

# Cleckheaton Cricket Club

## Please enjoy reading this brief history of our Club

The facilities available to you today are due to the combined efforts of all club members from the club's beginnings back in 1864 when as a workshop's team it was known as Hunsworth Mills Cricket Club. In that year a strip measuring 40 yards by 10 yards was laid out in the field on which the club still plays to this very day, and a year later in 1865 members subscribed to have a wooden hut erected to provide proper facilities. A further year down the line the pitch was extended to a much more impressive 40 yards by 40 yards.

The year 1872 saw the building of a brick pavilion to replace the wooden hut that had by now become too small for the ever increasing band of new members. This pavilion built by the club's own members during their leisure hours probably stood close to where today's main bar area is situated.

In this same year, the club operated with 1st & 2nd teams for the first time, and Mr William Hatton, a wicketkeeper from Liverpool became the club's first professional player to be engaged for a full season.

Many local cricket clubs were formed around this time. It is believed that the oldest club in the area was Heckmondwike. It has maintained the same name since starting life in 1864, the year in which the Hunsworth Mills side was also formed. Both East Bierley & Spen Victoria sprung to life a year later in 1865, and in 1868 twenty or thirty enthusiastic volunteers following the example of the Hunsworth Mills side took up their spades and shovels to dig and level an area of rough ground in Scholes to form the Scholes Cricket Club.

In 1883 the club, then still known as Hunsworth Mills Cricket Club, became one of the original teams to play in the Heavy Woollen Cup Competition when it was formed in that year. It was not however an auspicious start as they bowed out to Adwalton Queen Elizabeth in the 1st Round. Until Cleckheaton's entry into the Bradford Cricket League in 1976 they had not missed playing in this Competition in any of the intervening years.

A General Meeting held on 10th March 1885 gave approval for the club to change its name to "Cleckheaton Cricket Club". This move was popular as the town had no club bearing its name. "Cleckheaton Alexandre" which had played on a ground situated where Whitcliffe Mount School now stands had ceased to exist some years earlier.

The club continued to progress and over the next few years extensive improvements were made. The ground was re-laid over nearly 3000 square feet, and the Club President officially opened the "new" ground on 19th May 1894. This occasion was marked with a cricket match in which the home side was able to enlist the services of J. Tunnicliffe of the Yorkshire County XI to play against a side from Rastrick.

At the October General Meeting of 1896 it was agreed that "bowling" facilities should be introduced. Previous activities of this nature had taken place on a green provided at the Punch Bowl. The green was opened in August of 1897. Since then the Bowling Section of our club has become one of the most respected in Yorkshire, if not the North of England, and has in recent years twice hosted the Finals of the All England Crown Green Bowling Association.

Unfortunately many playing records and other documents have not survived the ravages of time, but it is known that the honour of being the first Cleckheaton player to score a century belonged to John Hodgson who took 106 runs off the Undercliffe bowling in 1896.

During the intervening years, whilst playing mostly in the Yorkshire Council and Central Yorkshire Leagues, the club has met with limited success on the playing front. Cleckheaton did however reach the final of the Heavy Woollen Cup in 1902 when after bowling Wakefield out for a less than impressive 103 were themselves skittled for 51. They were again losers in the final of this competition in 1912 when it was Dewsbury's turn to put Cleckheaton's batsmen to the sword in bowling them out for the meagre total of 58.

In September 1932, Cleckheaton purchased their ground and became "the proud possessors of the whole fine estate". It was during this period of Cleckheaton's development that the cricketing pioneer Frank Morton had become associated with the club and for many years he was to be its driving force. He was also the main instigator behind the formation of the Central Yorkshire Cricket League in 1937 and he remained its President until 1958. He also became President of the Yorkshire Cricket Council. When he died aged 80 in 1965 both the club and cricket in general had lost one of its better known administrators.

Back on the trophy trail, Cleckheaton finally won the Heavy Woollen Cup in 1939 against Scholes at Harts Moor, but before this happened they were defeated in the 1936 final by a successful Heckmondwike side captained by Arthur Brearley who whilst at their helm led them to a hat trick of wins between 1936 & 1938. The Club again reached the final in 1940, but on this occasion Ossett's of 312 left them with far too much to do to retain the trophy.

