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BOWLING MAIDENS OVER: 1931 AND THE BEGINNINGS OF WOMEN'S CRICKET IN A YORKSHIRE TOWN

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the development of women's cricket in a West Yorkshire town – Brighouse – in the 1930s. It situates this subject within the context of the growth of women's cricket more generally, and goes on to explore the personality and uniqueness of women's cricket in the town. The article identifies key issues in the way that women's cricket was perceived at the time, particularly in the pages of the *Brighouse & Elland Echo*, the local newspaper. As such, it considers the novelty of the sport, the gender stereotyping that was an important aspect of press coverage, the relationship between women's and men's cricket, and also the marketing of key fixtures. The article will also refer to developments in the women's game at Todmorden Cricket Club, thus adding helpful and relevant context to the discussion. The article also emphasises that studying sport, and cricket in particular, can offer the historian a fascinating window on society.

I

The inter-war years witnessed a remarkable blossoming of women's cricket.^[i] This development threatened one of the major assumptions about sport, and cricket in particular; namely, that it was very much a male preserve. Men were seen as the natural athletes, while women, on the whole, were assigned a minor, supporting role. As Horne, Tomlinson and Whannel have pointed out, 'Gendered differences in sport participation have been, and remain, marked.'^{[?][?]} Even as late as 2002, it is reported that female participation rates in sport were 56 per cent – compared with 71 per cent for men.^[?] Although sport history, as a discipline, has come of age in recent years, it is a fact that very little has been written about the history of women's cricket. The social history of cricket is gradually acquiring its historians – Derek Birley, Jack Williams and Jeff Hill, for example^[?] - but even so, the phenomenon of women's cricket remains largely untouched.

This article seeks to redress the balance. It focuses on the West Yorkshire town of Brighouse in the 1930s, and explores the nature and character of women's cricket in this context. It does so by analysing local press coverage - in particular, the headlines, reports, articles, editorials, comment pieces, photos and adverts that appeared in the *Brighouse & Elland Echo*, the main local newspaper – in 1931. The argument put forward in this article is that women's cricket was not just popular in the Brighouse area in the 1930s, but was also taken seriously by the local press (give or take the odd 'patronising' or 'sexist' comment emanating from a male journalist^[?]). Studying women's cricket in 1930s Brighouse also reveals much about cricket in the inter-war

period (in general) and cricket in Yorkshire (in particular), as well as casting interesting light on the nature of English and British society.

Brighouse ('Bridge over the Calder') is a small town four miles to the north of Huddersfield, four miles to the east of Halifax, and seven miles to the south of Bradford. It is located in the far south-eastern corner of modern-day Calderdale, and today boasts a population of 10,859.[?] Historically, the town developed on the back of canal traffic and among its most noted products were cotton, silk and wire. Its most famous resident was Rev. William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, who lived there in 1857 and 1858. In the early part of the nineteenth century, the town was famed for its 'Henpecked Husbands Club' and its seventy-nine-year-old mayor, Robert Thornton. Of course, in tandem with Rastrick, Brighouse is also celebrated for its brass band. In 1941, Arthur Mee characterised Brighouse as 'an industrial town bristling with chimneys'.[?] For his part, Norman Ellis describes Brighouse as an 'industrial centre with a diversity of products, which embraced silk and cotton spinning, woollen and worsted manufacture, dyeing and bleaching, quarrying, chemicals, engineering and wire making.'[?]

The town has an impressive cricketing tradition. Although it is generally recognised that the current Brighouse Cricket Club came into being in 1873, this date actually marks the year in which the club was re-formed and moved to the ground at Clifton Road. In fact, cricket had been played in the town for many years prior to 1873. During this time matches were commonly staged on a ground behind the parish church and the sport was fostered by a number of influential local gentlemen including C. Jessop Esq. and J. Milnes who formed a club called Brighouse Alexandra.[?]

The club was re-formed in 1873 when the old Brighouse Alexandra Cricket Club amalgamated with the Brighouse Working Men's Institute. The result was that Brighouse New Alexandra C.C. was born, and the new club rented a new ground, which was situated in a convenient location behind the Working Men's Institute's clubhouse. Clifton Road was to become the home of Brighouse cricket until the beginning of the twenty-first century. It was first rented from Messrs J.B. Sugdens – in all likelihood a local textile company - and soon relaid for cricketing purposes. The first match was played on 30 May 1873.

The club's first professional was William Shotton from Lascelles Hall. He was engaged in 1876, eleven years after the first of his two first-class appearances for Yorkshire. His second came a year later when he was one of six players from Lascelles Hall who represented the county in a match against Gloucestershire at Clifton College. His association with Brighouse proved to be long and successful. He played twelve seasons for the club as both professional and amateur, scoring 3,011 runs and taking 318 wickets.

Derby matches with Rastrick were always keenly fought affairs, especially in the 1870s. The first 2nd XI encounter took place in 1873. By 1876 the two 1st XIs were playing each other and the first Brighouse victory came in 1878. The occasion received a special mention in the club's 1873-1933 'Record Book', as did the performance of that year's professional, Luke Greenwood. Greenwood was one of the great pioneers of early Yorkshire cricket, being a regular in the county side from 1861 until 1875.

