

## **Mirfield CC and the Great War**

The 1914 cricket season opened with Mirfield playing in the Yorkshire Council and no-one knowing what impact the events of 28<sup>th</sup> June when Archduke, Franz Ferdinand was assassinated would have on the World.

The season started with the visit of Dewsbury & Savile on 25<sup>th</sup> May. The *Dewsbury Reporter* commented on the make up of the side which was to be captained by H.Booth: *"It is seen that the side will include Sam Brown the former Hopton Mills player who is now resident at Goole and played with them last season. G.Booth is a Holmfirth player."*

The game was drawn with Dewsbury & Savile scoring 207 for 7 declared. Mirfield's professional , Nathan Fisher taking four wickets. In reply Mirfield scored 116 for 7 with Joe Radcliffe scoring 33.

The following week Mirfield entertained Heckmondwike and were heavily defeated. Heckmondwike scoring 157 and Mirfield being bowled out for only 32. In this game P.Redfearn having a trial, impressed enough by taking 4 for 24 to be signed on.

The 9<sup>th</sup> May saw Mirfield's first victory of the season. Away at Birstall they scored 109 with Fisher scoring 34. W.Gawkrodger was the bowling star taking 5 for 41 as Birstall made 90.

The rest of May saw a heavy defeat by nine wickets at Ossett and a draw at Spen Victoria, a game which saw W.Townend score 52 and Reggie Radcliffe, brother of Joe 24 in Mirfield's 95 for 5.

The busy Holiday programme witnessed three away games at Batley, Dewsbury & Savile and Chickenley.

Reggie Radcliffe scored 30 in Mirfield's 104 at Batley. Batley winning by two wickets. G.Wilson took 7 for 42 to help bowl Dewsbury & Savile out for 133 in a shock win for Mirfield who made 134 for 3 with Reggie Radcliffe 53 and Sam Brown 42. George Wilson was a former, Worcestershire county player and lived in Todmorden.



**George Wilson of Worcestershire**

Tuesday saw defeat again Chickenley making 174 with Nathan Fisher 6 for 36, but Mirfield slumped to 66 all out.

Mirfield played their first game at home since 2<sup>nd</sup> May on 13<sup>th</sup> June against Rastrick. It proved a good omen Mirfield winning by 37 runs. Mirfield made 162 with Sam Brown 39 and P.Redfearn 48 before Fawthrop took 4 for 41 as Rastrick were 125 all out. Fisher, the professional however, broke a finger in this game putting him out of action. His place was taken by Thomas Jones of Golcar.

On 27<sup>th</sup> June Mirfield travelled to Halifax. Booth scored 62 in a total of 167. Halifax despite five wickets from Fawthrop won by three wickets. The following day Franz Ferdinand was killed in Sarajevo.



**Franz Ferdinand and his wife minutes before their death in Sarajevo**

A poor display on 4<sup>th</sup> July at Spen Victoria saw Mirfield out for 64 with Andrew Canby scoring 31 not out. Spen won by four wickets.

The following week at much better batting performance with Joe Radcliffe, Reggie Radcliffe and Redfearn all scoring forties saw Mirfield a mass 207 at Morley. Morley got a draw scoring 163 for 5.

On 18<sup>th</sup> July the Baptist Military Band entertained the crowd at Park Bottom when Cleckheaton were the visitors. Mirfield wining by four wickets. Cleckheaton being out for 88 with Radcliffe taking 6 for 30. Unfortunately, we don not know which brother achieved this!

The *Dewsbury Reporter* tells of the festivities:-

*“the Mirfield Baptist Military Band played selections and dancing was indulged in, ‘side attractions’, in the shooting gallery etc were provided and a jolly time was spent by a large number of people.”*

Nathan Fisher made a welcome return to the team that played at Heckmondwike on 25<sup>th</sup> July. F.Walker made 77 as Mirfield scored 171. On a shivering cold day Heckmondwike secured a draw scoring 113 for 4.

The first round of the Heavy Woollen Cup on 1<sup>st</sup> August saw Mirfield heavily defeat local rivals Hopton Mills by nine wickets. Hodgson took 7 for 20 as Mills made 43.

On Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> August Mirfield travelled to Rastrick and were on the wrong side of a good thrashing. Rastrick scored 211 for 5 and Mirfield 87 with S.Peck scoring 34. The Mirfield side must have felt very down but the whole nation was plunged into War 24 hours later as War was declared as Germany violated Belgium neutrality.

On 8<sup>th</sup> August Mirfield lost in the Heavy Woollen Cup to Churwell by five wickets and the following week lost by nine wickets to Birstall at Park Bottom.

The last three games of the season saw defeats to Batley by 37 runs; Halifax by 144 runs in a game that saw Mirfield make just 26 and Chickenley by seven wickets.

Mirfield had had a poor season finishing 30<sup>th</sup> in the Council just one place above wooden spoonists Bradford. They played 21 games; winning just four.



**Mirfield volunteers at the Black Bull in 1914**

In 1915 it was decided by the Yorkshire Cricket Council that there would be no competitive cricket and that all games played would be friendlies. The County Championship had also been abandoned due to the war.

The ravages of enlistment seem not to have affected the club to a great deal in 1915 however, some games were played with only ten men batting for Mirfield. Also during the season County players were going around helping clubs out. George Herbert Hirst returned to the club for one game and that other great all-rounder Wilfred Rhodes played his only game for the club. Alonso Drake also appeared in one game.

On 1<sup>st</sup> May the *Dewsbury Reporter* previewed the forthcoming game with Chickenley indicating two unlikely players:-

*“The Mirfield team to meet Chickenley at Park Bottom will include Rev C.A Bowden, a well known Leicester County amateur, who is taking charge of the Parish Church during the illness of the vicar and the Rev W.R Legge curate of St Saviours Church , Ravensthorpe.”*

Unfortunately, it appears that the game was never played due to heavy rain and neither appears again during the season.

The first two games of the season under the captaincy of A.Sheard saw defeats against Ossett and Batley. On 7<sup>th</sup> May at Ossett Mirfield were bowled out for 103 with Joe Radcliffe top scoring with 32. In reply Ossett made 107 for 6. On 22<sup>nd</sup> May at Batley; Batley made 98 with Mirfield scoring 77 in reply.

However, on 29<sup>th</sup> May the *Dewsbury District News* reported that help was on its way for the game against Dewsbury & Savile:-

*“Mirfield will have the help of that famous county cricketer Geo H Hirst. On June 25<sup>th</sup> at Ossett W. Rhodes another county player will assist the team and on July 31<sup>st</sup> against Morley, Alonso Drake will play.”*

But, as luck would have it rain prevented any play and Hirst was prevented from playing his first game for the club since a professional in 1891.

The 5<sup>th</sup> June saw Mirfield's first win of the season with an eight wicket victory over Birstall at Park Bottom. Birstall were bowled out for 85 with A. Holsinger taking six wickets and C.Fawthrop 4 wickets. In reply Joe Radcliffe again led the way with 51 not out as Mirfield scored 86 for 2.

The following week saw a heavy defeat at the hands of Cleckheaton. The hosts making 232 for 4 and Mirfield with only ten men batting scoring only 75.

On 26<sup>th</sup> June Mirfield entertained Ossett and drew in a rain affected game. More importantly, the game saw the one and only appearance of the great Wilfred Rhodes for the club. Again Joe Radcliffe scored fifty and Rhodes 28 as Mirfield scored 129. Ossett were 56 for 3 at stumps. Rhodes took one wicket bowling Megson for 8.

The *Dewsbury Reporter* commented:-

*“Owing to rain Mirfield and Ossett were unable to arrive at a definite conclusion at Park Bottom on Saturday. The home team's 128 included a half century by J.Radcliffe and Wilfred Rhodes, the county cricketer, made 28. Horsnell, of Ossett got the last five wickets especially cheap and in all booked seven victims.”*

On 3<sup>rd</sup> July A.Auty scored 49 in a total of 122 in a drawn game at Chickenley. Chickenley scored 104 for 5.