The club was not destined to win this trophy again until 1959, but during this period blighted by lack of success they posted their highest score in this competition when they were able to total 411 runs in knocking Birstall out of the cup in 1948.

Further progress in both League and Cup did not materialise until triumph came once more in the Heavy Woollen Cup by virtue of a brace of victories very much against expectations when Hanging Heaton became their victims in the Cup Finals of both 1959 and 1960. Between then and 1976 when the club successfully applied to join the "Bradford Cricket League" their form was not always inspiring although many well-respected cricketers played for Cleckheaton during this period.

Those who have been at the club for some years will find it difficult to forget a wicketkeeper as flamboyant as Laurie Castle or batsmen as professional as Norman Heap, or as gentlemanly as Harold North, Jeff Binks, or Doctor Keith Parker. Neither will it be easy to forget bowlers of the calibre of Ernest Blakeley, Ronnie Womersley, Keith Mortimer, or close to the end of his career a revitalised David Haigh who whilst at Cleckheaton performed the feat of taking 26 wickets during three consecutive matches within the space of eight days.



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In both 1972 and 1973 Cleckheaton was chosen as the venue for the Heavy Woollen Cup Final which was the first time since 1943 that they had been so honoured. After seasons of neglect the ground was given a face-lift. Walls were whitened & seating was replaced. With the scoreboard back in working order and the ground looking so well, the Club which had such a progressive look still languished in the lower reaches of the Central Yorkshire League.

Rugby Union had been played at Moorend for a considerable time, and 1972 saw the amalgamation of Cleckheaton Cricket & Bowling Club with Cleckheaton Rugby Union Club. The marriage was good and a forward move that gave stability and security to all of the sports involved. It gave impetus to what was now known as the "Cricket Section".

The success of our staging of the two Cup Finals, the introduction of a Junior Cricket Section, and the desire to see cricket played at a higher level inspired our Cricket Committee to make application to join the Bradford Cricket League, an application that was successful.

We played our first League match on the 24th April 1976 as a 2nd Division club against Windhill, and what a start we experienced. Opening bowler Seb Grose recorded figures of 6 for 16 and Windhill were bowled out for just 37 runs. Playing for Windhill that day was our illustrious Cricket Chairman Dave Worrall who failed to trouble the scorers, being sent back to the pavilion with a "duck" against his name

We had gone into the League with the same team that had played in the Central Yorkshire League the previous season. Keith Stanley had been given the captaincy, and it was he who scored the club's first Bradford League century with 121 not out against Hartshead Moor. Even with the fillip of our first match victory we were unable to reach any great heights that season which at its end saw us vying with Queensbury for the bottom spot. The only notable success of the season had been Seb Grose who captured 69 wickets at a cost of a little over 15 runs each.

The ignominy of our first season brought it home to those involved that the team was in urgent need of strengthening and a decision was made to introduce Overseas Players. In the seasons between 1977 and 1999 our supporters have been fortunate enough to witness playing for Cleckheaton, cricketers numbered among the very best overseas players to have graced the Bradford League.

For the start of the 1977 season we were able to welcome to the club, Rahul Mankad who stayed with the team for four years. In those seasons he scored over 3000 runs which included an aggregate of 1251 in 1978 which at that time was a League Record that was to last for a full fifteen years until beaten by Russell Evans in 1993. In recent seasons, another Bombay player Iqbal Khan pushed the record to 1428, before Spen Victoria's Grant Lambert decimated the record in the 2000 season with 1683 runs. The efforts of Rahul helped the club to its first promotion to the 1st Division in 1979. Unfortunately in common with most of our sorties into the higher division, we stayed only two years in the top flight.

Whilst with us Mankad introduced to the club several top class Indian professionals who added much to the enjoyment of those watching cricket at Moorend during these years. We were fortunate at this time to be able to watch "Sonny" Singh & Suru Nayak who both went on to become full Indian Test Players, and Vijay Mohan Raj who was with us in 1980. Mankad revisited us during last season and was re-united with many of those that played with him during those early seasons.



**BRADFORD LEAGUE. DIVISION ONE. SEASON 2002.**

Back: Mark Gill, Martyn Evans, Faisal Irfan, Matthew Waudby, Dave Worrall, Steve Titchard, Richard Pyrah  
Front: Rhys Jowett, Chris Brice, Warren Stephenson, Chris Blackburn, Garrett Stead.