By the late-1870s Brighouse New Alexandra CC was becoming more established in local cricket circles. This was clear from its expanding fixture list, which included matches

against more prestigious opponents. One of the leading clubs in the North was Todmorden, who were approached in 1878 to arrange two 1st XI fixtures and one 2nd XI match for the following season. In 1893 Brighouse became founder members of the West Riding League. The competition was an attempt to form a regional cricket league along the lines of the Football League and the later Northern Rugby Football Union. It included Leeds, Huddersfield, Bradford, Sheffield United, Dewsbury, Keighley, Barnsley, Halifax and Brighouse. In fact, it went further than the initial rules of the Northern Union by allowing open professionalism to co-exist alongside payments for 'broken time'. Two professionals were allowed per team. By 1899, however, the West Riding League had folded, as the financial demands of semi-professional cricket on this scale were not met by public interest.

Brighouse's first major successes in league and cup competitions came in 1918 when they claimed the Yorkshire Council Championship and the Halifax Parish Cup. In 1924 the club joined the Bradford League, and within a decade they had won a hat-trick of titles - emerging as league champions in 1930, 1931 and 1932. And in 1943 the Brighouse 1st XI reached the final of the Priestley Cup for the first time. Brighouse have remained in the Bradford League ever since, and in 2002 sold their Clifton Road ground to Tesco, enabling them to erect a state-of-the-art ground nearby.

II

However, it is telling only half the story to concentrate on the male cricketers of the town. In 1898 a women's XI had been formed, and during the 1930s, Brighouse boasted one of the few women's teams in the North. In 1935, Brighouse Ladies were crowned Yorkshire champions and in Mona Greenwood possessed one of the star performers of the era. According to Jack Williams:

The playing of cricket by women expanded and became more organised between the wars, but the number of women who played regularly never exceeded 5,000 and was probably always fewer than those playing tennis, golf or hockey. Cricket had been played at prestigious girls' boarding schools before the First World War and although there had been one or two famous women's teams in the late nineteenth-century such as the White Heather Club and the semi-professional Original English Lady Cricketers, as a sport for women in the early 1920s cricket was hampered by a shortage of clubs.[?]

There were also key organisational landmarks in the 1920s and 1930s: the Women's Cricket Association (WCA) was formed in 1926, and ten clubs had become affiliated to it by 1927. By 1937 there were 20 county associations, and by 1938 105 clubs, 18 colleges and 85 schools had formed a link with the WCA.[?] Clearly, 1935, the year Brighouse Ladies became county champions, was a landmark. Nevertheless, the phenomenon of women's cricket merits only one index reference in Birley's seminal study, *A Social History of English Cricket*, and none at all in Brookes' *English Cricket: The Game and its Players through the Ages*.[?]

If we are looking to understand the origins and uniqueness of women's cricket in

Brighouse, we must focus on the glorious summer of 1931. In the wider world, 1931 was an eventful year. Sir Oswald Mosley founded the New Party, the Labour Government was replaced by a coalition, Spain declared herself a republic, and Gandhi pleaded for Indian independence. For the cricketing women of Brighouse, 1931 was very much 'the first season',[?] or 'breakthrough' year. Brighouse Ladies emerged victorious in eight of their eleven fixtures that summer. But more than that, women's cricket started to spread. In the middle of 1931, the *Brighouse & Elland Echo* stated:

Ladies' cricket in the town is now well established. Tonight, the Technical School Girls are to play Rastrick New-road, at Clifton-road, and next Friday night, on the same ground, the Brighouse Secondary School Girls are to meet a side from Huddersfield. There should be some really interesting cricket in this game. There is also to be a Brighouse v Rastrick Ladies' match, probably on July 4, and on July 18 the Brighouse and district ladies will meet Lascelles Hall ladies. Both the latter matches will be at Rastrick. It is also hoped to arrange an evening fixture with Bradford ladies.[?]

This article will also make reference to the development of women's cricket in Todmorden, another similar-sized northern town. Todmorden CC entered a team in the Lancashire Women's Cricket Federation between 1933 and 1936. In February 1933 the club, 'resolved not to join (Lancashire) Ladies' Cricket Federation but, in view of increasing interest in ladies cricket, give notice in local paper that we are willing to provide facilities for any ladies who are agreeable and desirous of taking up this sport.'[?] This minute confirms the fact that cricket was becoming more popular with women in the 1930s. The club was 'willing' to help them pursue their new hobby, although it is open to interpretation how 'enthusiastic' they were (maybe they were a little more enthusiastic than the word 'willing' actually implies to the modern-day reader). As it was, by 1933 Todmorden had decided to 'form a Ladies' Cricket Section'.[?]

Although Williams argues that the 'main strength of the WCA was in the south and midlands of England'[?], Yorkshire did not lag too far behind. It became formally connected to the WCA in the late-1930s, but there were other significant dates prior to this. In 1927 a Dearne Valley women's league (centring on Doncaster) was formed; 1930 witnessed the birth of the Keighley Ladies' Cricket Competition; in 1931 the Yorkshire Women's Cricket Federation was established; and by 1932 the Yorkshire Federation had set up its own Inter-City and Towns League (Brighouse plus Bingley, Bradford, Dewsbury, Halifax, Holme Valley, Horbury, Huddersfield, Keighley, Littleborough, Liversedge, and Sowerby Bridge all entered teams at some point).[?] During the 1930s we also encounter the Bradford Women's Evening Cricket League and the Leeds & District Women's Cricket League.[?] Most women's cricket in Brighouse was played under the auspices of the Women's Cricket Federation, some matches as early as 1931 and 1932.

