

# Underneath the arches

## Copley CC - Copley Lane

The wicket is good - a real wicket. But there again, I would say that. I'm the groundsman! A side that bats first has got to be looking for around 240. When Pudsey Congs. came here in the Black Sheep Trophy, they rattled off 400!

[Club groundsman, Tom Thorpe]

The village of Copley lies on the floor of the Calder Valley, two miles south of Halifax between Elland and Sowerby Bridge, and at the intersection of the historic townships of Greetland, Norland and Skircoat. Possibly the most famous person in the history of the place was Edward Akroyd who, in the middle of the nineteenth century, built a large mill in the area and created a model village for his workers (a school arrived in 1849 and a library the year after).

Between 1856 and 1931 Copley had its own railway station; and in 1917 its ammunition factory was the scene of a huge explosion. Today, the village is famous for the computerised information centre built by the Halifax Building Society. The building cost £25m to erect and employs 600 people.

One huge architectural structure dominates the Copley Lane ground - 'a substantial stone viaduct'. It is a wonderfully impressive sight. Tom Thorpe, groundsman and ex-player, says: 'I visit the ground every day to see to the wicket and I never get tired of the viaduct. I love looking at it, even now.'

In the early-evening twilight, the structure, along with the surrounding trees, brings a lovely sense of shadow to the playing arena. Thorpe comments: 'Lots of people have managed to throw a cricket ball over the viaduct, but only one batsman has cleared it. He played for Blackley - and yes, it was quite a hit!'

Atop the viaduct runs the Manchester-Halifax railway, successor to the famous Lancashire-Yorkshire railway - the first train line through the Calder Valley; high above the other side of the ground runs a freight-only line. Wedged in between is a well-sized playing surface, flat and in pristine condition (on occasions the wicket is pitched slightly towards the viaduct side). Benches line the raised boundary's edge and a good proportion tell their own story: THIS SEAT WAS KINDLY DEDICATED TO COPLEY CRICKET CLUB BY JOHN, JOANNA, KATE AND EMMA WASYLIW

2000...THIS SEAT WAS KINDLY DEDICATED TO COPLEY CRICKET CLUB BY THE LILEY FAMILY 1999.

To the first-time visitor, Copley's ground is not the most straightforward to locate. It is situated at the end of a long track, and the entrance to the track is easy to miss as one turns off the main road through the centre of Copley village. But when the ground is eventually located, there is plenty of space for parking and the sight of the viaduct is immediately appealing. One spectator describes the Copley ground as 'hidden', and also as a lovely contrast to the rugby pitches that are sited just across the road. One player says it's probably the 'flattest' cricket ground in Halifax.



**1935**

Cricket was first played at Copley Lane in 1880 (John Hampshire helped to celebrate the club's centenary in 1980). And there have been significant landmarks ever since: a wooden pavilion building was opened on 1 May 1909 (it was situated at the top end of the ground, where the scoreboard stands today); the club bought the ground for £100 on 31 January 1924 (thanks to money raised by lady members); a new pavilion was completed in August 1969; and a new scoreboard added in April 2001.

Locals also remember the day in 1946 when the River Calder burst its banks. Thorpe explains: 'The ground used to get flooded, and then the whole of the village. The water just used to seep through the whole place. On one occasion some of our wooden benches were transported by the torrents onto the main road!' Today, the venue is safe from flood alerts. Mounds have been built around the ground - and the village - to stop the spread of water, and the Water Board has made strategic adjustments to the water flow.

The floods used to affect Copley in the winter months; not in the summer, thankfully. Even so, cricket at Copley Lane has been curtailed for some very odd reasons. On one occasion, with Greetland 200-0, the players had to go off because the sun was too bright...and in the old days, when passing trains used to give off lots of black smoke, the umpires did not hesitate to send batsmen, bowler and fielders back to the pavilion for a breather.

Today, the framed memorabilia in the pavilion bar emphasises the history of the club: superb paintings of the ground by Thorpe and Geoffrey Beck; team photos from the early twentieth century ('West Vale Baptist League Champions 1901', 'Akroydon and District League Winners 1902'...); and a special tribute to veteran club official Roy Smith (known also as 'Mr Halifax' and 'Mr Cricket'). Former groundsman Walter Ball is also honoured - a wonderful photo shows him cutting the square in a loving and tender manner c.1959.

An intriguing document from yesteryear also hangs in the pavilion bar. A Yorkshire Federation report stated that Copley's ground covered 17,545 square yards, that motor hire cost the club £4.10 per year, and that gate fees raised £14 per annum and tea sales £18. It was also noted that seating facilities were 'not sufficient' - a minor problem that has been well and truly rectified since.

By anyone's standards, Copley Lane is a distinguished cricketing venue and, as a by-product, stages its fair share of big cup games when a neutral ground is required. And an interesting fact: it has witnessed two 'obstructed the field' dismissals in the last decade. Quite a rarity.

Extract from P.Davies, *Home Soil*