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It is impossible to vouch entirely for the authenticity of the following anecdote, but I am assured by many involved with the Club at that particular time that when Ravi Shastri turned up wanting a game at the ripe old age of 16 or 17, a certain Mike Williamson, then Cricket Chairman, took one look at him and decided that he was far too young to be of any real help to us. Kapil Dev had been a frequent visitor to the club at this particular time. I can only hope that he wasn't handed out the same treatment.

Most of our overseas players, with some notable exceptions, have been good for the club. On the plus side we were fortunate to have for a season a 6ft 8ins South African called Paul Robinson in transit to Lancashire. He played at the same time as Mankad who dreaded us winning the toss for he knew he would still be trying to bat at 9.00pm after Paul had bowled 25 overs running from his mark quite close to the sidescreen.

We were not as lucky with a Hyderabadian manic by the name of Venkatmurthy scorer of possibly 150 runs during his season with us, and an Aussie madman by the name of Chris Killen, who after letting us fly him to the UK at our expense "buggered off" to the Lancs League for "big bucks". These were the exceptions. In recent seasons we have had excellent servants in Suresh Shetty, Noel David, Kanwaljeet Singh, & Abey Kuruvilla who like Mankad in 1979, was instrumental in gaining 1st Division in the 1995 season.

Since joining the Bradford League we have had some excellent captains. One to spring immediately to mind is Russell Hutchinson who was big hearted albeit small of stature. He skippered our side during the late 70's and it was he who took us to the 1st Division for the first time following promotion in 1979. He once made two separate visits to Batley Hospital for stitching up over each eye in turn during the same match, but was too late arriving back on the second occasion to be able to continue his innings.

"Gentleman" Brian Bolus was probably the most respected of past captains after joining us from Brighouse. He took over the captaincy of the side from Russell Hutchinson following promotion to the top division and he was unfortunately at the helm when relegation came in 1981. He moved to Farsley in 1983 and nurtured what was arguably the best team of young cricketers ever seen in Bradford League cricket, a team that included Kevin Sharp, Ashley Metcalfe, Tim Boon, Richard Thorpe, David Ripley, Chris Gott, & Kevin Tighe.

Bob Clark made us 2nd Division Champions in 1983. In his team was a youngster by the name of Chris Pickles, who after returning to Cleckheaton in 1998 took us once more into the 1st Division as champions. Chris Fisk regained our top division status in 1994.

Since 1976, some fine cricketers have been major influences at the club. We have been lucky to have had several quality wicketkeepers within our ranks. David Legood was with us when we first entered the Bradford League and he stayed 1979 before moving to Hanging Heaton. Dave Hallett joined us in 1980. During that season forced his way into the League Handbook by taking 5 stumpings in one innings.

Greg Hutchinson signed on in 1988 and stayed until 1991 managing to pick up the League's Wicketkeeping Trophy twice whilst with the club. He made a surprise return to 2nd team cricket in 1998, a return which almost gained him a further trophy as he and his team just missed out against Saltaire in the Priestley Shield Final.

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Greg's forte is now playing bowls for our Bowling Section, but he is still signed on and is always more than willing to take his place behind the stumps in an emergency. After all, he is still the best keeper at the Club, or at least that is what he is happy to tell anyone willing to listen. In 1994 Jake Jeffrey was the leading 2nd Division wicketkeeper after capturing the "David Bairstow Golden Gloves Trophy" the previous season.

During the 80's and early 90's we were generally short of top class batsmen but the likes of Trevor Gill, John Tiffany, Simon Horkin, Ian Gatenby, and Martyn & Richard Evans all made consistent contributions. On the bowling front Ian Leng, Ralph Emsley, Andy Baxter, Allan Stansfield, and David Lee saw us safely through the early 1980's and finally to promotion in 1983.

We were joined in 1984 by Kevin Tighe for yet another season back in the 1st Division. He liked us so much he stayed until 1989, coming back in 1992 for a further taste of the same medicine. In 1986 Jamie Robinson joined him and for years were one of the most feared pairs of bowlers in the 2nd Division.