Todmorden were lagging slightly behind. They played a full season in the

Lancashire Women's Cricket Federation in 1933, locking horns with Rochdale, Heywood, Crompton, Burnley, Littleborough, Milnrow and Facit on a home-and-away basis. The inception of a women's team was viewed as an interesting experiment by the club authorities. However, the club did not field a women's side in 1937 and were forced to resign from the Lancashire Women's Cricket Federation.[?]

Developments in Brighouse reflect Williams' contention that the 'early 1930s were the high-water mark' of women's cricket.[?] Coverage of the sport in the *Echo* was extensive. On 24 July 1931 the paper devoted three full broadsheet columns to the women's game. Four separate stories were covered: the match against Bradford; the return fixture against Bradford; the away match at Lascelles Hall; and a scheme to standardise local women's cricket.[?] Often, articles about women's cricket were wedged in close to reports about the men's game, sometimes actually in a more prominent position. The paper also devoted a number of 'editorials' to issues surrounding women's cricket – a sure sign of the game's growing strength and importance.

The first thing we notice in the local press is the surprise and interest that greeted the advent of women's teams. On 29 May 1931, the *Echo* reported: 'A large crowd enjoyed the novel spectacle of a ladies' cricket match on the Rastrick ground last Monday morning, when teams representing Rastrick and Brighouse met in a friendly game.'[?] According to the newspaper, 'The match was full of interest'.[?] At first, reports about the women's exploits appeared on the 'news' pages, away from the regular round-up of the men's matches on the 'sport' page. However, by the end of the summer of 1931, the women had forced the hand of the *Echo* sports editor and made their way onto the same pages as their male counterparts. This, obviously, was a significant development, and seemed to imply that women's cricket had 'arrived'.

The novelty of women's cricket was reflected in the size of attendances. Women's county games could attract crowds of up to 8,000.[?] The May fixture between Brighouse and Rastrick ladies was watched by a gathering of 1,000 - small in comparison to the county crowds mentioned above (and to the crowds that men's games attracted), but mightily impressive for a match between women's teams from two small towns.[?] A photo of one of the players in this match was accompanied by a caption which seemed to allude to the 'pressure' that big crowds might put on the female cricketers. It read: 'Was it a century – or a duck? This lady cricketer, who took part in the Rastrick v Brighouse match on Monday, does not seem at all perturbed at the prospect of facing the crowd and the bowling.'[?] : When Victoria Central School Old Girls played Nahums, a Salterhebble cotton spinning factory, the *Echo* reported that there was a 'large crowd' and that everyone was 'treated to a spectacular display'.[?] By contrast, when Brighouse visited Lascelles Hall in July 1931, 'The lack of "atmosphere" seemed to affect the Brighouse side somewhat, and compared with the enthusiasm which their matches arouse at home, they found the Lascelles Hall spectators almost unnervingly quiet.'[?]

By the middle of summer the local press were, very subtly, beginning to evaluate the impact of women's cricket. On 26 June 1931 the *Echo* stated: 'Interest in the local ladies' cricket teams shows no sign of diminution, and the two matches decided on the Brighouse Cricket Ground during the week have attracted large crowds.'[?] A month later, on 24 July, the newspaper concluded that, 'The lady cricketers of Brighouse have quickly won a definite place in the life of the town...An organisation which can attract a crowd of 1,500 to 2,000 twice a week - a crowd representative of all classes in the town -

has obviously made for itself a definite place in the sporting and social life of the community.[?] But the novelty and newness of women's cricket caused the occasional problem. When Brighouse played Bradford in late July, there was an unexpected hiccup. David Green, president of Brighouse CC, 'explained that the Brighouse ladies had been used to playing on 20 yards pitch [sic] and when Bradford insisted on a 22 yards pitch it put the Brighouse girls at a disadvantage.'[?]

Brighouse Ladies were the number-one team in the area - on account of their link with Brighouse CC, the crowds they attracted and the 'stars' that turned out for them - but other teams also emerged: Rastrick, Elland, Brighouse & District, plus a host of schoolgirl sides including Technical School Girls, Rastrick New Road Girls, Carr Green Girls, Hove Edge Girls, Brighouse Secondary School Girls and Victoria Central School Old Girls. This list helps to illuminate a point made by Williams:

Women's cricket...reflected the force of class divisions within English culture. The WCA was controlled by those from economically privileged groups and it tried to organise the women's game in accordance with the values of men's cricket clubs for those from the wealthier classes in the south of England. The great majority of its clubs were for those from the upper and middle classes. In most parts of the country working-class women and girls did not play cricket. As a school sport for girls, cricket was largely restricted to private and selective secondary schools, educational institutions which very few working-class girls attended.[?]

