

HEBDEN BRIDGE CC

Hebden Bridge Cricket League

Rise and demise...

1894-1957 – HISTORY OF THE COMPETITION

‘There are few men in the district who, at one time or another, have not turned out with one ... of the teams in the league.’

Hebden Bridge Times and Calder Vale Gazette, 3 January 1958



The Hebden Bridge and District Cricket League was formed amidst an explosion in organised sport around 1890. Following the success of knockout cup competitions, leagues were formed across industrial Yorkshire, Lancashire and the north Midlands in football, rugby and cricket.

In local cricket the Halifax Parish Cup (1888) was followed by the Calder Valley League (1891), Halifax Amateur League (1892) and the Halifax and District League (1894). In 1895, the Ovenden and District, the Sowerby Division and the Brighouse Cricket leagues were formed.

At the western end of the Calder Valley, Todmorden was a founder member of the Lancashire League (1891) and the Central Lancashire League (1892), Walsden joining the latter in 1893. Of the major clubs at the eastern end of the valley, Halifax and Brighouse both joined the West Riding League in 1893, Elland joined the Spen Valley League in 1895 and Queensbury entered the West Bradford League.

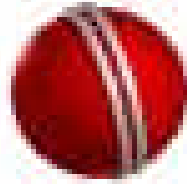


The Hebden Bridge League was formed as a subsidiary to the Calder Valley League in 1894. With a number of grounds in remote hilltop fields and most players working on Saturday mornings, transport and punctuality was a problem for Calder Valley League clubs.

The wave of sporting enthusiasm soon enabled clubs to field a second team and it was decided that these would play more locally. In 1893 the Todmorden and District League was founded, comprising the second teams of eight Calder Valley League clubs plus one new club. In 1894 the Hebden Bridge based clubs followed suit. The founder members were:

Cragg 2nds
Crimsworth 2nds
Cross Lanes 1sts
Hebden Bge Salem 2nds
Hebden Bge Utd Star 2nds

Heptonstall Parish 2nds
Heptonstall Slack 2nds
Mytholmroyd 2nds
St James's 2nds



By 1896 there were 47 first and second elevens playing between Todmorden and Mytholmroyd. Whereas minor leagues quickly collapsed at Ovenden (1897), Sowerby (1901) and Brighouse (1902), the Hebden Bridge and Todmorden leagues flourished. Indeed, there were so many clubs in and around each of these towns that travel between the two was unnecessary and these leagues effectively replaced their parent Calder Valley League.

In 1908 the Hebden Bridge League expanded to two divisions of 10 clubs. The outbreak of war in 1914 had an immediate impact. The League was reduced to nine clubs in 1915 and did not function between 1916 and 1918. Following the Armistice in 1918 one division of nine clubs was quickly organised for 1919 and by 1920 there were two divisions once more, nine teams in the first and eight in the second.

There was a steady turnover of clubs between the wars. The league was strong enough to reject the application of

Ryburn in 1932 'owing to the ground being too far away', but by the end of the decade there were first indications that the league was in decline. Clubs were having greater difficulty raising teams and in January 1939, a few months before war was declared, the resignations of Booth and Luddenden Parish Church saw the league advertising for new members.

In hindsight it is obvious that the more successful clubs, particularly those situated between Hebden Bridge and Halifax, would drift towards the larger conurbation with its stronger league as they aspired to improve and progress.



World War II interrupted this long-term trend and, of course, brought problems of its own. In 1940 the league was reduced to one division of ten clubs and by June so many players had been called up that the committee **'resolved that men from the press be allowed to play for any team in the league for this season'**. Local journalists present to report the game were likely to find themselves playing for any team with an unexpected shortfall.

To make best use of players before they were called up, fixtures for 24 August 1940 were brought forward to the July holiday break and the play-off semi-finals brought forward to 24 August and the league limped through to September.

The AGM in January 1941 was adjourned until player availability would be clearer and in March it was **‘resolved that owing to the small number of clubs who can raise teams for this season we do not run a league’**. The league was in abeyance for over five years. The next meeting was held on 3 December 1946, when the teams represented were Birchcliffe, Hebden Bridge Salem, Heptonstall Slack ‘A’ and ‘B’, Lumbutts, and Old Town ‘A’ and ‘B’.

