

## 6. Factories



Legend has it that around a century ago a local mill owner placed an advert in his local newspaper which stated: 'High-class weaver required: Must be able to keep wicket'.

This ad is a wonderful indicator of the relationship between the textile industry and cricket.

Of course, entrepreneurs wanted to develop their businesses and create employment opportunities, but they also wished to play their part in encouraging local sport.

In Huddersfield, Dewsbury and district there are many examples of this relationship in action.

Probably the best is Lascelles Hall, the oldest club in the Kirklees area, founded in 1825.

Here in the early nineteenth century, a group of local handloom weavers trespassed onto a field and started playing with bat and ball.

And instead of ticking them off, the wife of the local squire, a Mrs Walker, declared, famously, 'Those young men seem fond of cricket. Let them have a playground.'

Nineteenth-century entrepreneurs were often part of the non-secular movement for social reform through sport and recreation.

Drinking, gambling, absenteeism – these evils were all part of the same vicious circle and the more enlightened businessmen felt that sport, and cricket in particular, could play a major role in enhancing quality of life for their workforce.

Recreational activities also improved the general health and morale of employees.

Some businessmen were known to provide a ground at a peppercorn rent, sell land cheaply to local clubs, or provide them with general financial backing.

But the competitive imperatives of traditional sport could also be at the forefront of an employer's involvement in cricket.

This meant that in some cases money was provided to develop facilities and to pay players, or jobs were offered to prominent local players.

After all, the local mill owner knew that a successful cricket team, bearing the name of the business, could help raise a) profile and status, and b) profit margins.

At the same time, the introduction of the 'half-day' on Saturdays meant that workers now had the time to indulge in sport in a more organised and regular fashion.

Today, the industrial heritage of cricket in Kirklees is extremely apparent.

Many clubs were actually formed by industrialists. Denby Dale owes its existence to the pioneering Hinchcliffe family – in particular, father Zachariah and son Thomas.

And today, as if to thank the early twentieth-century entrepreneur, the clubhouse at the Wakefield Road ground is known as the Z. Hinchcliffe Pavilion.

Down the road in Scissett, Nortonthorpe CC moved into their Springfield Avenue ground in 1952.

The venue had been left to them by local industrialist George H. Norton and Roger Littlewood, club secretary in 2006, is very appreciative.

'The heritage of the club is interesting and important. My father was actually a manager at Norton's mill, so I'm very aware of the link between the mill and the cricket club.

'Norton was Nortonthorpe, and our club is deeply indebted to him.'

Throw in Armitage Bridge, who leased their ground off Brooke's Mill in the early days, plus Almondbury and Heckmondwike – both founded by merchants in the nineteenth century – and one realises the important role played by businessmen in local cricket.

Many 'works teams' have also plied their trade in local cricket leagues.

Take, for example, Bradley Mills, Digley Mills, Meltham Mills and Hopton Mills – four famous cricketing outfits, although, as if mirroring recent economic history, the Bradley, Digley and Meltham clubs have long been extinct.

Moreover, factory and mill teams used to play each other in specially-arranged 'workshop tournaments' – staged at places like Cross Lane, Primrose Hill, and the old Brighthouse ground.

In its heyday the Dewsbury & District was also home to a plethora of local works teams: Broadhead Transport, Foxes, Lyles, Marshall, Kaye & Marshall, Ruddlesdens, Thornhill Collieries, Wormalds & Walker, and Yorkshire Transport.

Today, the Huddersfield Evening League is home to a new breed of works teams including Nat West Bank, Carson Builders, Reliance Gears and Wilkinson Rodgers.

What better way to advertise your business, placate your workforce, and make useful contacts than to enter a team or two into the local cricket competition?

There are other interesting connections. In their first incarnation, Cleckheaton were known as Hunsworth Mills CC and nearby Scholes went under the name of Albert Mills CC.

The location of local cricket grounds also reveals a fascinating economic link.

The factory wall at Linthwaite, the foundry that backs on to Holmfirth's HQ, the spectacular industrial panoramas that greet visitors to Warrenside (home of Bradley & Colnebridge CC) and Dalton Fold (where Edgerton & Dalton CC now play their home games).

Finally, we should note the long life of the Heavy Woollen District Cricket Challenge Cup – so named because at its inception it was designed exclusively for cricket clubs in the industrial heartlands of Batley, Dewsbury and the Spen Valley.

Still going strong after 123 years, the competition's full, official title marks out the enduring link between local textile and cricketing heritage.