So, women's cricket in this period was essentially *middle-class* and *upper-class* women's cricket. Team photographs from the period also suggest this. Pictures of Brighouse Central School Old Girls and Brighouse Ladies in the local press show the female cricketers to be extremely well attired in matching garments (in action: white skirt, blouse and jumper, off the field: white blouse and dark gymslip). For want of a better phrase, they look 'prim and proper'.[?] That said, we should note the *Echo's* view (cited above), which implies that Brighouse cricket crowds were cross-class in nature. Clearly, working-class and middle-class cricket enthusiasts were not 'put off' by the spectre of 'well educated', 'upper class' girls playing sport - in fact, they actually flocked to witness the spectacle. This is an interesting comment on class relations in inter-war Yorkshire.[?]

We also know that most of the players were young, single girls. When the *Echo* listed the sides for the Rastrick-Brighouse game in early July, they did so like this:

Rastrick – Misses E.Ramsden (captain), E.Henson, M.Southern, B.Marsden, V.Newsome, F.Clegg, A.Eastwood, M.Marsden, N.Marsden, M.Peck, B.Haley.
Reserves: M.Hedley and D.Greenwood

Brighouse – Misses M.Stansfield (captain), A.Holgate, A.Sheard, M.Carling, K.Halmshaw, B.Woodcock, E.Bates, M.Halmshaw, M.Blackburn, W.Green, E.Ellis Reserves: K.Drake and E.Owen[?]

These team line-ups are representative of the era as a whole: 26 'misses' and not a married woman in sight. The team photos mentioned above are also illuminating. At a guess you might say that the average age of the Brighouse Ladies and Brighouse Central School Old Girls School was around 17 or 18.[?]

Interestingly, women's cricket was at a crossroads. An organisational structure was developing, but this was a slow and slightly haphazard process. This is reflected in a news story featured in the *Echo* on 24 July 1931. Under the heading, SCHEME TO STANDARDISE WOMEN'S CRICKET, it was announced that:

Mr. T. Metcalfe (secretary of the Bradford Ladies Evening Cricket League) supplied a reporter with a rough outline for a suggested scheme to standardise women's cricket in the West Riding. He pointed out that at the moment the girl cricketers in various districts play under slightly varying rules from each other and in some instances with different equipment. 'For instance,' he said. 'Bradford play with standardised equipment and the regulation 22 yards' pitch, as well as playing a maximum innings of 32 overs and having 12 players a-side. Leeds play on a 21 yards' pitch and prefer to complete their innings while Brighouse use a 20 yards' pitch and like each side to have one hour's batting. 'The proposal,' continued Mr. Metcalfe, 'is to call a conference of representatives of various districts with a view to discussing the necessity of uniformity on many points, and to fix up a proper programme of inter-district matches. It is suggested that representatives of the Leeds, Huddersfield, Halifax, Bradford, Keighley, Burley-in-Wharfedale, and Brighouse districts should hold a conference on this subject in Bradford sometime next February.[?]

In the regional context, this appears to be a landmark, akin almost to those significant moments in the nineteenth century when new national sporting organisations emerged to unify, standardise and govern sports (for example, in another sport, soccer, the Football Association was founded in 1863 and the Football League in 1888). Officials and administrators were obviously thinking hard about how to take women's cricket forward, ironing out small inconsistencies and helping to create a level playing field (almost literally, in fact). This seems to show that prior to the 1930s the game existed only in rudimentary and embryonic form. Actually, it bore more than a passing resemblance to some sports in the medieval period, when every village had their 'local rules'.

We should not think that women's cricket existed in a vacuum. Women's teams were often associated with men's teams, and often shared a ground eg. Brighouse Ladies at Clifton Road. 'Closer inspection...shows that the women who controlled the WCA believed that the women's game could have collapsed without the co-operation of men's cricket,' writes Williams. 'Except for some schools and colleges, no women's clubs owned their grounds and although some rented municipal pitches, very many women's clubs had to use the grounds of men's clubs. Women's cricket could not afford to antagonise men's cricket.'[?] In Todmorden a male cricketer – J. Ratcliff – was 'asked to coach the lady members' at a committee meeting on 3 April 1933.[?] Later that month, two 'scratch' matches were arranged for the club's female players.[?] By May the club had decided to donate 'half of the "gate" at the Crompton match on July 28th to Lancashire Women's Federation', and by June it was resolved that the 'fares of 4 lady cricketers in the trial match at Burnley be paid by the club', and that the club's female

cricketers be offered use of net facilities and the ground itself for certain pictures.[?] Thus, Todmorden's 'willingness' to help its female cricketers seems to have evolved into a genuine support and enthusiasm.

III

The beginning of women's cricket was greeted not just as a 'novelty'. It also heralded an outpouring of gender stereotypes. Williams states:

Some men believed that cricket was not a suitable sport for women and girls, and such an outlook can be seen to stem from the cultural assumptions that the two sexes should have distinct social roles, although it is likely that the expansion of cricket among women in the 1930s weakened this view... Some men belittled and ridiculed women's cricket, which can be seen to reflect assumptions that cricket playing was an area of male social power and a demonstration of male supremacy. The fact that the male president of the TWCF felt it necessary in 1932 to declare in public that 'women's cricket is no hat-trimming or pantomime exhibition' suggests that some in the North may have held such a view.[?]

The irony was that women did *not* seem to view cricket as a means of 'liberating' themselves. Of course they had discovered new opportunities - at work and at play - in the aftermath of the First World War, but 'there is little to suggest that women cricketers played cricket with a deliberate intention of promoting female emancipation'.[?] On the whole, women appear to have played cricket for the fun of it, simply for leisure and recreation, and not for any overtly 'political' reason. As Marjorie Pollard put it, women play cricket because 'we like it'.[?]

