

4. Pubs



Cricket as a sport was born in the eighteenth century in the village of Hambledon, Hampshire, at the Ball & Ball Inn.

Where the involvement of factory and church in nineteenth-century cricket represented the movement for leisure reform, the public house was strongly linked to traditional leisure culture.

In fact the pub remained the focal point for most working-class communities, despite the pressure for reform.

The relationship between public houses and cricket is, and has always been, a multi-faceted one – and the history of cricket and cricket clubs in Kirklees supplies us with much fascinating evidence.

First, the publicans: in the early period, some owned grounds and ran them on a commercial basis.

As leisure became rationalised during the second half of the nineteenth century and permanent clubs were formed, publicans saw the social and commercial advantage of sponsoring these new organisations.

Some licencees and brewery owners have been motivated by self-interest – making money out of cricketers' drinking habits both before and after games.

They have also used local sport as a means of publicising and advertising their businesses.

What better way to get your pub's name in the local paper (fixture lists, league tables, match reports) than to sponsor a cricket club?

Other landlords have taken on a more philanthropic role and, out of the goodness of their hearts, provided local teams with a field to play in or sandwiches and cakes at teatime.

Second, and following on from this, it is no surprise that the origins of some of our established cricket clubs are closely tied up with pubs.

In the late nineteenth century, Joseph Sykes, the landlord of Th'Alma, Linthwaite, organised a match between married men and bachelors to help the poverty-stricken Broad Oak club pay its annual rent.

Evidence also suggests that in the mid-nineteenth century Lepton Highlanders leased their ground off the landlord of the White Horse on Wakefield Road – and Cumberworth United had an early link with the Foresters Arms.

Other clubs gradually acquire links with hostelries, like Dewsbury club Westborough.

They started life as Dewsbury NALGO CC in the 1960s but quickly evolved into The Hart CC and Royal Oak CC before taking their current moniker (and then having relationships with two more local pubs: The Woolpack and The Swan Inn).

Third, it is a fact that many cricket clubs have been founded at meetings held in local inns and taverns.

Kirkburton were formed in the Rose & Crown in 1860, Shepley in the Black Bull in 1871, Birchencliffe in the Royal Hotel in 1950, and Holmfirth held their first committee meetings in the town's Crown Hotel.

Competitions too: the Huddersfield Central Cricket League was founded in 1913 during a meeting at the former Pack Horse Hotel in the middle of the town.

Fourth, and following on from what has gone before, it is no coincidence that many cricket clubs are located very close to pubs and inns.

The proximity of Leymoor CC to the Walkers Arms is the best example in Kirklees.

Local brewery Punch Taverns own the Parkwood Road cricket field, and on most summer Saturdays locals who pop in for a pint will also take a look at the cricket.

Other clubs also have pubs on their doorstep: Linthwaite (Coach & Horses), Liversedge (New Inn), Primrose Hill (Crimea), Spen Victoria (Saw Inn), Batley (Taverners) and Heckmondwike (The Cricketers Arms – what else?).

Furthermore, some clubs have used, or still do use, local pubs as their administrative headquarters.

At one point in time, Holmbridge CC held committee meetings across the road in the Bridge Tavern – ditto Hopton Mills at The Flowerpot, Leymoor at the Walkers, Upper Hopton at the Travellers Rest and Cartworth Moor at the Rising Sun (before it burnt down).

In 1886 *Athletic News* stated that the club contact for Hanging Heaton CC was a Mr T.L. Allatt based at the Fox & Hounds just opposite the cricket ground, while much more recently cricketers representing Lepton Highlanders CC got used to changing into their whites in the White Horse Inn while their new clubhouse was being erected.

Fifth, it is clear that in 2006 the pub-club link is as strong as ever, with many clubs being closely identified with specific pubs.

Cumberworth drink in The Star, Denby in The George, Upperthong in the Royal Oak, Shepley in the Farmers Arms, while YMCA CC (as was) had a period when they retired to the Cavalry Arms, Birkby, every Saturday night.

And often, in return, the pub in question will pay for a matchball, an advertising hoarding or a set of tracksuits each season. At Golcar CC, for example, the Rose & Crown is nothing less than a 'Gold Sponsor'.

Finally, it should be noted that many watering holes – including the Walkers Arms, Farmers Arms and Th'Alma – have entered teams in the Huddersfield Evening League.

So it is clear that the relationship between pubs and cricket is an important and enduring one.