

After the floods

29. Thongsbridge C.C. - Woodlands

*Enjoy cricket at this very picturesque Holme Valley ground. Sample our excellent teas... Carlsberg & Tetley beers.
[Huddersfield League Handbook - 2003]*

Thongsbridge - a small village on the Huddersfield side of Holmfirth - is a hot-spot for local sport.

It boasts one of the biggest and most progressive tennis clubs in the area, a cricket club that plays in the Huddersfield League, and a bowling team (the latter two have combined to form Thongsbridge Cricket and Bowling Club).

When you approach the village from Huddersfield, the landmark to look out for is the Royal Oak pub. Turn left at the hostelry and you discover tennis courts, bowling green and cricket field. Indeed, all three sports are played within a stone's throw of each other at the heart of the village.

Actually, the Miry Lane complex is renowned for its versatility. We are told that on one July evening not long ago, 'St. Andrews [church] presented Proms in the Park at Thongsbridge cricket ground. There were gazebos, tables (with cloths), chairs, candleabra, lanterns, bunting, picnic hampers, delicious food and wine - and that was only the audience participation! The crowd of about 150 were entertained by a wide variety of musicians.'

Thongsbridge is most renowned for its textile heritage. Hilary Haigh, one of the most prominent historians of the Huddersfield area, notes the 'concentration of mills' in the village and also says that the place gained fame in 1768 when the Woodhead Turnpike road was built - for the new construction crossed the River Holme at Thongsbridge. One local website states: 'The village...whose unusual name is derived from the old word for a strip of land or a "thong", was first mentioned in the early 13th century when this strip of land (or more correctly the surrounding estate) was in the ownership of a local family called Bisset. This is how it stayed for over 500 years with the estate passing into the hands of different families until the early 18th century and the onset of industrialisation.'

You locate the cricket ground by traipsing over a small iron bridge near the car park. The tan-coloured pavilion building and scoreboard are on your right. This is a new construction: it was officially opened on 20 September 1981 by former club president Mr. H. Wimpenny. Atop the two-storey building is a rather

handsome clock, and Tetleys and Carlsberg are given a name-check on the frontage. (The original pavilion had been opened on 31 May 1913 - and thus lasted for more than two-thirds of a century).



Ladies Tea Committee, 1950

Located downstairs in the pavilion are a set of showers and a pair of changing rooms: one for the umpires on the left, and one for the away team on the right. It is upstairs where the home players dump their kit bags and pad up as and when required. The view of the playing area from this vantage-point is excellent. When the sun starts to set in mid-evening, the picture is a very pretty one.

The playing area is surrounded by mills and cottages - and you'll often see locals picking fruit in adjoining fields. There are whitewashed dry stone walls at both ends of the ground, and the River Holme trickles under the aforementioned bridge. There is also a football pitch, a set of four benches, three advertising boards (for Sovereign Motor Co., S.G. Shaw Industrial & Commercial, and CEF Electrical), and a large collection of trees - hence the venue's name. The tea room is sited on the other side of the ground from the pavilion, and so many games are staged at Woodlands that occasionally the groundsman has to denote which home XI should use which strip by using special paint marks next to the wickets in question.

The history of the ground is an interesting one. Through the hard work of members, it was extended by 15 yards in 1934. A decade later it was severely affected by floods. The first bout came in the spring of 1944; the second arrived in September 1946, when several feet of mucky debris was left on the playing surface. But observers have been very kind, and rightly so. One, writing in 1951, declared that Woodlands was a 'pretty picturesque ground', that its wickets were better than ever, and that the club benefited from having a loyal, enthusiastic membership and did not have to rely on a bar for finance. The year after, a second said: 'The Thongsbridge club have of recent years had to face...tribulations, for flooding by the river has on occasions left two feet of filth and rubbish over the whole field. Only the great enthusiasm of the Yorkshireman for his cricket has enabled...such difficulties [to be overcome].'



1st XI, 1926

Today, the feeling of Thongsbridge cricketers is that they are lucky to have such a lovely ground. One commented: 'I think it's a nice, quaint venue, and surely one of the nicest settings in the League. Even opposition teams think it's a nice place to play, and for some it's their favourite away ground. The wicket is not the best, but it's not too bad either. I'd say that 200 is a par score on our strip.'

Thongsbridge C.C. was formed in the middle of the nineteenth century. There is no official record of the club's birth, but 1860 is a possible date. The club used to play in the Alliance League. They applied to join the Huddersfield Central

League in 1914, but were turned down, only to gain admittance the following year alongside Broad Oak; in 1926 they joined the Huddersfield League and have remained members ever since.

It is clear that 1933 was a key date in the history of the club. Only seven years after they had joined the Huddersfield League, they won it. The 1933 *Holmfirth Almanac and Yearbook* said that Thongsbridge had been 'worthy champions'. In the same year, they also finished runners-up in the Sykes Cup. Messrs. Lancaster, Haigh and Wilkinson - president, treasurer and secretary respectively at the time - would have been delighted.

And the future looks pretty bright. One of the club's juniors, 16-year-old Philip Birkhead, made headlines a couple of years ago when he rattled up 109 in a league fixture at Woodlands, after the opposition had put a total of 290 on the board. He was Thongsbridge's youngest-ever centurion and as one letter-writer to the *Holme Valley Express* put it: this was 'local cricket at its best'. The club juniors are obviously on a roll, for not long after there was another remarkable game at Miry Lane. The youngsters of Holmbridge scored 252-0 - only to see the home side cruise to an amazing nine-wicket victory.

If there is a cloud looming on the horizon, it relates to off-field rather than on-field matters. The ground has been blighted by vandalism, and both main buildings are regularly covered in graffiti. One club member says: 'It's a very big problem for us. We've repainted the front of the tea room and pavilion three times this season, and still the local vandals come and ruin our walls. Our other bugbear is litter. When I turn up for practice on a Friday night, I have to spend 10 minutes tidying up the field before I do anything else. A lot of kids walk across the ground to and from school, and we think that this is the root problem. Others come to play on the field; that's absolutely fine, but they've got to behave when they are on our property.'

Extract from P.Davies, *Pennine Pitch* (2004)