These seven teams contested the 1947 season and in November of that year advertisements for new clubs appeared in the local press. Initially new teams were attracted, including the first and second elevens of Mytholmroyd Methodists and Todmorden’s third eleven. In 1949 there were twelve teams competing

Hebden Bridge and District Cricket League Final Table 1949

	Pld	W	D	L	Pts
Old Town ‘A’	22	20	1	1	41
Birchcliffe ‘A’	22	18	1	3	37
Hebden Bridge Salem	22	16	1	5	33
Heptonstall Slack ‘A’	22	16	0	6	32
Heptonstall Slack ‘B’	22	11	1	10	23
Todmorden 3 rd XI	22	8	6	8	22
Lumbutts	22	9	1	12	19
Old Town ‘B’	22	9	1	12	19
Mytholmroyd P Ch	22	8	0	14	16
Myth Meths 2 nd XI*	22	5	0	17	10
Birchcliffe ‘B’	22	3	0	19	6
Friendly Methodists	22	3	0	19	6

* Mytholmroyd Methodists 2nd XI deducted 2 points for breach of rules

In 1950 the League again ran two divisions. That was the peak of the post-war boom. After that clubs were lost and advertising for new clubs became an annual ritual.

In the 1950s clubs in the Calder Valley made significant improvements to their grounds, spurred on by post-war enthusiasm, access to improved machinery and the need to maintain facilities in keeping with other clubs.

Speaking at the Hebden Bridge League's Annual Dinner, held at the White Hart Hotel, Hebden Bridge on 2 October 1953, league auditor Clement Stansfield stated:

Local cricket pitches are not as good as they might be, but going back 40 years they were much worse. Local cricket has improved tremendously, and grounds are much better. In the old days more often than not, a hundred was a winning score, but in present day local cricket individuals make centuries.

However, the improvements to grounds contributed to the league's decline. President Doctor AH Clegg identified an alarming trend at the league's AGM in 1954: **'A point worthy of mention is the effort being made by some clubs to improve their grounds ... This is how it should be, but I appeal to the clubs not to slope off into the Halifax League when these ground improvements are completed.'**

The League was sinking fast. In 1955 when double winners Bridgeholme followed Hebden Bridge Salem, Mytholmroyd Methodists and Luddendenfoot St Marys in jumping ship to

the Halifax Leagues, all of the Hebden Bridge League's first division champions since 1950 had left.

At the League dinner, secretary Richard Farthing was pessimistic: **'The present lack of interest in the Hebden Bridge League is heading for the winding-up of this old established organisation...I cannot see any prospect of re-starting once the present League ceases to function.'**

The demise of the Bradford section of the Yorkshire Council's second eleven competition provided a temporary reprieve. The second teams of Halifax, Illingworth St Mary's and Sowerby Bridge joined the League in 1956, but, despite the best efforts of committed administrators, the end was nigh. In 1957 Old Town were awarded a walkover when Heptonstall Slack 'failed to field seven men' and both Sowerby Bridge and Halifax received walks-over against the Halifax-based Royal Army Pay Corps.

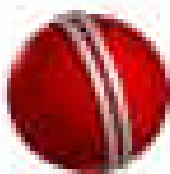


Yet there was no hint that the League's last ball had been bowled at the annual dinner on 18 October. West Indies' opening batsman Conrad Hunte presented the prizes for what League President Dr AH Clegg described as **'quite a good season'**. League Secretary Richard Farthing reported **'a possibility of one or two new teams joining for next season'** and financially the clubs were sound.

Over the next two months the picture changed dramatically. By the AGM on 3 December Halifax, Illingworth and Sowerby Bridge had resigned en-masse, returning to the Yorkshire Council which had re-formed its second team league.

Birchcliffe, increasingly struggling to raise a team, announced they would not be competing in 1958 and suddenly the Hebden Bridge League was reduced to three clubs – Heptonstall Slack, Old Town and the Royal Army Pay Corps, the latter possessing no ground.

As a final throw of the dice the meeting was adjourned so that the Todmorden League could be approached for the second time in four years with regard to an amalgamation.



The Todmorden League, which itself had only six teams, offered membership to any new teams but wished to retain its identity and would not amalgamate. The policy was independent, but also insular and short-sighted. The Todmorden League acquired no new teams and within two years was also defunct.

The end came for the Hebden Bridge League on 30 December 1957. Old Town were willing to support the

League but, needing competitive cricket at their wonderful new Boston Hill ground, had also gained provisional acceptance into the Halifax Association. Realistically, the Hebden Bridge League could not stand in their way and League secretary Richard Farthing minuted: **‘Owing to there being only Heptonstall Slack remaining the League be disbanded.’**



Within a fortnight both Heptonstall Slack and Old Town were formally admitted to the Halifax Association.

