

# Italian vistas?

## 15. Golcar C.C. - Swallow Lane

*Teas provided in the pavilion by our Ladies Committee. Come and enjoy yourselves. Bring your friends. Bowling Green available. Let the Lilys relax you with a good game of cricket. Golcar and Scapegoat Hill buses stop one minute from the ground.*

*[Huddersfield & District Cricket League Handbook - 1969]*

Golcar is an industrial district full of character and personality. In 1834 Pigot & Co.'s *National Commercial Directory* said the village was best known for its 'manufacture of coarse woollen cloths, chiefly for the Huddersfield market...and finer cloths are likewise made, with which some of the inhabitants travel through different parts of the country.'

In January 1967 Huddersfield East M.P. J.P.W. Mallalieu told the *Huddersfield Examiner* that Golcar's 'Italian look' could make it a tourist attraction. The newspaper commented: 'Row upon row of cottages, piled almost on top of one another, so that some folk step out of their front door practically onto a neighbour's rooftop have certainly given Golcar some similarity to a terraced Italian village.' Locals were apparently 'sceptical' about the claim, but three and a half decades on, a local website was playing on the same kind of theme: 'Golcar is a hill village of a type more common in Italy than England, Sir John Betjeman even called it the "Provence of the North."' Apart from its industrial heritage, the place is famous for its parish church (built in 1903) and Golcar Races. It is home to the Colne Valley Museum and the Weavers Shed restaurant. And in June 2002 the village played host to the Northern Hamster Show.

Golcar takes its name from St. Guthlac, a Saxon saint of the eighth century. Guthlac's Scar, or Guthlac's rock ('Gudlagesarc') may have been the rock from which Guthlac declared the faith. Over the centuries the name became

Golcar by way of 'Guthlacharwas', 'Gouthelagh' and, in the Domesday Book, 'Goullakarres'. By way of a postscript, another website says that 'Golcar' is 'pronounced "Gow-ker" according to some locals and "go ka", silent L, no W according to others'. Golcar - however it is pronounced - is also famous for its 'lilies', though no-one is quite sure why.

The Golcar club was founded in 1871. In its first incarnation it was known as St. John's C.C. because of its link with the nearby church. In 1882 it evolved into Golcar C.C.. In the early and mid-1870s it played at Scar Wood, Lowestwood Bottom and Knowle Bank. In 1877 it upped sticks for the last time and moved to Swallow Lane.



**1934 Team Photo**

Quite early on, development work had to be done at the venue. In 1877 an area of turf (40 x 10 yards) was laid at a cost of £5. And it paid an immediate dividend - the club went through the 1879 season unbeaten. The ground was relaid in 1895, and a special club bazaar raised £300 to help pay for this work.

Swallow Lane is sited just a few hundred yards from the centre of Golcar, and nestles close to a pub, a brewery, and a working men's cooperative society (which, incidentally, dates from 1895). To an extent, the ground reflects the character of

the village in which it is set. On one side, it borders onto the back gardens of some very posh bungalows - not really in keeping with 'industrial' Golcar; but on the other, there is a raw Colne Valley landscape to admire - full of cottages, mills, farmers' fields and breathtaking hillside vistas (not forgetting the Pole Moor transmission mast in the mid-distance). This backdrop gives the ground a spectacular feel. The fact that the playing area slopes down to the 'posh bungalow' side just adds to the character of the place.

In the early years, Golcar were indebted to Arthur Shaw, an enthusiastic and long-serving member, who was also instrumental in the formation of the Huddersfield & District League. On the field, success came in short bursts: the club won Section A in 1903 and 1905, and then again in 1934 and 1935. Two big names to turn out for Golcar were Roy Booth (who also played for Yorkshire) and Brian Turner (a well respected pro).

In 1924 another bazaar raised the 'princely sum' of £900 for club funds. By 1928 development work on the ground had commenced, with the club employing an architect - Mr. A. Shaw - and also masons, joiners, plumbers, slaters, plasterers and printers. The economic depression at the time meant that building work was constantly delayed, but today an inscription on the front of the pavilion tells us that it was finally erected in 'A.D.1933'. We are told that Golcar borrowed £750 to pay for the construction costs.

This was just one key date in the history of Swallow Lane. Others include:

1939 - Billiard table and wireless donated to the club.

1948 - Club pays off all its debts; volunteers start work on improving premises.

1950 - £150 spent on the wicket.

1957 - Moss on the field becomes a serious problem.

1961 - 'No Sunday cricket' motion defeated.

In the post-war era, Wilson's Brewery helped to renovate the

clubhouse, and in 1969 the club stated: 'The ground is kept in beautiful condition and the wickets play fast and true. The whole place is steeped in cricket tradition and since the League was formed the club has held a most important place from a playing and legislative point of view.'

The clubhouse - now 70 years old - is a modest but handsome building. Inside there are momentos from the history of Golcar C.C., and also a cute little café area, which serves excellent fare to visiting spectators at a very reasonable cost. Adjacent to the clubhouse is the bowling green. The changing rooms are not housed in the clubhouse, but in a charming little building diametrically opposite. But plans are afoot to extend the clubhouse so that the players can change and eat in the same building.

There are other interesting features of the venue: the 'mini-road' that skirts the playing area on one side of the ground; and the massive grass bank on the other, which sits beneath a long, meandering (and white) dry stone wall. When the sun is shining and the onfield action has reached an interesting stage, locals tend to congregate on the bank - and if the wicket has been laid on that side of the field, they are close to the action.

At one point in time, Golcar C.C. had a huge number of members. Take, for example, the following figures: 1935 - 480; 1938 - 450; 1943 - 350; 1945 - 370 (+120 women); 1953 - 340 (+80 women/juniors); 1958 - 450 in total. This membership information helps us to chart the history of the club, as does the following selection of trivia:

1926 - Complaints about the quality of the beer.

1928 - Women are excluded from 'celebratory dinner'.

1934 - Meat tea costs 1/3.

1940 - Club helps with Golcar Comforts Fund.

1946 - Talent money: 5/- for 50; 5/- for 6 wkts; 5/- for hat-trick; 2/6 for 3 catches.

**Extract from P. Davies, *Pennine Pitch* (2003)**