In 1992, we welcomed Martin South to the club and he soon became popular with our supporters. Martin was more than just an aggressive hard-hitter. In fact, he was probably our most consistent batsman during his spell with the club which lasted until 1997. He quickly made his mark by recording three unbeaten centuries in successive matches during 1993. This feat has been matched on only three other occasions since the League was formed, and bettered only once. Simon Lax had completed four successive 100's for Hanging Heaton in 1983.

When Martin left us, it was to return to Bradford & Bingley where he was just as popular as he had always been at Cleckheaton. It was with some dismay that we learned of an unfortunate accident at work that kept him out of cricket for most of the 2001 season. We were very happy to learn that he has made an excellent recovery, and is playing again.

The Junior Section, which was formed shortly before Cleckheaton's entry into Bradford League cricket, has over the years offered the Club just as much value as any of the "imports" that have arrived on a regular basis. We at Cleckheaton have always been justifiably proud of the youngsters who year by year have come through to play a senior role. Our 1st team has in recent seasons included a good majority of players who were still eligible to play as juniors.

Without doubt, over the past few years we are seen our Junior Section become an extremely important part of the Club, and we are proud to have so many talented and enthusiastic "young men" wanting to hone their skills with us. We are currently in the enviable position of having skilled coaches and helpers just as eager as their charges to foster cricketing skills.

We consider Junior Cricket so important that during 2001 we introduced for the first time our own Junior Cricket Academy which was run for two weeks during the summer school holidays. It was so successful, that it has been run ever since with coaches supplied by the YCB. In 2004 the Academy is taking place again with the continued support of Tony Bowry and the Yorkshire Cricket Board. Places will be available to any junior who would like to attend whichever Club they may be involved with. For news of this season's event watch the local press, or log on our web site "[www.cleckheatoncricketclub.com](http://www.cleckheatoncricketclub.com)".

Chris Pickles started as a junior at the club coming through the ranks from Under 13's to 1st team. A photograph in our clubhouse shows Chris holding the trophy after our Under 14's team had become Bradford Junior League "Gordon Bowers" Cup Winners in 1980. Interestingly the photo shows standing side by side on the back row two juniors who were to find success in other fields of sport. Simon Irvine who has played Rugby League for many years notably with Leeds and Keighley stands next to John Bentley who has played both Rugby Union and Rugby League at the highest level. He represented his country in both codes before becoming a member of the successful Lions' team that beat the South Africans in their own backyard.

Apart from Chris Pickles, our junior teams have over the years groomed other fine players. Notable among these have been Craig Rika, James Stansfield, and most recently Andrew Gale who each represented Yorkshire and England at schoolboy level. Andrew went on to play for his country at under 19's. He was called into the Yorkshire Academy at the start of 2001 and has rejoined us for the coming season.

Craig in attempting to forge a career in County Cricket signed on with Northants but unfortunately it didn't quite work out for him. On his return to Yorkshire it was playing Rugby League that now brought him success, being signed on for Halifax before moving to Wakefield. More recently he reverted back to the Union code with Huddersfield before sharing in Cleckheaton Rugby Union Club's success in recent seasons.

Last season, Cleckheaton's Rugby team had another highly successful year after achieving promotions in previous years. Promotion last season would have taken them into National League Division Three North. Although it was a close run thing, only in the last few weeks of the season did their aspirations finally run out of steam. As this programme goes to press, our Rugby neighbours are in the play-offs which could again lead them to National League status.

James Stansfield followed a different route. Attempting to make soccer his future, he served his apprenticeship with Huddersfield Town, and Halifax Town before reverting to non-league football. Currently playing for Park Avenue, he rejoined us last year following a spell with Brighouse, only to break his leg in the penultimate match and miss most of the season as a result.

Two other cricketing juniors found more success with the oval ball than the hard round one. These players, Alex Green and Graeme Hallas both joined the ranks of professional Rugby League. Graeme is still pursuing a career in League, but Alex returned to play Union with Cleckheaton where he has been instrumental in helping them to their recent successes, including beating the Club's pointscore record in the 2000/2001 season.

Our 2nd team has over the past few seasons, twice, in 1996 and 1998, reached the Final of the Priestley Shield. In 1999 they made the Final of the Crowther Cup, and the Semi Final the following year with a side almost entirely consisting of players still playing in our junior teams. The 1998 season will however be best remembered for their match at Moorend on 18th July when against Ben Rhydding they posted the highest total recorded in the history of the Bradford League. Their total of 427 runs beat the record previously held by Bradford & Bingley who scored 408 for 6 in 1990. The record owed much to No 8 batsman Dean Worrall who came to the wicket with the total on 202 for 6 in the 28th over and in the course of the next 20 overs (70 minutes) scored 123 runs. Whilst at the wicket he added 90 runs in partnership with Chris Dobson, and a further 122 with Liam Evans.