There was one further meeting of the League committee, fourteen years later on 1 December 1971. The League's assets, its five trophies, had been held at the local council offices in the unlikely event of the League being re-formed. In distributing its trophies, the League committee confirmed that there would be no second coming for the Hebden Bridge League.

The first division trophy was presented to the Collinson Memorial Charity Competition – the Collinson Cup. Two trophies were given to Mr K Lord for ‘Calder Valley competitions’ and one trophy to the Hebden Bridge Gala committee. The second division championship trophy, the Sowden Trophy was returned to the club which provided it, Bridgeholme CC, where it is still awarded to the club’s player of the year.

From Asbestos to Zion...

HEBDEN BRIDGE & DISTRICT CRICKET LEAGUE MEMBERS 1894-1957

CLUB	GROUND	OTHER INFORMATION
Birchcliffe	Nell Carr aka Nook and The Carrs, Calder Holme (1920)	2nd XI founder members
Booth	Booth	in League 1924-38
Bridgeholme	Cross Stone (1952) Station House, Eastwood (from 1953)	in League 1952-55; div 2 champs 1952; div 1 champs 1953, 55; cup winners 1952, 53, 55
Cape Asbestos	Mount Skip	played in division 2 1952-56
Cragg Vale	Deacon Hill, Cragg	2nd XI founder members
Crimsworth	Crimsworth	2nd XI founder members
Cross Lanes	Calder Holme (1890s) Falling Royd (by 1908)	2nd XI founder members
Dawson City	Dawson City	
Eastwood	Station House, Eastwood	in League 1895-1933
Friendly Methodists	Water Hill	
Halifax 2 nd XI	Thrum Hall	played two seasons, 1956-57; champions both seasons
Hebden Bridge		
Liberals		
Hebden Bridge		
Salem	Foster Holme (aka Salem Fields) Bents (c.1910-20)	2nd XI founder members; then called Salem Wesleyans; helped re-start League in 1947; left to join Halifax League 1955
Hebden Bridge		
United Star	Calder Holme	
Heptonstall Parish	Cross Hills, Heptonstall (1890s) Top o’ th’ Eaves, Heptonstall (by 1908)	2nd XI founder members withdrew in 1910 when could not get a field
Heptonstall Slack	Popples	only team to play continuously in in League 1894-1957
Hope Street Baptists	Old Chamber, Hebden Bridge (1890s) Nell Carr (by 1906)	

Illingworth St Mary's 2 nd XI Jack Bridge Luddenden Luddenden Parish Church (aka Luddenden St Mary's) Luddenden United Luddendenfoot Mary's	Calder Holme (by 1910) Falling Royd (by 1920)	played two seasons, 1956-57 first season 1914
Lumbutts	Heyhead	in League 1931-38
Mytholmroyd	Calder Holme	
Mytholmroyd Methodists	White House Holme (until 1895) Redacre (1896) The Holme (1897-1901; 1906-07; 1909 onwards) Bent (1902 and 1908) Banksfield (1904-05) Buckley Gate	first season 1914; re-joined for one St season 1926; re-joined 1950-53 helped re-start League in 1947; left to re-join Todmorden League 1952 2nd XI founder members; 1st XI champions called 'Mytholmroyd Wesleyan Sunday School' until 1935; re-joined 1948, left 1951
Mytholmroyd Parish Church Mytholmroyd St Michael's	'the church ground'	1st season 1930; re-joined 1949-51
Old Town	Old Laithe (until 1956) Boston Hill (1957 onwards)	helped re-start League 1947
Oldroyd	Croft	1st season 1934; Tod & Dist Lge Champions 1926-33; Hebden Bdg Lge Champions 1934, 35
Pecket Well Royal Army Pay Corps (Halifax) Sowerby Bridge 2 nd XI St James's	Moorside, Pecket Well no ground – played all games 'away' Sowerby Bridge CC	1st season 1910 played one season 1957 played two seasons, 1956-57
St John's Mission	Sandbed (until 1901) Greenhouse, Rawtenstall (from 1901)	2 nd XI founder members Sandbed ground taken by Tod Corporation for sewage works during 1901 season debut season 1902 all out for 2 v Cragg Vale 10 May 1902
Todmorden 3 rd XI Wadsworth Lane Zion	Centre Vale Great Raw Foster Holme (1895) High Hirst	played one season, 1949 joined 1895 founded 1895; champions in first season

A Gentleman's Game?

