

Cricket in the Colne Valley



The rich heritage of the Colne Valley extends to sport, leisure and recreation. And to cricket in particular. Today the area boasts seven established clubs: Marsden, Slaithwaite, Linthwaite, Broad Oak, Golcar, Leymoor and Paddock. And in yesteryear there was a dedicated Colne Valley Cricket League and a plethora of local teams including Golcar Church Institute, Linthwaite Hall, Milnsbridge Baptists, Paddock Institute and Westwood United - all now sadly defunct.



Pictured:

Top:
Linthwaite 1929 Team photo

Right: Aerial view of
Slaithwaite Cricket Ground

Below: Line drawing of
Marsden Pavillion (1937)

Meanwhile, the early history of Broad Oak was linked to Christ Church and the Vicar of Linthwaite, while it is more than likely that the Slaithwaite club was linked to the village church, St. James's, in the late nineteenth century. And it is probable that the local mechanics institute was instrumental in the formation of Marsden CC in the late nineteenth century.

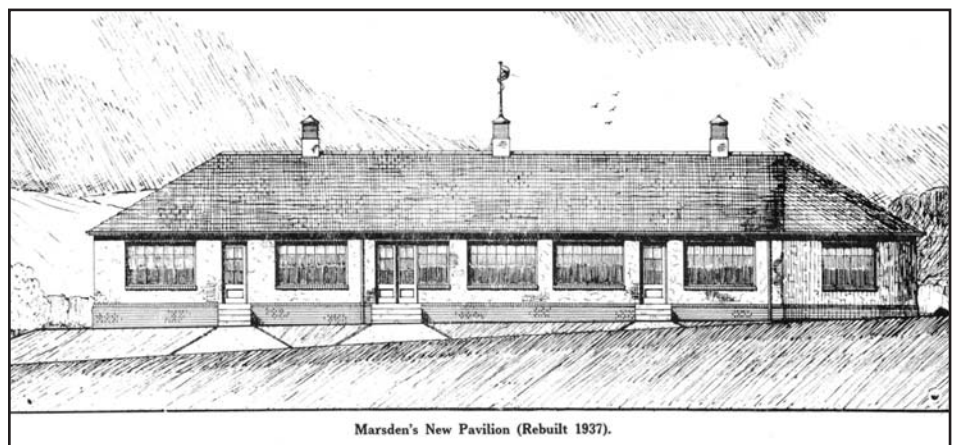
In geographical terms, the valley is situated in an area that is famous for its grassroots cricket culture. The Huddersfield League is one of the oldest in the country, never mind Yorkshire, and its clubs have produced some of the finest cricketers in the history of the sport.

But cricket is not just a game. It is part of the social fabric and many communities have come to define themselves in terms of the sport. So what is special and distinct about the Colne Valley's cricketing heritage?

First, the origins and early years of valley clubs are fascinating and tell us much about the way that sport and local society intersected. Churches played a major role in the formation of Paddock CC, Golcar CC, Broad Oak CC and

Slaithwaite CC. Paddock Cricket & Bowling Club was formed by a group of young men from Paddock Methodist Church in 1872 and Golcar were originally known as St. John's, Golcar CC when they were established in 1871.

At Marsden and Slaithwaite we also encounter important and generous benefactors. It was John Edward Crowther, an influential local mill-owner, who in 1921 gifted the people of Marsden with a multi-sport arena: Hemplow.



Marsden's New Pavilion (Rebuilt 1937).



The Walkers Arms at Leymoor

Alongside a cricket ground there was a golf course, bowling green and set of tennis courts. And it was the Earl of Dartmouth, landlord and patron, who assisted Slaithwaite in their switch to Hill Top in 1881. It is said that, out of pure goodwill, he demanded only a nominal rent from the infant cricket club.

And today at Leymoor we see the relationship between cricket and public houses in full swing. The Walkers Arms is sited on the boundary at Parkwood Road. Club spokesman Graham Parr explains: 'Our ground is linked to the pub because the brewery - Punch Taverns, and before that Bass North - own the cricket field. We have a great relationship with the current landlords, who help us tremendously. Recent summers have been so good, weather-wise, that on some Sundays the playing area has virtually been ringed by sunbathers - folk who had popped into the pub and who

ended up at the cricket. The pub also has an Evening League side, which plays its home games at the ground.'

The cricket grounds of the Colne Valley are a window on the world. Hemplow (Marsden), Hill Top (Slaithwaite), Hoyle House (Linthwaite), Gillroyd Lane (Broad Oak), Swallow Lane (Golcar), Parkwood Road (Leymoor), and West View (Paddock). These are famous and evocative names in the history of local cricket. And they stand as testament to the toil and vision of club members and groundsmen who invested the necessary time and energy into making the sites fit for local league cricket. In 1951 one local writer assessed the history of Paddock's ground at West View: 'One would doubt if ever a club ground was made under more heart-breaking and back-breaking circumstances...(It) had to be made and thousands of tons of tipping had to be used. Night after night, month in and

year out, the early enthusiasts toiled with barrow and spade, and fruits of their labour can still be seen.'

Local cricket club officials are also renowned for their craftiness. In 1904 the premises at Broad Oak were extended. The club's centenary brochure says: 'It was also at that time that the canny Broad Oakers hit on a way of keeping the outfield closely cropped. Sheep were bought to graze on the field and the club got an extra cut by shearing the sheep and selling the wool.' So full marks for thriftiness!