Cleckheaton are now playing Bradford Cricket League 1st Division cricket for a sixth successive season. Previous promotions have usually resulted in an inauspicious return to the lower division at the season's end. Things are now much different at the Club. We now have a fervent desire not to play 2nd Division cricket again.

Our current journey began in our 1998 Championship season, a season that will long live in the memory of all those involved with the club. The season started with the belief that we would be League Champions by Mid September. We had a strong team and soon fostered an excellent team spirit. All our players performed well. On the batting front our Skipper Chris Pickles scored 1,423 League and Cup runs, Carl Sharp - 915, and Paul Winrow - 748 with useful contributions from James Stansfield, Andy Yates, Adam Swallow & Alistair Long. Chris was completing 1000 Bradford League runs for the fourth time. We had 4 bowlers in the top half of the League Bowling Averages with Adam Swallow taking the League Trophy for the Best Average. In all matches he captured 73 wickets at an average of 11.59 runs each. James Stansfield finished with a tally of 43 wickets at 17.51 whilst Paul Winrow (40 at 17.03) and Andy Yates (38 at 20.89) made up the foursome.

The 1999 Season, our first back in the 1st Division was a struggle from the very first match and looked like finishing in a mid table position until our form deserted us in the latter half of the season. We did, however, maintain our Division One status, but only just. The point taken from the season's last match against Yorkshire Bank left us equal on points with local rivals Spen Victoria, and only the extra win gained by ourselves pushed our neighbours into the lower division. We struggled to find consistency throughout the team, but our season was not without some outstanding performances both with bat and bowl. The season's highlight was captain Chris Pickles' achievement in recording 1000 Bradford League runs for a record breaking fifth time. Before the season had begun both he and Iqbal Khan had each performed the feat four times.

Kanwaljeet Singh, an experienced Indian off spin bowler, joined us a month into the season, an introduction which in the final analysis made the difference between us staying up and making a quick return to the division which we had so joyously left twelve months earlier. His figures in the final averages didn't look startling, but he managed very effectively to stifle some of the League's very best batsmen. His performance against Baildon when he finished with figures of 19-overs, 13-maidens, 10-runs, 5-wickets was most definitely the highlight of his season, but stints every bit as effective against Spen Victoria, Bradford & Bingley, and Undercliffe twice gained us valuable points on each occasion.

A young man called Andrew Gale hit the bigtime with a bang. Joining us the previous year as a promising young cricketer he was playing regular first team cricket by last season's close. Not only did he progress from the junior ranks to play 2nd and then 1st team cricket but to Yorkshire and from there to the heady heights of England schoolboy cricket where he was certainly not overawed as he marked his elevation with a "ton" on debut.

With Chris Pickles still at the helm we hoped that the 2000 season (our 25th in Bradford League cricket) would be the season in which we finally consolidated ourselves as a 1st Division side. Actually we did better than we could have ever hoped, finishing in 3rd place behind Pudsey Congs and Bradford & Bingley. It was the first time since joining the Bradford League that the Club had managed to gain a third successive season in Division One.

We had been joined at the beginning of the season by Paul Booth from Meltham and Mark Gill from Windhill, and we started the season with what we considered to be the best spin bowler and the best wicketkeeper in the League. Paul captured 64 wickets at an average of 14.14 each, and but for injury mid season, which forced him to miss six games, he would most certainly have taken more wickets than any other league bowler. Mark finished the season with 31 victims, 18 of which were stumpings, and scored 594 runs at an average 28.29. Chris Pickles and Paul Winrow both made major contributions with the bat whilst the latter represented the Bradford League in the Yorkshire Leagues' Knockout Trophy where in the final he won the "man-of-the-match" award with fine performances with both bat and ball.

