

Looking back

with Margaret Heward

This week sees the start of a new feature on Cricket and the Community in the Spen Valley. 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, and the first one focuses on Gomersal

Glorious days for Gomersal

THE first sign of cricket in Gomersal village was in 1863.

On August 14, 15 and 16, 22 cricketers of Gomersal and district (including several county players) starred in a match against the United England XI.

The date of the club's formation is uncertain, but the majority of sources indicate that Gomersal St Mary's Cricket Club (as the club was then known) was founded in 1881 by the village vicar, the Rev RF Taylor.

It played its matches near the Wheatsheaf Inn, on a field also used by the local football team – also founded by the sports-mad clergyman.

This church link is significant, and is repeated across other clubs in West Yorkshire and beyond.

In 1886 an entry for Gomersal appeared in the Athletic News Cricket Supplement and Club Directory.

The club was re-formed in 1892 and moved to what became its permanent home – Oxford Road. This had previously been the site of the Little Gomersal Colliery.

Some members remember this as the official birth of the club, as the centenary was celebrated in 1992. Later sources also demonstrate the difficulty the club has had in dating its own formation.

On the eve of the Great War, Gomersal was able to field a women's cricket team.



From 1921 onwards, the club engaged in fundraising in an effort to buy its ground. The club devoted many years to this and finally, in 1929, it had enough money to make this historic purchase.

1921 was an unforgettable year for Gomersal CC. They reached the final of the Heavy Woollen Cup, but lost to Wakefield by six wickets.

In 1927 the club decided to change its name from Gomersal St Mary's Cricket



A BOOK about the Heavy Woollen Cup – one of the most famous cricketing competitions in the world – was launched at Gomersal Cricket Club on Monday. From Bailey to Barnsley is written by historian Mike Butler and is a year-by-year chronicle of the competition.

It is published in association with the Cricket Heritage Project and for information on how to get a copy telephone 01484 472405.

Mike Butler launches his book surrounded by (from left) Lesley Robinson, David Sharp, Peter Davies, Bob Shackleton and Keith Robinson. (090513)



ABOVE: The 1914 women's team at Gomersal. **LEFT:** Famous Gomersal old boy Wilf Barber.

Club to Gomersal Cricket Club. The club had always been financially solvent, so when a decline in profits was encountered due to falling membership, the club was concerned.

Members thought of ways to increase income – one of the suggestions being a bar. The president, however, decided that the best way to move forward was a door-to-door canvass of local households. Young children were also encouraged to play cricket at the club.

The end of the Second World War for Gomersal Cricket Club meant a new tea room. The club bought an ex-army Nissen hut to serve this purpose.

Following the purchase of the tea room, Gomersal continued to develop their ground. In 1962 a bar was opened in the Nissen hut. The club then decided, in 1974, to open a new clubhouse and changing rooms.

After coming so close so many times in the past, finally in 1984 Gomersal became Heavy Woollen Cup winners for the first time.

1982 marked the 100th anniversary of the formation of the club. No doubt this event led to lots of nostalgia – and thoughts about the future.

In 1993 Gomersal celebrated their first-place finish in the Central Yorkshire League but they didn't stop there. In all they claimed three trophies that summer.

After lifting the Central



LEFT: The 1966 2nd XI crowdier cup winners. **INSET:** The programme for the 1930 charity carnival.

Yorkshire League's Premier Division title in 1996, Gomersal had the confidence they needed to make an application to join the Bradford Cricket League in 2000.

After joining the league, they quickly gained promotion to the top division.

Today, Gomersal stands as a modern, progressive club with excellent facilities. It is also a club that is very conscious of its own history and heritage.

Dr Davies and Rob Light have co-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, and copies are available from Dewsbury Books at Crackenedge Lane, Dewsbury.

The books are published by Sigma Press. Call 01484 472405 for more information.