

SHEPLEY CC

Shepley Cricket Club was formed at a meeting in the Black Bull Inn on 21 July 1871. This makes it the oldest sporting organisation in the village.

We are told that Mr Kaye Armitage - a local mill owner - 'played a prominent and active part in the club's formation'.

It was eventually resolved that: 'We have a Cricket Club to be called "The Shepley Cricket Club" and that we have the Laithe Croft of Mr Senior's subject to conditions named and the rent to be £5, a year paid in advance.'

Shepley's first HQ was on Lane Head Road, adjacent to where Cliffe House was built.

In its early days, the club also played at Stag Fields (167-169 Abbey Road) - which hosted soccer and rugby matches too.

Shepley employed their first professional player in 1874. A cricketer by the name of R. Crooks received 35/- per week for his services.

Throughout the 1880s, the club took part in friendly matches.

This early period also witnessed 'workshop cricket' - where local firms would challenge each other on the cricket field (20 overs a side, two overs per player except for the stumper, and the convention was that the losing team bought the winners a pie-and-pea supper).

We are also told that Shepley had a women's XI in this period.

In 1888 Shepley Cricket Club received a notice to leave their first ground.

This forced the club to fold – temporarily at least. Happily, it re-formed fairly swiftly and played for two or three seasons on land adjacent to the old Stag Inn.

In and around 1891, the club moved to its present site – Marsh Lane. This ground was loaned to the club by the local brewery.

Shepley were late starters so far as league competition was concerned. The club did not take part in the rush to join the first wave of leagues that were formed in the early-1890s.

However, one Shepley side did have an early taste of competitive cricket. Shepley Methodists New Connexion C.C. were playing in the Huddersfield & District Junior Cricket Alliance in 1894.

By 1900 the club had succumbed to the competitive urge and entered a team in the Dearne Valley League.

That year saw the club win the Dearne Valley League 'A Group' Championship.

In 1901 the club moved to play in the Huddersfield Combination League.

1901 also saw a first cup final appearance. Lepton were the opponents in a low-scoring Combination Cup decider.

After being dismissed for 80, the Shepley attack tore into the Highlanders' batting, leaving them 30 for 7.

At this point, news was sent back to the village along the lines that victory was almost assured, which prompted the Shepley Brass Band to set off to meet the victorious team on its way home!

But, as the bandsmen reached Stone Wood Bottom, news that Lepton had rallied to win by 1 wicket reached them - and they hastily returned home!

By 1906 Shepley were back in the Dearne Valley League.

They won the title in 1912 and then in 1913 they scooped the Combination Cup – and also finished second in the championship.

In 1925 Shepley emerged as champions of the Huddersfield Central League and reached the final of the Tinker Cup.

Shepley replaced Friarmere when they joined the Huddersfield & District League in 1933, and in 1951 a local cricket writer observed: 'During recent years [club] members have put a deal of hard work and endeavour into the ground, which may be regarded as a credit to the League.'

Shepley went through a lean period during the 1940s and 1950s, having to apply for re-election to the league.

The leading figure during these dark times was Leonard Battye, whose enthusiasm was vital in keeping Shepley alive. He introduced, and ran, both the ground improvement scheme and the forecast draw which placed the club on a sound financial footing.

In 1961 electricity was installed in the pavilion and at the same time work also began on new toilet facilities.

The effect seemed to be immediate, as in 1962 the club scooped the F.E. Greenwood ground improvement trophy.

In 1966 Shepley won the Hinchcliffe Cup as champions of Section 'B', and also bagged the Schweppes Cup, based on the 2nd XI's performance during the last six matches of the summer.

A contract was signed for the purchase of the Marsh Lane field freehold in 1967. Two years later, in 1969, the title deeds of the ground were formally handed over by league president Alec Lodge.

Shepley celebrated their Centenary in 1971 – and also opened their new tea room.

After an amazing run, Shepley were defeated by Broad Oak in the final of the 1978 Sykes Cup.

In 1981 South African Neil Jurgensen became the first batsman for seven years to score over 1,000 runs in a season. Shepley also entered the prestigious Heavy Woollen Cup competition for the first time.

In 1988 Indian superstar Sunil Gavaskar brought an International XI to Shepley to play against a Huddersfield League XI in a Benefit Match.

Today, Marsh Lane is one of the most attractive venues on the local cricket circuit.