2001 was a disappointing year after what had been achieved the previous season. We finally finished just one place above a relegation spot although we did have some rewarding performances. On the batting front Mark Gill scored 1035 runs at an average of 45.04, and Paul Winrow totalled 828 at 33.12. South African Derek Brand's contribution was 643 runs (42.87 runs per wicket), and newcomer Chris Siddall managed 494 runs at an average of 32.29. In all four batsmen scored centuries with Paul Winrow's 124 the highest. Paul Booth was again our outstanding bowler capturing 61 wickets at 16.97 runs each, but it was Andy Yates with 40 wickets at 16.73 each who topped the averages.

We certainly missed Chris Pickles who due to other commitments was unable to play more than a handful of matches, and at the end of the season we were all deeply disappointed to learn of his decision to retire from Bradford League Cricket.

Going into the 2002 season, we held hopes of a relatively successful year although on the playing front we had lost three key members of our 2001 squad. Paul Winrow decided to join Huddersfield League Barkisland, the Club where his father is chairman, and Paul Booth rejoined his old club Meltham taking Andy Yates with him. Chris Pickles finally announced his retirement, and it was decided not to re-appoint South African Derek Brand who had left early due to personal reasons at home.

The new players we had appointed seemed to fit the bill. In fact we appeared to have a stronger squad than the previous season. A new captain Steve Titchard had joined us straight from County Cricket where he had spent ten years with Lancashire and two with Derbyshire. He was expected to open the batting with Mark Gill who had decided to stay with us after turning down more lucrative offers from other clubs. Faisal Irfan, a 23 year old 6ft 7ins Pakistan fast bowler had agreed to join us and "old boy". James Stansfield had returned to the fold after a couple of years at Brighouse. Faisal had topped the Pakistan 4-day Bowling Averages the previous season and it was hoped that the pair would form a formidable partnership. Youngsters Chris Brice and Richard Pyrah had joined from the Yorkshire Academy. Chris, a left arm spinner, and Richard, an earlier order batsman and medium pace swing bowler had both gained experience playing for the YCB and Yorks 2nd Eleven teams.

Unfortunately, this optimism was short-lived as circumstances quickly began to decimate our squad. James Stansfield after playing the opening match broke his leg playing for Bradford Park Avenue and was lost to us for most of the season. Chris Siddall started the season magnificently with 238 runs in his first five innings (including 2 centuries) before tearing his groin and bringing his season to a premature end. Fast bowler and hard hitter Adam Swallow had played just two matches before he had to miss a further seven due to a serious knee injury that threatened to keep him out for the remainder of the season. He did, against medical advice, return to play as a batsman only, but he was unable to bowl again until the last month of the season.

With our new skipper Steve Titchard unfortunately unable to discover any significant batting form and with a team patently short of strength in both batting and bowling we reached the half season with just 19 points. With normally around 50 points required to reach safety the very serious danger of relegation loomed.

The second half was certainly better than the first, but until the help of the first slice of good fortune we had enjoyed all season, relegation still seemed inevitable. During late July overtures were made to all clubs by Farsley asking for support in forcing an EGM to vote on a proposal to change the number of clubs being relegated from three to one. They were concerned firstly about their and other club's loss of revenue through the lack of home fixtures, and secondly that there were so many teams in the 2nd Division that they were unable to play each other twice. With our and other team's support the requested EGM took place and by the smallest of margins the rule change was carried. Cleckheaton now only needed to stay clear of the bottom spot to survive which they duly did.

In a season where our resources were severely stretched, the available players led by example, and in the end they were only one win away from clawing out of the bottom three. Mark Gill scored 766 runs at an average of 47.88, Richard Pyrah, who was selected the Bradford League's "Young Player of the Year", totalled 717 runs at 39.83 per innings, and Adam Swallow was only 4 runs short of making the List of Averages, scoring 296 runs at 32.89. Steve Titchard's improving form saw him end the season on 352 runs. Including Cup matches Mark's final tally was 875, Richard's 801, and Steve's 520, in the circumstances all highly creditable performances.

Both Faisal Irfan and Chris Brice fulfilled their promise. In his first season in England Faisal captured 42 wickets at 20.33 runs each. He has been retained for the 2003 season when it is hoped he will perform even better. Chris's contribution was 38 wickets at 19.39.

