

3. Women



Women are leading the way into the new century at Skelmanthorpe Cricket Club – and they've caught positions as chair and vice-chair. Margaret Dollive, a hospital worker, and Beverley Crossland, a local hairdresser, are the first female members of the committee and they've scooped the top jobs. Members say the club...is breaking new ground and it's all down to the ladies.

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The last few decades have seen major changes in the role of women in local cricket.

A hundred years ago, if a woman was involved at a local club, she was invariably the tea lady, or the scorer, or someone who, with the cooperation of her female friends (and perhaps under the aegis of the club's 'Ladies Committee'), would organise a 'clothes evening' in an effort to raise money for her beloved club.

Today, things have changed. Of course, there are still a multitude of tea ladies, and a plethora of female scorers, and always a number of willing fundraisers, but women have also taken on other mantles.

They have become secretaries, treasurers and chairmen on club committees, started to play or umpire, or even helped with building and property matters.

But, traditionally, women have been associated with matchday catering.

Throughout the early years of the twentieth century, local clubs looked to women to help out in the kitchen. In doing so, they were not going against the grain of society, but rather reflecting the reigning stereotypes and traditions.

Obviously, as kitchen facilities have improved, and as certain league authorities have insisted in their 'rules' on the provision of 'tea', the fare on offer has got noticeably better.

On a typical summer Saturday, several women may be involved in a club's catering operation. These women may be wives, partners, girlfriends,

mothers, mothers-in-law or merely friends or acquaintances of individual team members.

Some clubs will not place all the tea-making burden on women volunteers.

Some may organise a rota involving all senior cricketers; others may pay a couple of individuals to mastermind the catering operation or even allow them to develop a 'mini-business' (again, these individuals may well be women).

Back in the post-war years (in particular), it was quite fashionable for local clubs to have their own 'sub-group' of willing female members. More often than not, this sub-group would be known as the Ladies Committee.

Where a club had a Ladies Committee, it was usually semi-autonomous and devoted to fundraising and improving the general wellbeing of the club.

It would organise its own events (jumble sales, clothes evenings etc), pay in the takings to its own bank account, and then donate money back to the club as and when it was needed for specific purposes.

The hey-day of the Ladies Committee was, arguably, the era through from the 1950s to the 1970s.

Since this period, women have made great strides.

Once upon a time, 'the men' played cricket, and 'the men' also ran cricket.

This meant that the typical 'club committee' was, almost always, all-male: male president, male chairman, male secretary, male treasurer, and the rest.

Again, cricket was not unusual - it merely reflected society, perhaps even exaggerating and amplifying its 'male bias'.

But at some point in the late-twentieth century, things started to change. As women gained more rights in the 'public' sphere - the workplace, the law - so they started to make advances in the 'private' world of clubs and voluntary societies.

It wasn't as if women were 'banging on the door', demanding their rights; but rather that they, and others, realised that they had something to offer the world of local league cricket.

Take the example of Margaret Dollive and Beverley Crossland at Skelmanthorpe or Pat Pye (Marsden CC secretary), Debborah Payne (treasurer at Slaithwaite), Hilary Holmes (secretary and league rep at Linthwaite), Sonia Ross (Clayton West child welfare officer), Claire Woodhead-Turner (Golcar secretary), and others.

Then there's Broad Oak CC, which has a brace of female committee members - Kathleen Dudley (treasurer) and Angela Metcalfe (secretary).

Local leagues have also brought women into the corridors of power.

Finance secretary and joint match secretary for the Huddersfield League is Yvonne Collins, while the Huddersfield Central League boasts a female Management Board member (Julie Dolley), a female vice-president (Joyce Booth) and a female welfare officer (Yvonne Whittaker).

In all of this we must also acknowledge the long history of women's cricket in Huddersfield and district.

It was in the 1930s that women's cricket first took off and since then many clubs have turned out women's XIs.

And the Huddersfield area has a major claim to fame in the shape of Clare Taylor – who grew up in Crosland Moor, scored for Golcar, and went on to play for the England women's cricket team and share in the famous Ashes triumph of 2005.