

AROUND THE WICKET

with historian
Peter Davies

NORTONTHORPE CRICKET CLUB: the ninth in a fascinating series of cricket histories

Land bequest and glory days of Sixties

THE earliest reference to cricket in Nortonthorpe comes in the Elmley (Emley) CC fixture card for 1877.

Two fixtures were arranged between Elmley (Emley) and Nortonthorpe, the first scheduled for 5 May and the second for 15 September.

By 1906 the club had joined the Dearne Valley League.

For the first few decades of its existence it played close to the River Dearne, just off Wakefield Road in Scissett.

In 1920 the local league system was undergoing some major reorganisation. A number of clubs, including Nortonthorpe, were set to form a Holme and Dearne Valley League. But at the last minute they were asked to join the ailing Huddersfield Central League.

Two decades later, in 1940, as war raged across Europe, the club scooped its first piece of silverware - the 1st XI winning the Huddersfield Central League championship.

As was customary at the time, a 'Champions v Rest' match took place after the League programme had ended.

In 1952 the club moved to Springfield Avenue.

This switch coincided with the death of George H Norton, the famous industrialist who owned the famous Nortonthorpe textile mill complex, and it was he who left the land to the cricket club.

Actually, he left the land 'in trust' to Nortonthorpe Sports Club, a charity (with four named trustees) set up to manage Norton's former land.

The club inherited seven and a half acres - and the deeds (dated 31 December 1952) say that it must always be used for sport, nothing else.

Norton was part of an important family that hailed from Cattlehurst and after whom the village of Nortonthorpe was named. The patriarch was Benjamin, a small-time clothier; he was a weaver himself, and also put weaving work out to others.

Following their move to Springfield Avenue, the club had to engage in some necessary excavation work, and also had to level the playing surface so it was suitable for local league cricket.

Today, Norton and his generosity are remembered fondly.

Club secretary Roger Littlewood comments: "The heritage of the club is interesting and important.

"My father was actually a manager at Norton's mill, so I'm very aware of the link between the mill and the cricket club. Norton was Nortonthorpe, and our club is deeply indebted to him.

"We're very proud of our connection with him; if it wasn't for him we would not have the lovely ground we now have."

The 1960s began well for Nortonthorpe and after the 2nd XI had scooped the Tinker Cup in 1960, the 1st XI enjoyed similar success in their knockout competition, bagging the Allsop Cup the following year.

If the early 1960s were the 'glory years' of Nortonthorpe Cricket Club, then 1963 marked the pinnacle of that era.

In that year not only did the 1st XI land the league and cup double, but the 2nd XI also carried off the Tinker Cup.

After another championship success in 1964, Nortonthorpe's dominance of the Huddersfield Central League peaked again in 1965.

The 1st XI repeated the feat of 1963 by claiming a league and cup double for the second time in three years.

In 1999 a chronic lack of players caused the club to put out an SOS call to the local community.

Club spokesman Roger Littlewood explains: "We've had our moments, but since the 1970s we've struggled slightly.

"Once upon a time we had the best facilities in the area, but time has moved on. It all came to a head



Nortonthorpe's championship side, 1950. From back left: C Blackburn, E Monkman, J Wilkinson, J Greaves, J Battye, A Shaw, D Tipler, R Bentley, D Blackburn; F Exley, K Bowers,



Crisis club issues SOS

TRYING TIMES: A club in crisis (above) in 1999 and worrying headlines. Below: Harry Blackburn in batting action in 1987



NORTONTHORPE MEMORIES: the champion-winning outfit from 1950 and below: a line-up from 1963.

in the 1990s when we were on the verge of folding.

"There was a time when we regularly had to field six- or seven-man teams. Eventually we sorted ourselves out, and we were greatly indebted to a group of young Pakistani cricketers for getting us moving again.

"We would like more youngsters, but I'm sure every club would say that."

Nortonthorpe's local-derby games used to be against Clayton West and Emley, but since these clubs moved leagues it is Denby Dale who are now the main local rivals.

● Readers are asked to contact Peter Davies on 01484 472405 or via p.j.davies@hud.ac.uk if they have any more photos or information relating to local cricket history.



NORTONTHORPE C.C. 1963

STANDING: E. Monkman, N. Mosley, R. England, B. Glover, Dennis Bentley, M. Taylor, J. Bettye
SEATED: F. Exley, S. Holden, R. Hardy (Capt.), K. Armitage, T. Kitson