

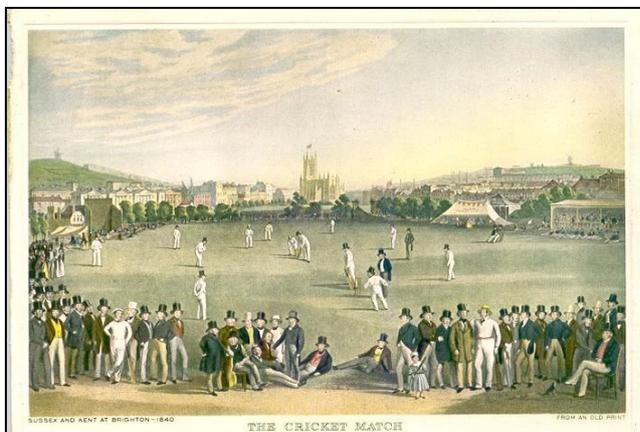
## RELIGION, RAILWAYS AND A BOOMERANG The early years (1743 to 1892)

**1743**

The place of the Oaks situated on the river Worth, to the southwest of the Aire valley town of Keighley in West Yorkshire, did not formally exist until 1844. It is clear that prior to this date education and religion had begun to play major roles in developing the community in the area known as Oakworth. It seems that early educationalists and a few travelling preachers of the mid-eighteenth century had begun to have a deep effect on the social scene in the then rural Oakworth. As early as 1743 a lady by the name of Sarah Heaton had opened a free Methodist school at Harehill and in 1790 the Wesleyans erected a similar larger free school at Sykes Head. This followed the establishment 6 years earlier of the first Sunday school in the whole of Yorkshire on the Sykes Head site. It's doubtful if the school curriculum included the game of cricket, but it does seem likely that the village lads played their under-arm version or stool ball on the village common. The Yorkshire game of Knurr and Spell was also popular.

**1844**

Throughout the Napoleonic wars the village continued to develop and the churches began to establish more permanent chapels from which to spread the gospel. In 1844 the area of Oakworth including Laycock and Braithwaite was finally recognized as an



ecclesiastical parish independent of Keighley. A year after the erection of Christ Church in 1845, the transport revolution reached the Aire valley with the completion of the Midland Railway line from Bradford to Skipton. Meanwhile the game of cricket was also progressing with scores now being accounted in books rather than by the traditional means of notching the bat! In 1816 all bowlers had to ensure their hand remained below the elbow on delivery, but by 1835 this requirement had become "below the shoulder". In 1849 a pitch could be rolled and swept and in 1850 wicket keepers were allowed to wear gauntlets. The game was

indeed developing rapidly in the era prior to the County Championship, which did not appear until 1864.

**1848**

1848 saw the founding of the Keighley Cricket Club alongside the railway bringing the semi professional game to the Aire valley, providing entertainment for the workers of the town.



**1853**

The North's first newspaper, the Daily Northern Times, was first published in 1853 and the local Telegraph and Argus followed in 1868.

**1862**

One year after the death of the reverend Patrick Bronte in Haworth even more rapid growth for Oakworth came along with it's own Co-op in 1862, another chapel in 1863 and the commencement of the magnificent Oakworth House for the Holden family in 1864. In 1867 the jigsaw was almost complete with the opening of Oakworth Railway station providing a much needed transport link with the outside world. So the scene was set for the emergence of cricket in Oakworth.

**1868**

It is a matter of conjecture how influential the rail link was in attracting Oakworth villagers to the ground of the Keighley club: but I'll wager that one or two did make that journey on Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> July 1868.

The auspicious occasion was to see the Keighley Club take on the Australian aboriginal tourists in the 20<sup>th</sup> match of their tour of the UK. The aborigines had been inspired to tour by the successes of the English tours to Australia in 1862/63 and 1863/64. Their team consisted of 13 genuine aborigines delighting in the names:

Mullagh, Cuzens, Bullocky, Red Cap, Twopenny, Dick-a-dick, Peter, Charley, Mosquito, Jim Crow and Sundown. They gave entertaining displays of boomerang and spear throwing in addition to some excellent cricket as they won 14 of their 47-match programme. Their game with Keighley resulted in a draw after Keighley had set them a target of 164 runs to win but the visitors reached only 142 for 8. For Keighley T Waring scored 64 not out in their first innings score of 118 and J Dennison had match bowling figures of 9 for 81 in restricting the Aborigines to 101 in their first knock. The match featured over-arm bowling which had been legalized four years earlier in 1864.

#### 1878

The first official Australian tourists came to play Keighley in 1878 and on 29<sup>th</sup> July eighteen Keighley hopefuls took on the might of the D W Gregory international stars including the famous Bannermans, the almost unplayable demon bowler Spofforth and Murdoch. The 3 day match ended in a convincing win for the tourists as first the Bannermans with their bats and then Spofforth with amazing match figures of 20 for 117 subdued the gallant locals by 7 wickets.

Scores	Keighley xviii	102 and 133
	Australia	206 and 32 for 3

#### 1880

Two years later with batsmen now wearing new fangled batting pads, the Second Australians returned for another three-day game over the Whitsuntide Holiday. This time the Lawkholmers gained an honourable draw.

