many years was had been the Conservative Club'. It is perhaps more likely that for most villagers – at least male villagers – the several pubs such as the 'Wagon and Horses', the 'Globe', the 'Bay Horse' and the 'Swan' played a more prominent role. In fact an article in the *Leeds Mercury* of 1872 refers to Outlane as a 'long, straggling, uninteresting place with numerous public-houses and beerhouses' where the writer had his first experience of 'Yorkshire "roughs"' outside the 'Commercial Inn'. The temptation to consider the possibility of the chapel cricket club providing a non-boozing alternative is somewhat complicated by the fact that the Ainleys of the local Wapping Spring Brewery were chapel men and VP's of the cricket club. But, in any event, the cricket club's recreational and sporting events came to be important social occasions in days when money was scarce, holiday opportunities even scarcer and commercial alternatives not yet readily accessible. Women, effectively excluded from public houses and clubs, would have benefited particularly from the club's concerts, dances and other social offerings, as would have children from the gala and sports day.

As narrated in the *Centenary* brochure, the club considered removing the reference to the chapel as early as 1911. This most likely was to reflect the real situation and perhaps to identify more closely with the entire village community, rather than as a consequence of any antagonism to the church, but it seems to have met sufficient opposition or indecision not to make the change. The change did take place immediately after the Great War, during the 1919 season, when it was resolved that 'that the Sec: write the Trustees

of the U.M.F. Church asking permission to change the name from U.M.F. Church Cricket Club to that of Outlane Cricket Club and the Trustees to renounce all claim on the Club.' No corresponding record exists in the Trustees' minutes. Incidentally, the minutes refer to the club as Outlane *UMF* not Outlane *MNC* indicating the merger of the Methodist New Connexion with the Bible Christians and the United Methodist Free Church which took place in 1907. It should have referred, however, to Outlane *UMC* – the United Methodist Church – the correct title of the merged body. Whether this was indicative of the de facto detachment of the cricketers from the chapel or simply a slip of the pen is impossible to say.

The cricket club's relations with the chapel, following the split of 1919 seem to have remained cordial. They were allowed to use the schoolroom for meetings and to hold the supper & social evening to celebrate winning the Lumb Cup in 1921, during the club's first season in the Huddersfield and District Cricket Association. Chapel members were also to continue as club officials and vice presidents.