But this did stop local newspapers from slightly looking down on women's cricket. In Brighouse there were many examples of this. The *Echo's* report on the special challenge match between Rastrick Ladies and Brighouse Ladies in May 1931 was accompanied by the headline, FAIR CRICKETERS AT RASTRICK.[?] The phrase 'fair cricketers' was used again within the main body of the report. A month later, an advert for the match between Carr Green Girls and Hove Edge Girls finished with the words: 'Roll up to watch the fair sex use the willow'.[?] In the same kind of vein, a caption to an *Echo* photograph read: 'A Good Return - A fielder in the ladies' cricket match at Rastrick caught in graceful pose'.[?]

At times, the tone of comments emanating from those watching from the sidelines was quite patronising. When New Road Ladies played the Technical School, the headline in the *Echo* was: ENTHUSIASTIC LADY CRICKETERS - BRISK HITTING AT CLIFTON-ROAD GROUND.[?] Similarly, when Rastrick played Brighouse, the *Echo* reported that: 'The ladies entered enthusiastically into the game, and some of them displayed no little skill.'[?] 'Enthusiastic' is the give-away word. Would it really have been used to describe the efforts of the Brighouse men? And is the last line not slightly patronising? It is as if the reporter was not expecting much 'skill' to be on display in a women's match.

After one game between the Secondary School Old Girls and the Central

School Girls at Brighouse, Mr H. Marsden - chairman of the Brighouse (men's) club - said he had been impressed by the women cricketers on view. He went on: 'In fact, we have been thinking of signing them on as professionals for the Brighouse club.' This would not have been so bad had it not been for the element of contextualisation added by the *Echo*: Marsden's words were uttered 'amid laughter'.^[?] There was also the small matter of language. Why, in the local press, were female performers known as 'Misses' or 'lady cricketers' or 'girls'?^[?] The *Echo* summed up its attitude to women's cricket in an 'opinion' piece on 24 July: 'There seems no doubt that so far as Brighouse is concerned, cricket for ladies has come to stay for a long time, and it is a wise and sympathetic move on the part of official sporting organisations to offer them help and support.'^[?] On one level, this was a positive statement. On another, however, it was laced with sexism.

On the press, Williams comments: 'Most newspapers gave little coverage to the women's game, and as the press was in the main controlled by men, this probably indicated a male suspicion that the playing of cricket by women was of no great consequence and did not represent a challenge to the social power of men.'^[?] In general, 'national' terms this may well be the case. In Brighouse the situation was slightly different. Of course, as we noted above, much of the language was patronizing. But, in terms of the *size* and *prominence* of reports, and the total amount of column inches devoted to women's cricket, the *Echo* did not do too badly. Reports were detailed, scorecards contained key information, and in addition there was the occasional photograph. The bottom line, of course, is that this was the 1930s, and attitudes to women's cricket reflected attitudes to women in general.

Women's cricket matches in Brighouse were also extremely well advertised in the *Echo*. For example:

GRAND CRICKET MATCH
BRIGHOUSE LADIES v KEIGHLEY LADIES
SATURDAY AFTERNOON, SEPTEMBER 12TH
ON THE CLIFTON ROAD GROUND
WICKETS PITCHED AT 3 O'CLOCK

COMING EVENTS. CRICKET ON THE CLIFTON RD. GROUND
THIS FRIDAY EVENING AT 6.45
BRIGHOUSE LADIES v HUDDERSFIELD LADIES
ADULTS 2d, BOYS AND GIRLS UNDER 14 1d

GRAND CRICKET MATCHES ON THE CLIFTON ROAD GROUND
THIS 'FRIDAY' EVENING, JULY 10TH
WICKETS PITCHED AT 7 O'CLOCK
SEMI-FINAL ROUND, LADIES COMPETITION

SECONDARY SCHOOL OLD GIRLS v CARR GREEN GIRLS
ADMISSION: ADULTS 2d, BOYS & GIRLS (UNDER 14) 1d

The growing popularity of women's cricket raised a number of issues. Could women indulge in other 'male' sports, and was 'equality' a realistic aim? Perhaps as a retort to the growing ascendancy of women in local cricket circles - and in local sport more generally - the local press carried some rather 'defensive' opinions about women in sport. On 26 June, the *Echo* opined:

It has been left to Mr. John Ayrtton, president of the Brighouse Rangers' Football Club, to point out the one field of sport in which women have not challenged the men. Women cricket teams are all the vogue just now; there were Association football teams for women many years ago; up to the present, however, the ladies have not ventured into the robust activities of the Rugby football game.

The *Echo* piece went on to say that rugby was 'entirely a man's sport, and no one wants to see ladies engaged in it.'[?] Was this the 'male' establishment fighting back in the light of women's move into cricket and other sports? Or was this merely a sensible, humanitarian cry?