1912-52 - RULE CHANGES

Cricket has rarely lived up to its stereotype as the 'gentleman's game' for long. In 1932 the Hebden Bridge League's committee decided: **'after hearing the report of an umpire regarding ungentlemanly conduct that each representative inform his committee and ask them to try to stop this kind of thing.'** The following League rules suggest that there never was a truly golden age of immaculate player behaviour.

1912: Rule 16

The decision of the Umpire shall be final (if in accordance with M.C.C. Rules), and he shall be subjected to no personal abuse or violence.

1952: New Rule

If an umpire be subject to abuse he or either club is permitted to inform the League Secretary who shall put the case before the committee. The offender(s) shall be subject to whatever decision the committee shall decide..

The shift in emphasis from the authoritarian commands of 1912 to a process of greater discourse in 1952 reflects the gradual liberalisation of society. The authority's inflexible assumptions of compliance in 1912 have been replaced by greater interaction with accuser and accused and, by

inference, an acceptance that players sometimes misbehave by 1952.

Gunnings Fired – Twice!

1936 - UMPIRE SACKED

From the minutes of the Hebden Bridge and District Cricket League

23 June 1936

Resolved that...C Gunnings be struck off the list of umpires for making remarks during a league match contrary to the good conduct of the game.

28 July 1936

Resolved that, after hearing a report from umpire C Gunnings, the previous decision of this committee be adhered to.

4 May 1937

Resolved that after an apology Mr C. Gunnings be reinstated as an umpire.

4 June 1940

Resolved that C. Gunnings be struck off the umpires' list for failing to turn up, until he sends a satisfactory reason.

In support of others

1934-52 – CHARITY FUNDRAISING

The League raised funds for various causes. In the days before the protection of the welfare state, injury could threaten provision for a player's family. When A. Warhurst broke his arm in a match in 1934 a benefit game was organised to raise funds for his family. A Hebden Bridge League XI played a Todmorden League XI on 30 July at Calder Holme. On 30 June 1947 a benefit match was played between Lumbutts and the Rest of the League at Todmorden for the widow of the late Norman Law.

The Devon village of Lynmouth, devastated by floodwaters after 8 inches of rain fell on Exmoor in 24 hours, was the beneficiary of local fund raising in 1952. The Hebden Bridge League contributed the proceeds of a charity match staged at Popples on 21 September. The League Champions played the Rest of the League, raising £2 3s 6d.

Occasionally the League provided moral rather than financial support. In May 1935 the League committee invited club members to join the procession through Hebden Bridge on Civic Sunday **'in honour of our President [Councillor JA Parker] on his appointment as Chairman of the Hebden Bridge United District Council'**. In 1953 the League was invited onto the local council's 'Coronation Committees', but declined 'in view of the facts that the league matches are so widespread and

that most are already represented through Sunday Schools’.

Poor old Mr Greenwood!

1935 – OFFICIAL STRUCK OFF

Occasionally, when researching the histories of cricket clubs, this Project has discovered bare information which cries out for further investigation, often by studying microfilm of old newspapers.

One such example occurred in the minutes of the Hebden Bridge and District Cricket League’s monthly meetings in 1935:

3rd September

Resolved that the umpires for First Division Final be A. Wilde and J. Greenwood.

1st October

Resolved that J Greenwood be struck off the list of umpires.

Sadly, on this occasion reports give no clues as to umpire Greenwood’s misdemeanour, sticking adhesively to the details of Heptonstall Slack’s uneventful four-wicket victory over Jack Bridge.

Is Ryburn really too far away?

1932-52 – ODDS AND ENDS

From the minutes of the Hebden Bridge and District Cricket League

1 March 1932

Resolved that we cannot accept Ryburn CC as a member of our league owing to their ground being too far away.

28 July 1936

Resolved that the umpires for Booth 2nd v Heptonstall Slack 2nd be written a letter of censure for leaving the ground too early and not returning when meeting the Slack team.

23 January 1952

Resolved to add new law – ‘All bowlers must be dressed in white shirts and white or grey flannel trousers’.

30 January 1952

The side batting first shall, as far as possible, have their tea before the tea interval.

Workers' Playtime

1950-1 – WORKSHOP KNOCKOUT

The Hebden Bridge and District Cricket League ran a short-lived workshop knockout tournament in 1950 and 51.

