

Pristine and professional

26. Honley C.C. - Far End Lane

You'd be hard pressed to find a better ground in the Huddersfield area than this one. The wicket may be a little spongy - it's traditionally slow and low - but the outfield is very flat.

[A current Honley player]

In *The Rothmans Book of Village Cricket*, Pat Murphy, the author, compiles an A-Z of picturesque venues. Only one of his choices lies in the Huddersfield area: Honley. Ditto Jonathan Rice in *The Pavilion Book of Pavilions*. This is some tribute to Far End Lane, a venue that would not look out of place hosting county 2nd XI fixtures.

As a place, Honley (*Haneleia* in Latin or *Hanaleah* in Danish) is neat and semi-rural. In 1838 it was described as a 'large irregular clothing village', and exactly a century later as a 'large and handsome clothing village' complete with 'handsome villas' and 'extensive mills and factories'. So, over the last 200 years its characteristics have remained constant: it is a larger-than-average village with a strong link to the cloth trade. Before 1888 Honley was part of the parish of Almondbury, and in terms of sport and pastimes its history has revolved around bull-baiting, whippet-racing, cock-fighting, pigeon-flying, foot-racing, handbell-ringing and hunting. The village is famed for its male voice choir, socialist club, cinema and bridge (built in 1791 and widened in 1915).

The charm of Far End Lane is the setting. Emerald green trees, tasteful fences and walls that line the playing surface, and attractive stone cottages. You can also set your watch to the sound of the bells ringing out from Honley parish church (the 'old' chapel was built in the fifteenth or sixteenth century; the 'new' version in 1842). The ground is also pretty open - which means it can get pretty windy sometimes.

Honley C.C. have played in the Huddersfield League since 1894 and their fixtures attract a decent crowd; there are always plenty of spectators' cars parked neatly in rows by the main entrance and dotted around other parts of the boundary. Not long ago, Honley had 350 paid-up members,

including 50 juniors - a very impressive figure.

The green-and-white pavilion is an endearing double-decker construction. Rice says it looks like 'a Chinese pagoda from the outside and the aftermath of a Vicarage Bring and Buy sale on the inside'. The pavilion was built in the 1890s and insured for £120 in 1902; the upstairs was added in the 1930s. (Before the pavilion was built, Honley had to rely on a canvas tent, bought from nearby Hepworth C.C. for £16-10-0). The adjacent building - housing bar and tea room - is spacious and welcoming. Inside the clubhouse a range of memorabilia is on display: a photo of Mike Bocarro (who scored 177 for Honley in 1982), two paintings of the ground, and a multitude of team pictures (one dating from as far back as 1925). Brian Wilson (1929-1991), Leslie Green (1921-1992) and the legendary Alonza Drake (Yorkshire star between 1909 and 1914) are key names in the club's history. At the rear of the ground is a recreation field, both busy and noisy.

It is not just the pavilion building that gives the ground a slightly distinguished look. A pair of splendid green iron gates greets visitors as they approach the main entrance (dedicated to the memory of veteran club member Bill Dransfield - and officially opened on 7 July 1984); the scoreboard, tucked away in the bottom corner of the ground, is built out of solid brick and provides all the statistical information a spectator could wish for; and that's not to mention the handsome village skyline in the near distance.

The playing area is well-kept and super-flat, possibly the largest in the area. Dozens of little white 'stops' mark out the boundary - another professional touch. There are no sightcreens, just two dry stone walls, thoroughly whitewashed. And the teas are excellent (turkey balm cakes, sausage rolls, pasta, potato salad and sponge cake).

The club was originally founded in 1846, although it is claimed that cricket was played in the village three years previously. In the early years, Honley were indebted to Joshua Robinson (quality batsman), Robert Heap (lethal underarm bowler) plus Messrs. Thomas and Brook Beardsall. At first, Honley were known as Honley Church Cricket Club - according to the historian of Honley, Mrs. M.A. Jagger, this original club 'had its bright and dark days, ups and downs, sulks and recoveries' - but Honley C.C. became the official title in 1879. (Some actually date the formation of the club to 1880).

Over time, Honley have played their home games at three different venues. At first they played at Westgate Fields, immediately behind the

George & Dragon pub. Things were not very professional: the cricketers changed in a small tent, all sports were played on the field, and sheep also used the pitch! Eventually the inn was converted into a working men's club and the cricket field became a racecourse.



Then the club moved to a 'large and elevated field behind Northgate Mount', a gift from Mr. William Brooke - a local industrialist who moved to Northgate Mount in his retirement - and again 'sheep on the pitch' was a fact of life. (For a time the club was actually known as Northgate House C.C.). In 1881 the club decamped to its current HQ, again with help from Mr. Brooke and other subscribers. In the early 1890s the playing area was drained and extended, a cinder track laid, and a pavilion erected. At Easter 1896 a fundraising bazaar netted £450 for the club, and soon after a famed HCC member called Jack Messenger helped to raise a further £600. Through these efforts, Honley bought a new 'county machine' mower and secured the future of their ground; and by 1928 they had purchased it outright via public subscription. (It should also be noted that in the early twentieth century, Honley were not the only cricket team in the village. There was also Honley Wesleyans).

It is not just *The Rothmans Book of Village Cricket* that has

complimented Honley's home patch. Mrs Jagger wrote: 'I hope that this ground will always be preserved in our midst, for one of the most typical sights of the neighbourhood are our playing fields on a Saturday afternoon.' Likewise, an observer in 1951 talked about the 'beautiful condition' of the venue, and declared that it was a 'picture in winter and summer alike'. Tributes have also been paid to the 'rural seclusion' of the venue and the 'picturesque pavilion'.

Honley made important strides in the 1950s. They bagged an array of titles: they won Section B and the Greenwood Trophy in 1952, the Paddock Shield in 1954, and the Greenwood Trophy again in 1957. (They also began to rent their ground out to Huddersfield Hockey Club in 1950). In terms of ground development, the key events also occurred in the post-war period. In 1959 the bar and tea room was opened, and a new roller (christened 'Jack' after Mr. Messenger) was purchased; in 1962 the pavilion was extended; and on 20 April 1968 a new scoreboard was officially unveiled (and dedicated to the memory of former HCC president S.L.R. Waite). A year later, in 1969, the club's message to all cricket-loving locals was: 'Come and enjoy yourselves in pleasant surroundings'. The message obviously got through to Yorkshire legend Geoff Boycott, who staged one of his Benefit Year fixtures at the venue.

In the past, the Far End Lane committee has hired the ground out to Honley Tennis Club and Honley Victorian Cycling Club. Today, it promises visitors a 'warm welcome', not unconnected to the fact that 'the bar serves the full range of Tetley's products.'

Extract from P.Davies, *Pennine Pitch*