

The Heights of Bradshaw

By Mark Whitcombe

Finding the village was the problem. I hadn't bargained on it being such an adventure. We followed the road out of Halifax and the signs for Keighley with the confidence befitting our age. True, we didn't know where it was to begin with, but we were sure of reaching our destination on time. That was before getting lost. We found Illingworth. We even went as far as Denholme. Little were we to know that Bradshaw lay to the east. In other words we should have turned right a few miles back.

The trick was to find that one person walking along the pavement who knew where everything was. We happened upon one such saviour. An old lady talked. She pointed, she smiled and sent us on our way.



I sighed in relief as I saw the old parish church. We were on Bradshaw Lane. It was only a matter of moments later when we saw Bradshaw cricket ground. It was still there as we passed it by.

Even so. We soon found a place to turn round and reached our destination slightly flustered and a little anxious. All anxiety left us when we saw the ground and met the two gentlemen we had come to interview. I am not going to write about the interview, nor shall I describe the personalities and facets of the men guarding the ground, friendly though they were. No. You cannot go to Bradshaw and come back without mentioning the beautiful landscape shaped around the club. It is mesmerising.

High up it is home to a wonderful view. Hills can be seen. They gently rear up in the distance, creating the backdrop for the heavenly sight before me. Fields showing the hard labour of farmers add to this glorious vision. The spectacle is a fitting reminder that the cricket club was born out of a philosophy of hard work. Nobody can make a cricket club function without dedication and passion.

A luxurious setting helps. As I stared out into the horizon I mused with sentiment. Who would want to leave this place? The heights of Bradshaw far exceeded my imagination. The hills really do create a natural circle around the ground. They are far away and yet they look deceptively near.

We are high up ourselves. Higher than most grounds around our little cricketing area. The advantage is that we can look down. Down onto the fields. Down onto the countryside that stretches out over the valley and beyond. If you look over the scoreboard you see the hill edge downwards, slanting like a great cliff watching over the land. It is a silhouette set against the sky. It is a lovely sight to behold. You could easily get lost in your own adventure at Bradshaw.

There is a certain mysterious nature about it all. I have seen it in other grounds, but here you can feel the magic. I remember after I finished the interview just standing and staring, breathing in the air and taking in the view. It was such a glorious day; the sun was beating down hard, lighting the ground with a radiant glow. I saw the sky and thought of its role. Overlooking the ground it sweeps over the hills. Come winter the clouds will gather and the club will quiver under the snow. In autumn there will be colours of gold and brown, the trees will shake their leaves and the sky will fall down in crashing storms. Spring will bring change and new life, a colour to the trees, a vibrancy to the air.

Summer will bring heat. And with it cricket will be staged, honouring and encapsulating the *joie de vivre* of the club and the wonders that surround it.