Only two weeks after, on 10 July, the *Echo* carried a plea for equality - but in a way that would 'penalise' women for their growing involvement in local sport. The newspaper argued:

Now that the ladies have, in a large measure, secured that equality of opportunity for which they used to cry out, will they carry the thing to its logical conclusion and accept equality of responsibility? At a meeting, this week, when the question of charges for admission to the final stages of the local Merit Bowling Competition was being discussed, one delegate suggested that the ladies and gentlemen should both pay the same price...Is this incident a sign of the times and shall we soon find that the ladies, having been given equal opportunities in all sports and games, will be expected to accept equal responsibilities for providing the funds with which the sport is carried on.[?]

Here the context was bowls, but the principle carried over into cricket. Now that women had their own teams, surely they had to pull their weight in terms of their 'input', whether financial or otherwise?

In general, though, the *Echo* was willing to acknowledge that women's cricket had made great strides. On 19 June it stated: 'A number of Brighouse ladies gave an effective answer to those critics who say women will never be able to play cricket, when

the Victoria Central School Old Girls met a team of ladies from Nahums Ltd., Salterhebble, at the Brighouse CC ground, on Wednesday night.[?] Women's cricket was becoming more popular and organised. In fact, in a hard-hitting editorial, the newspaper bemoaned the fact that the Bradford Ladies' team was now demanding 'expenses' and 'one-third of the gate receipts' if they traveled to Brighouse for a fixture. It did not approve of a 'commercial business' being made out of the sport.[?] Another sign perhaps of subtle discrimination and 'sexism'?

IV

Women's cricket was growing and becoming a significant spectator sport in its own right. As a result, it began to produce its own stars: Margaret Lockwood, England wicketkeeper, who received invitations to 'guest' for various teams; Mrs L. Wilson, of Keighley C.C., who took hat-tricks in successive matches; and, in Brighouse, Mona Greenwood.[?]

It was the summer of 1931 that saw the emergence of Mona Greenwood[?] as captain of the Brighouse team, and its top performer. In early season, Greenwood had also turned out for Rastrick Ladies against Brighouse in a special challenge match. Rastrick triumphed by an innings and eight runs and the *Echo* reported that she was one of the two 'most successful' bowlers in the Rastrick side.[?] However, by the end of the year, she was firmly established in the Brighouse side.

In 1935 the Brighouse women's side was crowned Yorkshire champions. Greenwood's career developed further over the following few years and, after representing Yorkshire and the North, she was selected for England Women for two 'Tests' against Australia in 1937. Her international debut came in the second match of the series at Blackpool, where she scored 0 and 13. She was then selected for the third 'Test' match at the Oval where she made 23, her highest international score. The statistics say that she did not get on to bowl in either match, but she averaged 12 with the bat - a respectable effort in this period. She is also credited with one catch.[?]

The point about 'standards' is a key one. In the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, the state of cricket wickets was, on the whole, poor. There was not the sophisticated ground-maintenance equipment that there is today. At the same time, batting techniques were fairly rudimentary. In comparative terms, this led to low individual scores. The corollary of this was that the innings totals being posted by women's teams in the 1930s were nothing to write home about. In May 1931, Rastrick (55) beat Brighouse (20 and 27). Thirty wickets had fallen for the grand total of 102 runs at a paltry runs-per-wicket average of 3.4. Other murmurings followed:

With respect to the Brighouse Ladies' play, a little criticism might be helpful and may be appreciated, especially as there is no intention to belittle the side's achievement...There is little fault to find with the fielding...The bowling of the side is good but on Friday night there was one flaw. All the bowlers tended to keep to one length the whole of the time...The greatest measure of criticism must be leveled against the batting. One thing the Brighouse ladies have got to learn – that is that batters should be better judges as to how the game should be played than any of the spectators. They must school

themselves to ignore the shouts and advice of the crowd which too often leads to serious risks being taken...Another fault is the failure to make certain that one foot at least is behind the 'popping crease'.[?]

Further criticisms followed relating to hitting across the line and dealing with balls pitched on leg stump.[?]

However, before we start to condemn these early female cricketers for their lack of technique and skill, we should note the *Echo's* comments on 3 July: 'When the Brighouse girls went into bat there was some quick scoring. Mona Greenwood especially gave a creditable display, her stance, placing and free hitting being such that many experienced male cricketers were moved to admiration.'[?] We must also remember that in the early days of organised cricket even men's teams also had their problems. Webster, for instance, has written: 'A match between Halifax Clarence and Bradford played on Skircoat Moor in June 1834 came to an abrupt end after Halifax had scored 56 and Bradford had reached 15 in reply...At Stainland the Holywell Brook Merry Boys beat the Burwood Bright Eyes (68 runs to 57). Another match at Sowerby Bridge resulted in the Bouncing Besoms, 72 for 8, beating Making Place (38).'[?]

As a result of her success in the women's game, Greenwood became a celebrity in Yorkshire cricket circles. In 1934 her views on watching Don Bradman, the legendary Australian batsman, were sought by the media when he appeared in the Headingley Test Match of that year. The newspaper article read as follows:

JOYS OF SEEING DON BRADMAN IN BATTING FORM.
A WOMAN'S VIEW OF THE TEST MATCH.
MANY RUNS SHOULD HAVE BEEN PREVENTED.

By Mona M. Greenwood
(Yorkshire Women's Cricket Captain)

If anybody thinks that I was disappointed with the play on Saturday in the Test match at Leeds they are mistaken. Perhaps if I had watched the match through the eyes of those hundreds – possibly thousands – of women who made most colourful the record crowd which ringed the enclosure, I would have been tired of the play long before the finish.[?]