In the return game with Cleckheaton on 10<sup>th</sup> July, Mirfield again were heavily defeated. Cleckheaton making 161 for 4 and the ten men of Mirfield being bowled out for 59.

On 24<sup>th</sup> July, twenty four years after his last game as a Mirfield player George Herbert Hirst played again for the club. This time it was on the Park Bottom ground. He took five wickets for 12 runs and held a catch as Batley were bowled out for 32. P.Bates also took 5 for 15. Mirfield scored 33 for 1 with Hirst 22 not out.

The *Dewsbury Reporter*:-

*“The ground was on the soft side, and large scores were not expected. They certainly did not materialise for Batley. Wood (14) was the only visitor to reach double figures. Mirfield won by nine wickets. G.H Hirst took five wickets for 12 runs and P.Bates five for 15.”*

The following week the third Yorkshire County player helped Mirfield out. On 31<sup>st</sup> July, Alonzo Drake who the previous year had become the first Yorkshire player to take all ten wickets in an innings when he took 10 for 35 against Somerset at Weston-super-Mare played at Park Bottom against Morley.

Drake scored 41 and J.E Radcliffe 23 as Mirfield made 107 and then took six wickets for 25 as Morley were dismissed for 66.

The *Dewsbury Reporter*:-

*“Alonzo Drake played a double part with success on Saturday, for he was top scorer (41) and best bowler (six wickets for 25) for Mirfield. C.Fawthrop took two wickets in two overs for eight runs and Bates’ one victim cost 30.”*

The Heavy Woollen Cup was played and Mirfield were defeated by Birstall by 12 runs. Birstall made 98 and Mirfield were 86 all out in reply.

The following week 28<sup>th</sup> August Mirfield beat Birstall in a friendly match. Mirfield scored 109 with A.Auty 31. Birstall were bowled out for 61.

The 1915 season finished with war still raging. 1916 was to see the collapse of the playing strength of the club.

On 6<sup>th</sup> May the *Dewsbury District News* reported:-

*“The war has not yet affected Mirfield Cricket Club, but it is probable that several prominent players will soon be called up and at present it is not known who will fill their places.”*

The team to play away at Batley that day as shown in the paper was;- A.Sheard (captain), A.Auty, E.Sykes, W.Holt, J.Steeles, N.Sheard, J.Minar, F.Garnett, H.Singleton, P.Bates, C.Fawthrop, A.Holsinger and F.Sutcliffe.

There is no report of this game and it is unknown whether it was played. The following two Saturdays it was reported that Mirfield had no game.

The *Dewsbury Reporter* dated 27<sup>th</sup> May reports the effect that the war had played in folding the club:-

*“In consequence of enlistments, Mirfield cricket officials have been reluctantly compelled to cancel their 11 fixtures, and in consequence the summer game will not be played at Park Bottom this season. South Kirkby should have visited the ground today, but a Mirfield team could not be raised as several players have been called up during the last fortnight. The bowling and tennis sections will be run as formerly.”*

A.Holsinger was soon signed up as a professional for Batley. How many of the players were called up is unclear and on the Mirfield Roll of Honour of the dead only one name appears that could be one of the players. That of Ellis Sykes, whether this is the E.Sykes selected on 6<sup>th</sup> May it is at present not certain. Also an Albert Auty, son of Sam and Rachel of Mirfield appears on the St.Keverne, Cornwall Roll of Honour again it is uncertain whether this is the A.Auty of the club.

A month or so later the *Dewsbury Reporter* reported on a meeting which saw the folding up of the cricket club's assets:-

*“A meeting of the members of Mirfield Cricket and Athletic Club Ltd (in voluntary liquidation) was held on Tuesday. Mr J.T Steeles presiding. The liquidators Messers. Spencer Newsome and C.J Williams showed how the winding up of the company had been conducted and its property disposed of. After all debts had been paid there was a balance of £10 19s 3d but the liquidation expenses reduced that to £1 1s 7d. The small surplus was given to the liquidators with expressions of thanks for their services. The new club, the Mirfield Cricket Field Bowling Club is enrolling many members.”*

The bowling part of the club appears to have continued and it would not be until 1952 that Mirfield Cricket Club would rise from the ashes.