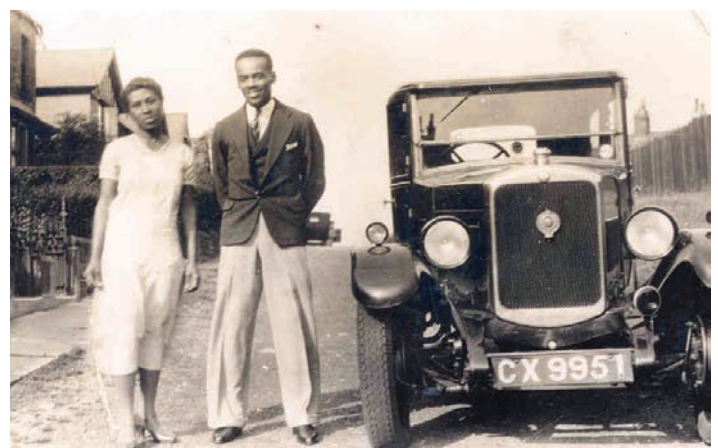
While Marsden, Slaithwaite and Broad Oak play high up in the clouds, Linthwaite, Golcar, Leymoor and Paddock play down in the valley bottom. Each ground has its breathtaking vistas. At Golcar you have a wonderful vantage point from which to peruse the rows and rows of weavers' cottages that make the village so famous. And at Slaithwaite you can view mile upon mile of stunning Pennine moorland. Furthermore, from Hemplow, Marsden, and West View, Paddock, it is possible to trace the contours of the whole valley from its western and eastern tips.

Cricket is also entwined with local identity. Two Colne Valley villages boast a pair of clubs each (Linthwaite: Linthwaite CC and Broad Oak CC, and Golcar: Golcar CC and Leymoor CC) and there are myriad local rivalries for the local cricket fan to be aware of. These are not just intra-village but inter-village too: Golcar v Slaithwaite and Paddock v Broad Oak, for instance, are fixtures which conjure up age-old rivalries and are certainly not for the faint-hearted.

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Edwin St. Hill (1934)



Hemphow, Marsden Cricket Ground in Winter

A cuckoo is emblazoned on the Marsden club cap and all official literature emanating from Slaithwaite CC features a 'moon-and-star' logo - demonstrating that both organisations feel a strong civic affiliation. Likewise, the 'Golcar lily' is much in evidence at Swallow Lane, and over the years loyal supporters have yelled 'Come on the Lilies!' from the boundary edge. And as if to emphasise the centrality of the club to the local community, in 1905 the annual Golcar Sing was staged on the hallowed turf of the cricket ground.

Furthermore, cricket is inseparable from the valley's industrial heritage. West View, Paddock, is situated directly adjacent to a steep railway embankment. Directly below is part of the Leeds-Manchester train line that wends its way into and out of Huddersfield train station. Across many decades, large sixes have been hit onto the line - and in the years before the onset of child protection legislation local kids were known to crawl down the embankment in search of missing balls!

Down the line, trans-Pennine trains can also be spotted in mid-distance from the Hill Top ground at Slaithwaite, and Hoyle House, Linthwaite. In fact, at Linthwaite, visitors see something else that is quite unique: a factory wall (belonging to pharmaceutical company Thornton & Ross) that doubles as a boundary fence!

The history of cricket in the Colne Valley is dominated by people - not just players but groundsmen, scorers, committee members, fundraisers, supporters and spectators.

Players fall into two categories: home-grown and imported.

Among the many excellent amateur cricketers to play at Colne Valley clubs are John Cooper (Golcar), George Dawson (Slaithwaite), Joe Jebson (Linthwaite), Wright Jessop (Paddock), J. W. Lumb (Leymoor), David Nosworthy (Marsden), and Jack Washington (Broad Oak).

Some have even gone on to play international cricket for England. These include Chris Balderstone and Willie Watson, who both made their name at Paddock before going on to play county and then Test cricket. Both men also combined cricket with football. Both started at Huddersfield Town before moving on (Balderstone to Carlisle and Watson to Sunderland).

Colne Valley clubs have also hired their fair share of big-name professionals from around the world, including Basil D'Oliveira (Marsden), Sonny Ramadhin (Golcar) and Gary Sobers (Paddock).

But probably the most significant was the West Indian Edwin St. Hill. He signed for Slaithwaite in 1934 and in so doing became the first black player to star in the Huddersfield League. During his career he played in two Test matches and was employed as a professional by various league clubs in Lancashire and Yorkshire.

We should also highlight the role women have played in the development of local cricket. In the early years they took on very traditional roles: as tea ladies, spectators and supporters.

They performed vital jobs, especially in the catering department, but their contribution was barely recognised.

But in the last few decades women have become more 'visible'. They have formed ladies committees, involved themselves in massive fundraising efforts, and taken their place on club committees as treasurers, secretaries and chairs.

And today there is still a strong female influence on Colne Valley cricket. Hardworking club women include Kathleen Dudley and Angela Metcalfe (Broad Oak), Claire Woodhead-Turner (Golcar), Doris Brook (Leymoor), Hilary Holmes (Linthwaite), and Deborah Payne and Jenny Sykes (Slaithwaite).

So, cricket has left an indelible mark on the valley. It has provided local people with a pastime and a passion, a means of demonstrating their identity and their commitment to village life.



Willie Watson