It is interesting, though not entirely surprising, that Greenwood talks about the 'colourful' female spectators in attendance. In 1934 this kind of sentiment would have been common; both women and men would have used this kind of language without fear of being branded 'chauvinist'.

Greenwood's successful career owed a great deal to Brighouse Cricket Club's support for the women's game in the 1930s. In 1931 the club ran a successful women's knockout competition at Clifton Road, which attracted considerable interest in the local press. It was won by Brighouse Secondary School Old Girls who beat Brighouse Central School Old Girls in the final. Nahums Ltd., New Road Rastrick, Carr Green and

Huddersfield Rovers were among the other teams that took part. In the final Greenwood played a starring role, scoring 55 and taking 7 wickets as her team won by an innings and 22 runs. Two years later, in 1933, she finished top of the Yorkshire Women's Cricket Federation 'Inter-City' averages, with 369 runs at an average of 30.7 – more than 10 runs better than the next best batter (which indicates a significant gulf in class). For good measure, she also finished fourth in the bowling charts, with 10 wickets at 11.9.[?]

Thereafter, Brighouse Ladies cricket matches became high-profile occasions. But along with the new-found celebrity there also came increased scrutiny. One *Echo* headline read: BRIGHOUSE LADIES' CRICKET CLUB – WHY THE BRADFORD MATCH WAS LOST – A FRIENDLY CRITICISM.[?]

The summer of 1931 was a significant year for women's cricket, not just in Brighouse, but throughout West Yorkshire. Ladies teams appeared to be springing up all over the place, in nearby towns and local schools. The following teams are mentioned in the *Echo* in 1931: Huddersfield, Lascelles Hall, Holmfirth, Bradford, Keighley, Nahums Ltd. We also know that around this time there was a women's team in existence at Greetland, just south of Halifax; and that in 1938, the opening of a new 'tea tent' at Illingworth St. Mary's was marked by a cricket match between the 'Ladies' and 'Gentlemen of the club', with 'the male element being restricted to retired cricketers'.[?] On 28 August 1931, under the heading LADIES' CRICKET MATCH - FIRST AT ELLAND - A GOOD HOME VICTORY, the *Echo* reported: 'Elland staged its first ladies' cricket match on Tuesday, and so successful did it prove that there is every possibility of it being made an annual event.'[?]

V

This paper has explored the phenomenon of women's cricket in a Yorkshire town during the inter-war years. Brighouse was not just *any* town, but a particularly important centre of the game. Press reports and comment help us to understand the way in which the sport developed and was received by local people. By focusing on one town, we are also able to extrapolate onto the national plane.

Our main conclusions must be these. Women's cricket in Brighouse was a significant force. There were many teams and the matches they took part in were both well advertised and well attended. In no way, though, was women's cricket *in competition* with men's cricket. Local (male) cricket clubs supported women's cricket as much as they could; in fact their help and assistance was integral to the success of the women's game. Brighouse CC was formed in 1873 – relatively early – and was also a strong, traditional club with an excellent ground. This all boded well for the growth of women's cricket in the area. Brighouse – the town – was also an industrious place, at the heart of the West Riding textile industry; it had good schools, too, which clearly put a premium on sport and recreation (for boys *and* girls). This was a coming-together of (conducive) circumstances. It may not explain everything, but it does go some way to helping us understand why Brighouse was such an important centre for women's cricket. Eventually, the town produced its stars, Mona Greenwood in particular. When she was capped by England it was a proud day for the Brighouse club and for women's cricket in Yorkshire more generally.

The reaction of the local press - as articulated by the *Brighouse & Elland Echo* - was

interesting. On the one hand, they treated the women's game seriously: they devoted significant space to key matches and also featured it in leaders and editorials (a sure sign of its growing social and societal importance). On the other hand - and quite predictably, given the era - they also, occasionally, patronised and demeaned it. The language and vocabulary that was used was not that which was utilised to describe the men's game. And more general questions were raised about women and their 'suitability' for certain sports.

The state of women's cricket in Todmorden in the 1930s is an interesting reference point for us in analysing the situation in Brighouse. Both towns are roughly the same size and both have strong cricketing traditions. During the inter-war period, things seemed to be moving slightly faster in Brighouse as regards the development of women's cricket. But there wasn't much in it. In both towns the established (and predominantly male) cricket clubs were happy to sponsor women's cricket with varying degrees of enthusiasm, though this does not imply that they were unenthusiastic. Rather, the feeling one gets is of two clubs 'going into the unknown'. Occasionally, too, women's cricket is viewed by male club officials as being either a charming diversion not to be taken too seriously or as a possible means of generating extra income for the club. But, this should not take anything away from the fact that (predominantly male) clubs did play a huge role in assisting the development of women's cricket in the 1930s.

The popularity of women's cricket has ebbed and flowed over the decades. Today, women's cricket is once again in vogue, with international teams, in particular, gaining significant coverage in the mass media. In Brighouse in the 1930s women's cricket was new, novel and popular, and as a result attracted significant press attention.

[i] Thank you to Jack Williams, Malcolm Heywood and Rob Light for their help and advice during the preparation of this article.

