

BATLEY is the next club in our special summer feature on cricket and the community in Batley. The series of articles

has been written by DR PETER DAVIES, project leader of the Cricketing Heritage of Calderdale and Kirkstall.



IT WAS in the 1860s, we are told, that cricket was first played in Batley. The probability is that, in some form, cricket reared its head much earlier.

One key date in the emergence of cricket in Batley was 1862, when an All England XI visited Batley and beat the home side by 63 runs.

This sporting spectacle would have increased interest in the embryonic game. It is no coincidence that a year later, Batley Cricket Club was founded as successor to Prince of Wales CC.

By 1880 the club had set up home at Mount Pleasant, and been joined by other local sportsmen, including rugby players who had set up Batley RFC - later to become known as The Gallant Youths.

When in May 1876 the United South of England XI played against 20 of Batley and District, the visitors included the great W G Grace.

The match was played in front of around 4,000 to 5,000 people. Grace scored 4 and 40 as the local 20 won by 11 wickets.

Two years after the United South of England visit, Batley took on the Australian tourists.

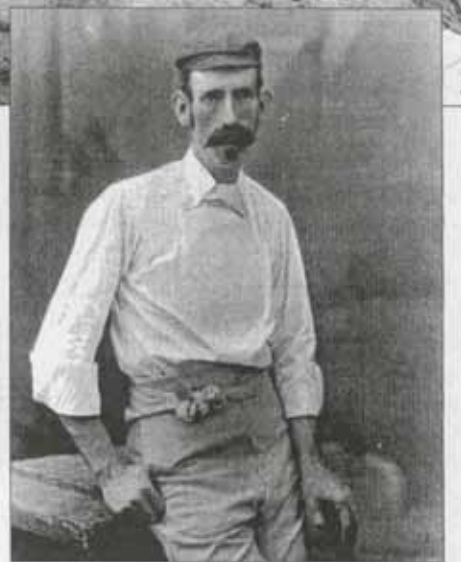
The Australian side was formidable, and included the demon fast bowler Fred Spofforth.



● Top: An aerial view of Batley Cricket Club and Mount Pleasant. (NS)

● Above: The Batley Cricket Club team from 1894. (NS)

● Right: Louis Hall, a dour opening batsman known locally as 'The Batley Giant'. (NS)



The day Batley C C took on the Aussies

FIRST CLASS

On September 17, 1863, Mount Pleasant hosted its first and last first-class fixture, between T Emmett's XI v R G Barlow's XI.

In the early years of the Heavy Woollen Cup, Batley's record was only bettered by that of its great rival Dewsbury and Saville. It contested 10 finals before 1914, winning five of them.

Historically, Batley have always been one of the most colourful and controversial clubs in the competition - for example, pelting the supporters of the victorious Birstall side with grass sods in 1892.

Batley have also been one of the most important clubs in the history of the cup, competing almost every year and they are the fourth most successful club in the history of the competition.

On 12 occasions the trophy has gone to Mount Pleasant but only three of those were since the end of the Second World War.

The cup final has been staged at Mount Pleasant 13 times, a total only exceeded by Saville Town and Heckmondwike.

In the 1880s organised competition - in the shape of local leagues and cups - was still some years away. What therefore

existed was an informal network of inter-town friendly fixtures and challenge matches.

During this era the club's most famous personality was Louis Hall, a dour opening batsman and known locally as 'The Batley Giant'.

In the first half of the twentieth century, Batley won their fair share of Heavy Woollen Cups - triumphing in 1900, 1905, 1911, 1919, 1922, 1930 and 1943.

Under the captaincy of P Shaw, Batley stormed to the Central Yorkshire League 2nd XI First Division title in 1946. They also won the championship the

following year, 1947, with F Hirst as skipper.

During the post-war decades, Batley claimed their fair share of Central Yorkshire League silverware.

SAME YEAR

In 1967 Batley won the Central Yorkshire League First Division under the captaincy of Solly Adam. In the same year they also scooped the Wheatley Cup 2nd XI cup competition.

1969 was also an epic year for Batley CC. They won the Central Yorkshire League First Divi-

sion, the Jack Hampshire Memorial Trophy 1st XI Cup, the Yorkshire Council play-offs, the Heavy Woollen Cup and the Crowther Cup (2nd XI).

In the late-1990s social change impacted upon Batley Cricket Club.

The Asian community in Batley and Mount Pleasant area rallied round to save the club and supply it with players as others left to play elsewhere.

The old pavilion was redeveloped thanks to the hard work of volunteers from the club.

It now incorporates changing rooms, a tea room area and

scoreboard. Adorning the outside walls are adverts for a variety of local companies and sponsors.

There is also a seating area in front of the building where batters waiting to go out to the middle can bite their nails in peace and quiet.

Over the years, the cricket club has put on an array of social events to help with fundraising: discos, race nights and prize draws.

Today, Batley CC stands as one of the most famous clubs in the area and boasts a distinguished history and heritage.

● Dr Davies and Rob Light have 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. Copies are available from Dewsbury Books at Crackenedge Lane, Dewsbury. The books are published by Sigma Press. Call 01484 472405 for more information.