Matches were to be played on an artificial surface in Calder Holmes Park. In April 1950 the League ordered four vellum-covered bats, four balls and a mat, 19? yards by 2 yards, from AH Broughton.

Although teams such as A & H Sutcliffe's and Calder Valley Bakers were initially enthusiastic, the competition was not a success and on 23 January 1952 it was minuted that, '...we sell workshop kit but retain the mat. We loan mat to Hebden Bridge Canine Society.'

In May it was decided to 'loan mat to Cape Asbestos for their next home fixture if it is not sold in the meantime'. The Cape Asbestos pitch at Mount Skip was not the best for batting! The mat was eventually sold.

What's the score?

1953 – SCORESHEET CONTROVERSY



Mr Richard Farthing, the secretary/treasurer of the Hebden Bridge and District Cricket League, speaking at the League's AGM in the Trades Club, Hebden Bridge, on 7 December 1953, complained about the quality of scoresheets he was receiving:

May I draw your attention to the badly made out score sheets I have received during the past season. These tend to increase the possibility of mistakes being made in both the match results and the averages. Perhaps it would be better if the scorer, instead of sitting in the pavilion where he is likely to be disturbed, seeks out a place where he will be free from possible interruption.

60 years old!

1954 – DIAMOND JUBILEE



Slack discipline

1957 – THE END

‘Owing to there only being Heptonstall Slack remaining, the league be disbanded’ - minute from the final meeting of the Hebden Bridge and District League on 30 December 1957

Heptonstall Slack was the Hebden Bridge and District Cricket League’s most loyal club. Founder members of the Calder Valley League in 1891, they were also founder members of the Hebden Bridge League which, alongside the Todmorden and District League, was established to accommodate the second teams of Calder Valley League clubs in 1894.

SERIOUS POSITION FOR HEBDEN BRIDGE LEAGUE

Resignation of four teams

"WE are at a serious crossroads. If we decide to wind up the league, I'm afraid we shall never put it going again," said Mr. R. F. Parthing, secretary and treasurer of the Hebdens Bridge Cricket League, speaking at the annual meeting of the league, held in the Trades Club, Hebdens Bridge, on Monday evening. Mr. T. Greenwood, league chairman, presided.

Mr. Parthing's remarks were made after he had announced that in accordance with the constitution of the league of the Hebdens, Hebdens Bridge and Ilkleyworth, the league's secret should be laid open. He also stated that he had also been informed that Hebdens Bridge would not be taking part in next season's competition. This would leave only five teams in the league—Hebdens and Heptonstall, which were the only teams which were members of the league, but the Royal Army Pay Corps, it would be almost impossible to run a competition under these circumstances.

43 YEARS' RAILWAY SERVICE

Retirement of Mr. Victor Yelland

A well-known Calder Valley man, Mr. Victor Yelland, of 22, Milton Street, Hebdens Bridge, retired today after 43 years' service with the railway.

Since the end of 1922 Mr. Yelland has been goods agent at Hebdens (Vale), goods station and in charge of the City Road goods station. For three years before then he was railway goods agent at Hebdens.

Mr. Yelland started working for the railway in 1914.

Slack played continuously in the League until it folded in 1957, only the breaks for war, 1916-18 and 1942-46, intervening. Like all clubs, they had their share of characters, particularly in the 1930s when they featured at most of the League's disciplinary hearings, as the following minutes show:

6 July 1931

Resolved that we write to Heptonstall Slack with regard to certain of their players using abusive language to umpires, and that we ask them to place warning notices in their pavilion.

9 August 1933

Resolved that after reading a report from an umpire against CE Taylor for using bad language that a letter of warning be sent to the said player, and also a letter to Heptonstall Slack CC asking them to try and prevent such conduct in future.

3 July 1934

Resolved that I Judson of Heptonstall Slack who was reported by an umpire for using filthy language have a letter of censure written to him. Also that he must apologise to umpire within seven days or be suspended.

1 June 1937

CE Taylor of Heptonstall Slack was reported by an umpire for making certain remarks...the League Committee decided to suspend Taylor for four matches, and also that he must send a written apology to Mr A Wild the umpire.

7 June 1937

It was resolved after discussing an appeal from Heptonstall Slack CC against the suspension of CE Taylor that the appeal be not upheld.

6 June 1939

Resolved that a letter be sent to the Heptonstall Slack club re complaint by an umpire with regard to some of their second eleven players.