[ii] J. Horne, A. Tomlinson & G. Whannel, *Understanding sport: an introduction to the sociological and cultural analysis of sport* (London, 1999), p.110.

[iii] These figures come from <http://www.sportengland.org> (women's participation factsheet). These figures relate to participating in sport at least once a month.

[iv] See D. Birley, *A social history of English cricket* (London, 1989), J. Williams, *Cricket and England: a cultural and social history of the inter-war years* (London, 2003), J. Hill, *Sport, leisure and culture in twentieth-century Britain* (Basingstoke, 2002).

[v] In this period we must assume that most working journalists on a local newspaper would have been male.

[vi] <http://www.calderdale.gov.uk/council/information/ward-profiles/profiles/brighthouse.html>.

[vii] A. Mee, quoted in N. Ellis, *Bygone Halifax & district* (Rigg, 1993), p.63.

[viii] N. Ellis, *Bygone Halifax*, p.63.

[ix] Jessop and Milnes were probably industrialists.

[x] Williams, *Cricket*, p.94.

[xi] *Ibid.*, p.95.

[xii] Birley's sole reference relates to women's cricket in Surrey (p.352).

[xiii] *Brighthouse & Elland Echo*, 8 Sep 1931.

[xiv] *Ibid.*, 19 Jun 1931.

[xv] *Todmorden C.C. committee minutes*, 6 Feb 1933.

[xvi] *Ibid.*, 6 Mar 1933.

[xvii] Williams, *Cricket*, p.96.

[xviii] There was also a Meltham Mills women's team - see Williams, *Cricket*, p.97.

[xix] Williams, *Cricket*, pp.96-7.

[xx] *Todmorden C.C. committee minutes*, 11 Jan 1937.

[xxi] Williams, *Cricket*, p.97.

[xxii] *Brighthouse & Elland Echo*, 24 Jul 1931.

[xxiii] *Ibid.*, 29 May 1931.

[xxiv] *Ibid.*

[xxv] Williams, *Cricket*, p.97.

[xxvi] Compare also these figures with crowds for (male) county matches today. Except for one-day games, county clubs very rarely get any decent attendances. At four-day games, there are usually a few hundred people in attendance, if that.

[xxvii] *Brighthouse & Elland Echo*, 29 May 1931.

[xxviii] *Ibid.*, 19 Jun 1931.

[xxix] *Ibid.*, 3 Jul 1931.

[xxx] *Ibid.*, 26 Jun 1931.

[xxxi] *Ibid.*, 24 Jul 1931.

[xxxii] *Ibid.*

[xxxiii] Williams, *Cricket*, p.100.

[xxxiv] *Brighthouse & Elland Echo*, 19 Jun and 24 Jul 1931.

[xxxv] See D. Russell, 'Sport and identity: the case of Yorkshire County Cricket Club, 1890-1939', *Twentieth Century British History* 7 (2) (1996), pp.206-230.

[xxxvi] *Ibid.*, 3 Jul.

[xxxvii] Ibid., 19 Jun and 24 Jul.

[xxxviii] Ibid., 24 Jul.

[xxxix] Williams, Cricket, p.102.

[xl] Todmorden C.C. committee minutes, 3 Apr 1933.

[xli] Ibid., 18 Apr and 24 Apr 1933.

[xlii] Ibid., 15 May 1933, 6 Jun 1933, 19 Jun 1933 and 31 Jul 1933.

[xliii] Williams, Cricket, p.104.

[xliv] Ibid., p.98.

[xlv] Ibid., p.98.

[xlv] Brighthouse & Elland Echo, 29 May 1931.

[xlvi] Ibid., 19 Jun 1931.

[xlvii] Ibid., 29 May 1931.

[xlviii] Ibid., 26 Jun 1931.

[i] Ibid., 29 May 1931.

[ii] Ibid., 24 Jul 1931.

[iii] Ibid., 29 May 1931 and 19 Jun 1931.

[iiii] Ibid., 24 Jul 1931.

[iv] Williams, Cricket, p.105.

[v] Brighthouse & Elland Echo, 26 Jun 1931.

[vi] Ibid., 10 Jul 1931.

[vii] Ibid., 19 Jun 1931.

[viii] Ibid., 3 Jul 1931.

[lix] Williams, Cricket, p.97 & p.98.

[lx] She was also known as Mona Bradbury.

[lxi] Brighthouse & Elland Echo, 29 May 1931.

[lxii] www.cricket.org/link_to_database/PLAYERS/WOMEN/ENG/GREENWOOD_M_01017287.

[lxiii] Brighthouse & Elland Echo, 24 Jul 1931.

[lxiv] Ibid.

[lxv] Ibid, 3 Jul 1931.

[lxvi] E. Webster, 'Leisure and pleasure in nineteenth-century Halifax' (Transactions of the Halifax Antiquarian Society, 1989), pp.23-46.

[lxvii] <http://www.slsa.sa.gov.au/bradman/scrapbooks/20/bsb20069.htm>.

[lxviii] Brighthouse C.C. 'Record Book', p.559.

[lxix] Brighthouse & Elland Echo, 24 Jul 1931.

[lxx] <http://www.illingworthcc.co.uk>.

[lxxi] Brighthouse & Elland Echo, 28 Aug 1931.