

BIRSTALL CC is the last club in our special summer feature on cricket and the community in Batley. The series of articles has been written by Dr PETER DAVIES, project leader of the Cricketing Heritage of Calderdale and Kirklees, which has been running over the last two years.

THE first cricket club to appear in Birstall was Birstall Albert Cricket Club, named after the Prince Consort. They played six matches a year, including Feast matches against Holmfirth.

Apparently, the team played near the Black Bull in Kirkgate as early as 1854. There is a certain amount of debate as to whether this is a direct ancestor of the current club.

This club had a small membership of around 30 people, and these saw fit to change their name in 1860 to Birstall Victoria – in honour of the Queen.

In 1860 Birstall Victoria moved from near the Black Bull to a site behind the National Schools in Scott's Field.

The team remained here for 10 years (occasionally competing under the name Birstall Cricket Club) until notice was served for a housing development.

GROUND

Therefore, a ground move had to take place yet again. Eventually, the club settled at its current location around 1870.

In 1883 Birstall Victoria embarked on a brief merger with Birstall Rugby Club.

However, this was short-lived and the separation of the two establishments in 1885 signalled the official birth of the cricket club as an entity.

This development also heralded the arrival of the club's first Heavy Woollen Cup victory in the same year, against rivals Dewsbury and Savile in the final.

This team retained the trophy the following year, beating Dewsbury and Savile again.

Plans for a grandstand were passed in April 1887 and around 5,000 people were reported as attending that year's Heavy Woollen Cup semi-final against Dewsbury and Savile.

PLOUGHED

Money was ploughed into ground improvements and in 1892 the pitch was leveled out using pit waste.

This investment seemed to have a knock-on effect on the field of play – one of the reasons (possibly) why the club was able to claim the Heavy Woollen Cup in 1892.

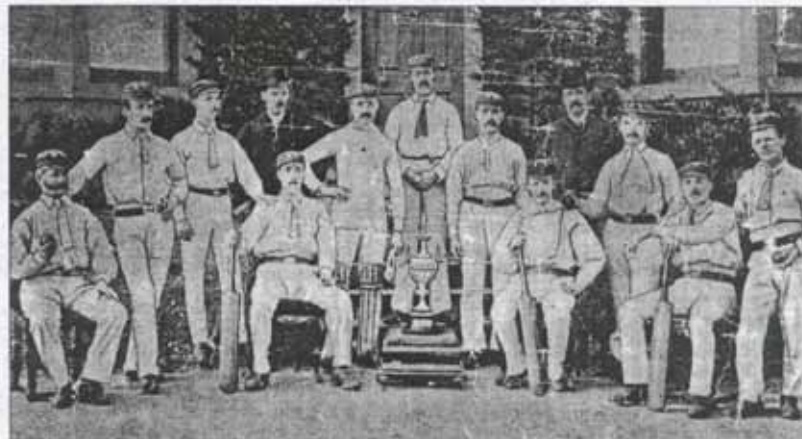
However, as the team walked home through Batley, some disgruntled opposition supporters pelted the team and the accompanying Birstall Band with grass sods.

This didn't dampen the cel-

From Albert to Victoria – and beyond



Totally triumphant: Birstall Cricket Club's treble winning 1954 team.



Looking back more than 120 years to the 1885 side that won the Heavy Woollen Cup. (NS)

ebrations, which lasted for a full week and, as one local historian states: "The cup was hardly ever empty of alcohol."

The club initially bought the Leeds Road ground in 1896.

However, problems with mortgage payments led to an appeal from the club to potential benefactors.

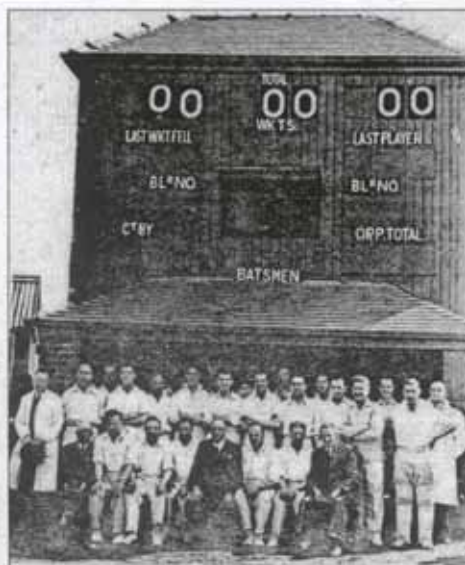
A key local personality, Dr Forsyth, responded to the plea.

Birstall beat Hopton Mills in the 1909 Heavy Woollen Cup final, and a great reception was reserved for the successful Birstall players.

The *Dewsbury Reporter* described the journey home:

been made. Birstall refused to continue the match on the Monday, claiming Ossett had failed to complete the match on the Friday.

The match was awarded to Ossett!



In front of the scorebox at Birstall Cricket Club. (NS)

"The winning team, who journeyed to Birstall by wagonette, displaying the cup en route, were met at the Smithies by Birstall Old Band, and great crowds of people gathered to welcome the players. The wagonette journeyed up Station Road, followed by the crowd, and then on Low Lane, where there was a monster assembly."

MARGIN

The report details how a charity fundraising game took place after the opening ceremony, between Birstall and a team captained by local councillor and manufacturer (and coincidentally, captain of Batley CC) Mr P W H Auty, Victory, and by no small margin, was to Birstall.

In 1932 Thornhill were defeated in the final of the Heavy Woollen Cup. Club skipper on this occasion was J E Thurmand.

Three years later, in 1935, the Birstall v Ossett Heavy Woollen Cup semi-final started on the Saturday and continued on the Wednesday and Thursday evenings without completion.

Ossett failed to turn up on the Friday evening, claiming an agreement to continue on Monday had been made. Birstall refused to continue the match on the Monday, claiming Ossett had failed to complete the match on the Friday.

The match was awarded to Ossett!

After this dispute, the club left the Heavy Woollen League and spent the 1936 season in the Leeds League before re-joining the Heavy Woollen League for the 1937 season.

The hardships of wartime are evident in the informal nature of a contract to engage W H Newell as pro in 1945. His fee was 25/- a match.

It was written on the back of an invoice for a 12 volt six watt SCC bulb from George Box Ltd!

In 1947 a letter was written to thank the Ladies Committee for a gift of £50 – which they had donated to the club after a stint of fundraising.

Birstall Cricket Club claimed a remarkable treble in 1954: scooping the Central Yorkshire League, the Heavy Woollen Cup and the Wheatley Cup.

NEW BAR

After some difficult years in the mid-1960s, the club started to plan for the future. A new bar was opened in 1968. The clubhouse extension was then officially opened by Brian Sellers, the former Yorkshire captain, in the following year and the bar was extended in 1974.

And in recent decades Birstall have claimed their fair share of Central Yorkshire League silverware.

They also possess one of the best-appointed grounds in the area.

● Dr Davies and Rob Light have written three books about the history of local cricket and the series is called *180 Not Out*. They are part of the £50,000 Cricket Heritage Project sponsored by the Heritage Lottery Fund. Copies are available from Dewsbury Books at Crackenedge Lane, Dewsbury. The books are published by Sigma Press. Call 01484 472406 for more information.