

## 2. Men



Wilfred Rhodes and George Herbert Hirst: legendary Huddersfield-born Yorkshire and England cricketers of the early twentieth century.

In their gritty attitude and no-nonsense endeavour, the two men, both raised in the back streets of Kirkheaton, have also come to personify the cricketing heritage of the district.

The story of cricket in the geographical area covered by Kirklees has been shaped, on the whole, by men.

Women have played a massive part behind the scenes – in the kitchen, at fundraising events, and in the committee room – but there is no getting away from the fact that, on and off the field, generations of male cricket enthusiasts have made crucial contributions.

On the field, hundreds and hundreds of local league sides have been indebted to hearty and loyal cricketers.

Here we discover the amateur ethos - playing for fun, for the love of the game, without any money changing hands.

Over the decades, many talented amateur cricketers have emerged from the area.

But cricket in this area also has a tradition of professional players.

Since the eighteenth century, when players were engaged to play for aristocratic patrons in matches for stake money, leading cricketers have been paid to play.

As hundreds of new cricket clubs were formed, the engagement of a professional was viewed as a symbol of increased status as well as a means of improving playing performance.

Armitage Bridge CC hired George Boothroyd, from Berry Brow, for the 1944 season. His contract stated, 'the Club agrees to pay to him the sum of One Pound per match and travelling expenses'.

Even Denby, in the Huddersfield Central League – which does not allow professional players – took on B. Ely in 1964, 'to coach the younger members if possible, on one evening per week.'

As cricket spread around the globe in the early twentieth century, there emerged the possibility that local clubs could employ overseas cricketers as their professionals.

West Indian Test legend Gary Sobers starred for Paddock in the 1960s, while current Indian batsman Wasim Jaffer has opened the batting for Spennings Victoria and Holme Valley side Scholes.

Throw in Clive Lloyd (Holmfirth), Shahid Mahmood (Meltham), Garth Le Roux (Lascelles Hall), Sonny Ramadhin (Golcar and Liversedge), Dilip Doshi (Meltham) and Basil D'Oliveira (Marsden) and you almost have a who's who of international cricket.

Then there are the amateurs who 'have made it' into county cricket and turned professional – most recently, Andy Gale (Gomersal and Cleckheaton).

But there would be no organised cricket if it wasn't for the umpires – the men in white who judge run outs and lbws.

Umpiring cricket matches, just like refereeing soccer games, is one of the trickier tasks in life.

You are there to make decisions, and arbitrate on the future of batsmen, bowlers and fielders, but you sometimes become the focal-point for criticism, back-chat and even verbal abuse.

Club scorers also earn their corn: stuck in a scoreboard all day, keeping tabs on batters' scores and bowlers' analyses.

Individuals like Gerald Hickmott at Gomersal and Bob Speight at Cleckheaton do a very unglamorous job – but one that has to be done.

Off the field, all clubs rely on armies of volunteers. When they have done their 'time', these workers become known as stalwarts – the guys that every club has, and couldn't do without.

The pantheon of local cricket stalwarts is dominated by groundsmen and administrators.

In the beginning, local groundsmen had to work with fairly rudimentary equipment.

But over the years they have made use of a variety of implements and at some clubs there have been some ambitious redevelopment schemes.

Take a trip round some local cricket venues and you meet some extremely dedicated groundsmen.

These guys, and those who do a similar job at other clubs, are the salt of the earth.

Clubs and leagues also rely on volunteer administrators and officials - cricket folk who don't mind chairing committees, auditing books, minuting meetings or drawing up cash registers in the name of a good cause.

Take, for instance, the case of Maurice Pollard.

He joined the now-defunct Dewsbury & Savile CC during the Second World War – and up until the demise of Dewsbury CC in 1989 served it in every conceivable way possible.

And today he is still a keen follower of Hopton Mills CC in the Central Yorkshire League.

Some club stalwarts also double as league administrators and officials.

No wonder both main local competitions – the Huddersfield League and Huddersfield Central League – have introduced annual awards to mark the contribution of hardworking club loyalists.

And in the twenty-first century there is a new breed of stalwart: the club webmaster, so step forward Ian Watkinson (Shepley), Dave Robinson (Golcar), Lee Booth (Thurstonland), Vic Reed (Denby Dale), and many fellow IT enthusiasts.

All these guys – players, umpires, scorers, groundsmen, stalwarts – are the lifeblood of the game at a local level.