

In the fifth of his features on Cricket and the Community in the Spen Valley Dr Peter Davies looks at the history of Spen Victoria



ABOVE: The 1957 team photo from Spen Victoria.
LEFT: Celebrating the club's 1990 double win in the Bradford League Priestley Cup and Yorkshire Cup are captain S Adam, Mr C Stead, president, and captain W Dawson.
BELOW: The score box at the Spen Lane ground.

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ALTHOUGH 1862 is often cited as a 'birth date', the club was formally established in 1865, by six men: George Wright, George Hardwick, Sam Haley, Alfred Starkey, James Strafford and Robert Corry. Valuable assistance was received from James Woodcock of Marsh Rolling Mills.

These founding fathers were associated with Clockheaton Wesleyan Sunday school. All members of that first inaugural team had to attend chapel regularly to play and this meant they often struggled to find a full side. One of the club's earliest fixtures was against Hunsworth Mills, now known as Clockheaton.

In 1895 the club moved from Whitcliffe Road - its first home - to Spen Lane, where it has resided ever since. It also became known as Clockheaton - later, Spen - Victoria (rather than Clockheaton Wesleyans). The field at Spen Lane was sub-let to the club for 1/- per week by Charles Mortimer. Soon after, a set of rules were drawn up.

It was in fact very fashionable for cricket clubs to name themselves after the monarch of the time. See also Iltrastall Victoria, Copley Victoria, Greetland Victoria, Ripponden Victoria, Sowby Bridge Victoria, and many, many

Reign of Victoria

others! By 1867 the club had 17 members, and in 1872 it hired its first professional, Mr B. Doughty.

There were several important events at HQ during the latter years of the nineteenth century:

- 1868 - 3,000 square yards of turf were added to the playing area.
- 1890 - £120 was spent on erecting the first cricket pavilion.

- 1895 - ground improvement plans were given the green light by the committee. The bowling green was opened in 1894, hence the formal emergence of Spen Victoria Cricket and Bowling Club. In this part of West Yorkshire and beyond it has been quite common for sports to 'amalgamate' within the same club organisation, with Spen Victoria a prime example. In 1887 Spen scored 472 in a 2nd Round Heavy Woollen Cup match against Dewsbury Clerks. This remains the

second highest ever score in the competition.

In the final they lost to Dewsbury and Savile by a record runs margin: 271. The 1895 final which Spen lost to Batley by 12 runs remains the lowest aggregate score (100) for two completed innings in a final. Spen finally won the trophy in 1896. The Spen Lane ground was purchased in 1902 and the club decided to build the existing pavilion and clubroom. It was officially opened in 1909.

DISTINGUISHED

The Spen Victoria CC ladies' committee was established in 1911, three years prior to the outbreak of the Great War. Over the following decades, the committee distinguished itself through its commitment to fundraising and the serving of matchday refreshments in the tea room (built originally at a cost of £500).

Bank Holiday Monday

August 1914 was the date of the first-ever opening stand between legendary Yorkshire cricketers Percy Holmes and Herbert Sutcliffe.

It was achieved for Spen Victoria in a Yorkshire Council game at Spen Lane against Keighley. Spen had bowled Keighley out for 105. Holmes and Sutcliffe then knocked off the target together. In 1931 Spen

joined the Bradford League



and they finished runners-up in their first season. AC Rhodes topped the league batting charts with an average of 46.88.

The club's early years in the Bradford League were relatively successful. They were runners-up in 1933 when Yorkshire and England batsman Wilf Barber was a key member of the side.

The club recorded its first Priestley Cup triumph when Harold Mortimer led them to a 23-run victory over Lightcliffe in 1936.

Spen were relegated to Section 'B' in 1942, despite the heroics of Clifford Sykes. Interestingly, this event was a prelude to an amazing renaissance in the club's fortunes.

The Spen attack was led by Derbyshire and England bowler George Pope and Yorkshire spin merchant Arthur Booth.

Back in the top division, Spen enjoyed their best ever season in 1944. In the midst of world war, they bagged the Division 'A' and Priestley Cup double.

Spen were celebrating in 1968 with promotion to the top division of the Bradford League. But they succumbed in the semi-final of the Priestley Cup.

But Spen beat Paisley St Lawrence in 1990 to lift the prestigious Priestley Cup trophy.

Three members of the Solly Adam-skipped team went on to play first-class cricket: John Wood (Durham and Lancashire), Tim Walton

(Northants and Essex) and Mike Smith (Gloucester and England).

In recent years club stalwart Harry Hoyle and a group of volunteers have tidied up the Spen Lane premises on a daily basis. Maybe that's why the ground always looks so attractive...

Spen won two Heavy Woollen Cups in 1996 and 1998 and gained a promotion in 2000. In 2004 they were involved in a long-running saga with an Indian professional (Rao Anjum), an elusive travel visa and the British High Commission.

At the time, club spokesman Alan Birkinshaw said: 'A series of circumstances have conspired against us and we must now move on. In the fullness of time we will reflect on the whole episode and look at our policy with regard to the signing of overseas players.'

Spen Lane hosted the 2004 Crowther Cup final. And the marquees were out in force. Today the club has a thriving junior section, a wonderful website, and Spen Lane always looks a picture.

● Dr Davies and Rob Light have co-written three books about the history of local cricket and the series is called *100 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 Cruckensedge Lane, Dewsbury.

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

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A 1932 cricket cartoon.

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