

Lascelles Hall Cricket Club

Lascelles Hall is the oldest surviving cricket club in the geographical area now covered by Kirklees.

It is also one of the most famous village clubs in the country.

Its fame rests on an amazing period of sporting and social history in the early nineteenth century.

The young men in this small community of handloom weavers were keen on the game and in 1825 trespassed onto a field belonging to the village mansion, then occupied by the wealthy Joseph Walker.

They expected a ticking off but Mrs Walker said: "Those young men seem fond of cricket. Let them have a playground." So the true founder of the club was the kind-hearted wife of the local squire.

Because the weaver-cricketers of Lascelles Hall had not been sucked into the factory system, they set their own hours of work and could spend the daytime practising cricket.

Then it would be back to the looms to work through the night by candlelight.

The most famous of all Victorian cricketers, W.G. Grace, was an admirer of the county and international stars produced by the Lascelles Hall 'nursery'.

For example, he called Allen Hill "one of our best fast round-arm bowlers", and Ephraim Lockwood "one of the best all-round players of his time."

In this early period the club entertained many glamorous touring sides, including the All-England XI in 1867.

'The Hall' had a particular rivalry with Sheffield, another cradle of Yorkshire cricket in the mid-nineteenth century.

In September 1870 they played Sheffield in a £50-a-side challenge match, winning by five wickets and therefore scooping £100 – big money at the time.

The victory caused such jubilation that a local writer penned a verse: "Oh, the Sheffielders, they were the chaps to play at bat and ball, But they could not beat the eleven lads that came from Lascelles Hall."

In 1874 Yorkshire played Glamorgan with six Lascelles Hall players in their eleven – an amazing statistic.

No wonder the Huddersfield & District League handbook said the place had become "renowned throughout the length and breadth of England as the greatest nursery of its kind."

During this era, the club's cricketers were regarded as a special breed.

A spectator once asked why all the team's players seemed to walk alike. "I suppose for the reason that we all bat alike," was the answer.

The players were obsessive about practice and had strict rules. A batsman had to give another player a turn after he had faced 40 balls - otherwise he was fined a penny.

Southern visitors to Lascelles Hall were as impressed by the local players' capacity for alcohol as they were by their cricketing prowess.

A document from 1882 lists the provisions laid on for matches against Harrow Wanderers and Uppingham.

They included half a gallon of Scotch whisky, one gallon of brandy and half a gallon of rum.

And all this drink would have helped to wash down the 30lbs of beef and 12 dozen pies that had been ordered for the first day of the match alone!

After the 1880s Lascelles Hall produced fewer county cricketers.

But in 1891 they triumphed in their first Heavy Woollen Cup final, beating Ossett, and a noted local composer, E.A.Lodge, produced a special song to commemorate the victory.

After this golden period, the club struggled and it took them 15 years of trying to claim their first league title in 1907.

But things began to blossom in the 1930s when the newly-formed Ladies Committee set to work on fundraising.

A new tea pavilion was built in 1931, and by 1936 the club was free of debt for the first time in years.

The club's ground became a major issue during the middle decades of the twentieth century.

For many years they had been paying only a peppercorn rent to the Whitley-Beaumont estate, but the club had been anxious to buy the ground outright.

And there seemed to be good cause during the Second World War when it was first reported that a builder had earmarked the pitch for development - and then that the Government proposed to plough up the ground for agricultural purposes.

The 'batsman's paradise' was in peril!

The Whitley-Beaumont estate set a price of £300 on the ground and the cricket club launched an appeal.

Thanks to some generous donations, including many from servicemen overseas, the money was raised within a fortnight.

Another problem arose in the summer of 1943 when American servicemen stationed at Penistone asked if they could use the ground for baseball.

The committee agreed, but the club secretary promptly handed in his resignation!

And there was more controversy in the 1960s when Kirkheaton Whippet Club was given permission to hold meetings at the ground!

Today, Lascelles Hall are a successful and ambitious Huddersfield League club with a beautiful ground set amid rolling landscapes.

Visitors to their memorabilia-filled clubhouse also realise that the club is enormously proud of its rich history and heritage.