Scores	Keighley xviii	102 and 53
	Australia	98 and 32 for 2

The "Demon" Spofforth and Palmer dominated the bowling as did Murdoch with the bat.

#### 1881

By now the population of Oakworth, measured as 2,648 in the census of 1881, must have been pretty familiar with the well developed game of cricket and no doubt some local enthusiasts were already dreaming of a team for the village

#### 1885 Beginnings

In 1885, worshippers at Christ Church Oakworth, taken with the game, kept faith with the Victorian vision of England as God's heaven on earth, and decided to form a team of players with the name of Oakworth Albion, a name much later also to be adopted by the village football club. The Albion or Church team used a field at Near Highfield, which is now a play area for the children of Sunhurst and Moor Drives. In that same year the Wesleyan Methodists also banded together to play on a ground in a farm field at Racemoor Lane very near to the present ground. Could it be that this is where the address of Cure Hill comes from since Wide Lane is probably the correct address of our club? The Methodists called their team Oakworth Brunswick, presumably after Prince Albert's family lineage. The Wesleyans it seems were true blue royalists as they had also built their new school on Victoria Road in 1878.

Both clubs played their first matches in 1885, Church Albion on 20<sup>th</sup> April and Brunswick on 23<sup>rd</sup> May. A team called Keighley White Rose were soundly beaten by the Church side (84 to 26) and Cross Roads Albion then succumbed to Brunswick by 42 runs to 23. The next recorded fixture involved the Albion who defeated Park Lane Juniors by 13 runs. A victory for the Brunswick against Springfield White Lily by 86 runs to 45 included a batsman with the name of Elijah Attack. Elijah and his relative Horace would both play their part in the early years of League cricket in the village. Elijah's score of 18 that day may not sound much but it was probably worth 50 today when the relative state of wickets is taken into account. It was commonplace that outfielders were left to be trimmed by local farmer's sheep or cows requiring a pre-match ritual for removing the droppings! No wonder Grounds-men are worth their weight in gold! Playing squares in 1885 whilst cut and rolled as best possible were obviously of poor quality since bowlers generally won the battle with the batsmen.

#### 1886

The team name Oakworth Brunswick gave way in 1886 to a new name of Oakworth Clarence for whom John Berry recorded a score of 23 in a win over the Board School by 27 runs. In addition to the Board School team the village boasted another under the title of Oakworth White Star although little is known about their origins or affiliations. The names of brothers Stephen and Joe Nicholls first appear in 1886. Stephen's bowling abilities were to become widely recognized and he should be regarded as the village's first real star player.

#### 1887

Results from the Keighley News show continuing action from the Clarence and White Star teams but the Albion club seems to have mysteriously disappeared.

#### 1888

During 1888 results were noted from the Clarence and there was the emergence of a club called Oakworth. However, examination of the Oakworth names, among them Stephen Nicholls, definitely indicates that this team was in fact the Albion without the Albion label.

Hefty defeat for Ingrow White Star was the result of their meeting with Oakworth Clarence on 12<sup>th</sup> May 1888, Oakworth's 72 well ahead of their 38. However, St Peters IIs dished out pain for Clarence with a 104-28 score-line. In the return match Elijah Attack's 16 not out was insufficient to avoid another defeat, this time by 69-34.

#### 1889

On 25<sup>th</sup> May Oakworth narrowly won the local derby in 1889 with 49 runs to 41 by the Clarence. Other reports during 1889 show only the Clarence team sporting the village name, albeit none too successfully. The only exception was a friendly 104 run hiding for Blackhill in June. Stephen Nicholls with 29 was top scorer.

#### 1890

Only a 46-20 victory over Exley Head for the un-suffixed Oakworth made news in August.

#### 1891

In May the Clarence recorded friendly defeats at Spencer Street (102-24) and at Worth Primitives (32-29)

#### 1892

In 1892 the last of the name changes for the two teams took place and they became Oakworth Church C.C. and Oakworth Wesleyans C.C. That season saw friendly games and a noteworthy couple of local derbies indicating perhaps relative strengths of village rivals. On 30<sup>th</sup> July the Wesleyans met Slack Lane Baptist C.C. and accomplished a crushing victory. The Wesleyans notched up a respectable score of 51. The less experienced Baptists were outclassed as Elijah Attack (4 for 3) and J Moore (4 for 1) produced deadly bowling to dismiss them for only 4 runs! Two weeks later the two senior clubs met and this time the Church overcame the Wesleyans by 36 runs to 20. One week later still they took the Baptists scalps by 44 to 14.

All around the county at that time a debate raged about the merits of League cricket. The diehards were prophesying doom and disaster if playing for Championships were to replace the friendly games. They held that the spirit of the game would be lost, conversely those in favour argued that increased competition would generate better skilled players. Two factors had led to this view; firstly that Yorkshire had not won the County Championship; the powers in the land were Gloucestershire, the county of the Graces, Notts and Surrey. Secondly the defeats of the English national team at the hands of the Australians had been taken really badly across the country. After all we had taught the colonials and indeed the rest of the world the finer points of the art of cricket. Hadn't we? They saw League cricket as the breeding ground for future County and Test players. The area around Bradford inevitably joined the debate and in common with others, amateur and semi-professional Leagues inevitably emerged.