Unfortunately probably due to our disappointing season we lost more players at the end of the year than we would have liked. Mark Gill left us to go to Undercliffe. Richard Pyrah and Chris Brice both decided to leave us for Woodlands. Adam Swallow after many years of service to the club, joined 2nd Division side Bradford & Bingley, and Steve Titchard having joined the Lancs Academy as a coach was refused permission to play "over the border". In hindsight 2002 was a season to forget . . . . . And so to season 2003 with hope !!

After an exodus of players, (particularly at the end of the 2002 season when we finished in a relegation spot, only to be "reprieved at the last second") we looked in a very vulnerable position for 2003. At the beginning of December 2002 we had no captain and only half a team.

Fortunately, youngsters Adam Patel from Baildon, and Anthony Daniells from Castleford had decided to join us. James Stansfield, out with a broken leg for much of the 2002 season, and Chris Siddall had decided not to "desert the sinking ship". We had agreed terms with Faisal Irfan who had wanted to remain with us for a further season. It still looked a little light, we were still looking for a captain, and at least one more top line batsman. Then everything seemed to gel. Ian Austin, the best decision the Club has made for many years, came on board. His enthusiasm was compelling, completely undaunted at the prospect of leading such an inexperienced side into the Bradford League arena.

Mark Bagley, known to Ian, and a member of the Worcester Academy, currently studying at Leeds University was persuaded to join us, and then just before the season was due to start Andrew Gale was released by the Yorkshire Academy and offered a Yorkshire contract that made it possible for him to play with us again. A team had now been put together which included Warren Stephenson and Liam Evans, both stepping up from last year's second string. With these additions the team still had a squad of only ten players with the 2nd team being asked to provide a player each week on a rota basis.

Our biggest worry as the season neared was whether Irfan would start the season. Because of the Iraqi problem only one British Embassy capable of issuing visas was still open in Pakistan. The national press was pessimistically predicting that it could be 10/12 weeks into the season before the overseas contingent arrived. Perhaps we were lucky, or perhaps it was the bombardment of faxes and phone calls, together with the help of letters from our local MP Mike Wood, but Irfan did arrive just in time to play in the first match.

And so the season began, but without Stansfield (still playing football), and Bagley (with the Leeds/Bradford University side). From match one when we suffered a 10 wicket defeat against the current champions Pudsey Congs the limitations of the senior team, and the ramifications for the 2nd's soon became apparent, and the season-long player shortage in the 2nd team almost spelled out relegation for them at the season's end.

The Congs match apart the season started well with three victories from the first seven games, other matches were curtailed by rain whilst in winning positions, and the match against neighbours Woodlands was washed out. We reached the half-season with five victories against our name and comfortably in the top half of the table, but we had already lost Bagley, recalled to the Worcester Academy. Our problems, however, were about to start, and the second half of the season started badly being unable to win any of our first six games. In fact during this period we had gained just 3 points from a possible 36 available, and suddenly we were only just above a relegation spot. It didn't look as though we were going to win another game, with both Stansfield and Siddall now having being recalled to play football. A week later, change bowler Iftexhar Ahmed started a new job which prevented him from playing any further matches. Our tight squad was suddenly a further three players light.

I don't know who waved the magic wand, or whether somebody up there just liked us, or whether it happened because of inspired captaincy, but suddenly our seriously depleted team couldn't stop winning. With our seconds in serious danger of relegation, we had to seriously look at which players we should pull into the senior side, and with due respect some of those players imported would have struggled to maintain a place in a full strength 2nd team. Their apparent lack of ability certainly didn't show, and without exception every single player we selected made an important contribution in the last month of the season.

Between 16th August and 13th September we won 5 of the 6 matches we played and took 4 points from the remaining fixture. This added to a total of 34 points from a possible 36 whilst the previous 6 matches had been worth just 3 points to us. What a change of fortune. The second team was also winning matches, and with one game still to play they had reached a position of safety. The senior side went into their last game needing to beat Baildon to finish in third spot, but it was a game too far, especially now that Faisal Irfan had had to return to Pakistan. Even though a score of 200+ was posted, the bowling strength was unable to contain the opposition.

In conclusion, given all the circumstances, to finish 5th in a season of such contrasting fortunes with a such a young squad of inexperienced players was magnificent. But most of all a huge debt of gratitude belongs to our skipper Ian Austin. No captain in this year's top division could have done as much operating with such limited resources, and without any complaint. All his players, without exception, were prepared to play for him and give him at least 100% effort.