

Quiet and idyllic

37. Cumberworth United C.C. - Cumberworth Lane

Cumberworth is a typical amateur, village club. There is a great tradition of youngsters coming through the ranks: in our current 1st XI there are nine homegrown players.

[Club secretary, Phil Senior]

Look out for the cuckoo-like character who jumps out of his box at Cumberworth Lane. Every time a run is scored, or a wicket is taken, or an over is finished, a little lad opens the hatch at the top of the pavilion and pops his head out. Yes, he's the scoreboard operator, and on Saturday afternoons his job is a pretty busy one.



Cumberworth United C.C. play their home games on the outskirts of Lower Cumberworth. They play in the Huddersfield Central League, and have also taken part in the National Village Championship. On a summer's day,

Cumberworth comes across as the ultimate in quiet and idyllic village venues. It is the immediate environs that help to foster this impression. There are farmers' fields all around, with a variety of animals on display; around and about there are tan-coloured houses and cottages; and the occasional tractor passes by on the road behind the bowler's arm. It actually has the feel of a French landscape - the colours, the smells, the views. If it wasn't for the summer sport being played out by 22 men in all-white, you might just think you were in Provence.

After a spell in the Huddersfield & District Combination, the club joined the Central League in 1919, and in the 1920s it won an array of silverware. Down the years, Cumberworth have been indebted to a variety of key players - Joe Noble, Douglas Cook, Thomas Horn and Arthur Horn, to name only four - but Friend Allsop (1901-52) was the undoubted star. An ex-miner, he was the top batsman in the side and was particularly influential in 1923 when his team won a hat-trick of trophies and he himself won the 1st XI batting prize. One teammate said of him: 'There was never a more respected and honoured son of the village...A more genuinely humble and reserved man I never met...I never knew Friend criticise an umpire...I cannot remember him causing a row or a scene. I ran him out twice during our partnership, still he never grumbled a word although I knew he was hurt.' The Allsop Cup - played for annually by Central League teams - was named after him, such was his stature in local cricket circles.

Although Cumberworth won the final of the 1931 Holden Cup by the huge margin of 278 runs, and although 1933 was 'another glorious year for this small village', historian Gordon Hinchcliffe says the 'great era of Cumberworth cricket' ended in the 1930s.

The emergence of cricket in Cumberworth is an intriguing story. We know of a team called the Young Men's Bible Class XI, which was linked to the Primitive Methodist church in the village and played at Dozing Field. We are also told of the Foresters Arms, a pub side that played at Bromley Field, near Croft Head - a venue that sat on top of four acres of coal. Apparently, in the 1890s the two teams merged to form Cumberworth United under the presidency of Henry Josiah Brierley, who owned Kirkstyles. There was also a side called Upper Cumberworth C.C., who played in the Central League (alongside Cumberworth United), but who were suspended from competition in 1923 'until improvements were made to their ground'. Phil Senior, club secretary, says: 'It's a bit confusing. At one point there may actually have been *three* cricket teams in the village, but the fact is that in the early twentieth century there was only one: Cumberworth United. And the "United" denoted the merger of two, or three, sides, *not* the merger of Lower and Upper Cumberworth, or teams from the two villages.' The 'new' club tasted knockout success in 1892 and 1894. A local poet wrote about the latter: 'Cumberworth had won the cup and Thurstonland were

done, Hats and bonnets, umbrellas and sticks were flying all around, and children like young kittens rolled and tumbled on the ground.'

The various slopes and gradients give the Cumberworth Lane ground a slightly rustic feel, but the new pavilion demonstrates that the club is aware of twenty-first century realities. It went up in 1996 thanks to a grant from the Lottery Sports Fund and is fully modernised, with a ramp for disabled access, a superbly kitted-out kitchen, and a pair of spacious changing rooms either side of the food-preparation area. (Prior to 1996, the 'tent' had been sited in a variety of different positions on the perimeter of the ground).

Refreshments are a key aspect of any Saturday afternoon at Cumberworth Lane: the volunteer helpers set to work on sandwich-making early on in the afternoon, the kitchen area is decked out in 'Yorkshire Tea' memorabilia (posters, towels etc.), and the price list tells us that a full tea costs £2.30 and a cup of tea just 30p. Framed photos of the 1923 and 1957 sides indicate that Cumberworth have a proud and illustrious heritage.

Close to the pavilion there is room for children to play and for sun-seeking spectators to unpack their deckchairs, unfurl their rugs and gossip about goings-on in the village. In the middle of summer, parts of the outfield are parched. The playing area as a whole has the feel of a 'bowl'. It is enclosed, slightly uneven, and rises up to the roadside. Around the perimeter there is a little gully-style drain, a number of benches, and dozens of little white plastic markers that denote the boundary. There are no sightscreens - just a wall and a fence that have been whitened. Occasionally, a dog wanders onto the playing area, and then goes off to play ball with the children on the boundary's edge.

It seems that the main problem at Cumberworth is parking. Cumberworth Lane is fairly narrow, and once a few spectators have parked their vehicles on this road, close to the ground, it becomes a difficult lane to navigate. Buses, fire engines and farm vehicles are all confronted by this unique Saturday-afternoon challenge. Parked cars are also in the line of fire. Any batsman who strikes a straight six from the bottom end is liable to endanger them. It is not a big ground, so the boundaries are very reachable. No wonder a pavilion notice says: 'Cars parked at owners' risk'. Even local joggers have to beware.

The Romans left Cumberworth in 40AD. In ancient times, the settlement was known as 'Cumbreuerde' (a Celtic name denoting 'the holding of Cumbra') and also 'Cumbreworde' (as mentioned in the Domesday Survey). In medieval times, local folk - known as 'Cumberworthians' - were notorious for leaving waste in the middle of the road and not paying their tithes. The village does not have its own train station but it does have a tunnel. In terms of buildings, the place is noted for St. Nicholas's church (which dates originally from 1299), the First School and the brickworks. There is also an annual gala. In the nineteenth century, Cumberworth was home to a colony of weavers, but a local study tells us that in

1847 the place contained: 1 cow doctor, 1 butcher, 11 farmers, 5 shopkeepers, 3 tailors and 1 pub - the Foresters Arms.

The natural landscape around and about is attractive, and hilly. Cumberworth lies on ridges of high ground north of Denby Dale - as one seventeenth-century cleric put it, it is a 'place in the mountains'. Not so long ago, coal, quarries and clay were the key industries; today, it is a sleepy, and very pretty, commuter zone. It is famous for drainpipe-production and grouse-shooting, and mention should also be made of another cricketing arena, Bonfire Hill, where many village children learnt the game informally.

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

