

No lying on the ground!

30. Holmfirth C.C. - Bridge Fold

Please help the tea ladies by returning your plate. Thank you.

[Notice in the pavilion - 2002]

Huddersfield Road is a big flat ground. Spectators can hear bird sounds and the trickle of the nearby stream, but there's also the noise of passing cars on the A6024. The club's roadside HQ is pleasantly enclosed by a range of emerald green trees, a couple of mills, a scattering of tall houses and a rather plush bowling club.

Decades ago it was the focal-point of the town, but not now. Denis Marshall, cricket secretary at the club since 1947, takes up the story: 'In the old days, before all the *Last of the Summer Wine* tourism, this place was the centre of attention in Holmfirth. All the local mill-owners used to get involved and come down and watch games. The ground was regularly full and collections would raise a lot of brass. But sadly, those days have gone.'

Yes, once upon a time, Holmfirth was noted for its cricket club, and its lido, and its show, and many other things besides. But today it is a tourist destination, regularly featured in the Sunday papers' travel sections and famous all around the world on account of Compo and Co.. And the local council exploits the town's new-found fame to the full. One glossy brochure states: 'Holmfirth, the largest market town in the Holme Valley, is best known as the home of *Last of the Summer Wine*. Visitors to Holmfirth will recognise settings from the popular TV comedy, which has been on our screens for over 30 years.' But it does go on to paint a more realistic picture: 'Holmfirth's development was linked to textiles, moorland sheep, fast flowing streams and rivers, weavers' cottages and impressive mills.'

Marshall, a former accountant, is an institution due to his decades of devoted service. He says: 'Behind the pavilion there used to be tennis courts and bowling greens, but the land was bought off us during the last war. A munitions factory was built and the club was compensated financially.'

The history of HCC is dominated by big personalities: Freddie Jakeman - Holmfirth product who went on to score 258* for Yorkshire against Essex in 1951 (he also played for Northamptonshire and MCC; his sons Stuart and Bruce, and his brother Walter, also turned out for Holmfirth); Arnie Sidebottom - ex-Holmfirth pro whose benefit match was staged at the ground; and Allan Lamb - who played his first cricket in England at Huddersfield Road. Two other interesting characters are David Whiteley, club president, and current groundsman, Scott Moody, who was also on the staff at Huddersfield Town.

Holmfirth's ground is a short walk from the *Last of the Summer Wine* cafes that dominate the town centre. The arena is easy to find, but it's not easy to enter. An iron bridge over the nearby stream is bolted up, the entrance via the adjacent bowling club is hidden from the road, and the main entrance is subtly located on the other side of a particularly ugly scrap merchant's yard. There is room for parking in front of the pavilion and by the bowling club.

But once inside, the ground is a delight: the charmingly dated scoreboard, the rows of handsome trees that overlook proceedings, and the lovely 'curve' to the outfield area on the main-road side. The outfield is a feature in itself. Some clubs have created playing surfaces out of large, undulating farmers' fields. Holmfirth's outfield, on the other hand, is exquisite - flat, well cut and surrounded by a pleasing white-trimmed low perimeter wall. You could play bowls or snooker on it. Literally.

The facilities are more than adequate: a two-storey pavilion (dressing rooms on the ground floor; bar and tea rooms above), a large, clear scoreboard, a plethora of benches and sitting areas for spectators, a practice net on the boundary's edge, a roller, a cutter, and a selection of other ground-

maintenance gear.

The pavilion is a particularly interesting building. From afar you are struck by its old-fashioned black-and-whiteness, the flickering lights on inside, and the cute collection of advertising boards that have been fixed onto its frontage. The downstairs area is dominated by noticeboards, changing facilities and the smell of sweaty men playing sport. Upstairs there's a smell of beer (the bar) and food (the kitchen area - full tea £2.50, sandwich £1.50, cake 50p, coffee 60p, tea 50p). Meanwhile, the staircase is covered in a slightly ragged carpet, one that has been trampled on by far too many cricketers' spikes.

The bar is a typical cricket club bar. Decorating the walls in bar and tea room are an amazing array of photos, paintings and momentos. The highlight is a superb oil painting of the ground - 'Dexter Ellis, 1973'. Not far behind is a truly bizarre scorecard. The caption reads: HOLMFIRTH JUNIORS BOWLED HOLMBRIDGE OUT FOR 1 RUN. And the single run scored was an extra. Poor lads.

Holmfirth C.C., whose club crest features a stag's head, was founded on 5 May 1850 and the first meetings it held took place in the Crown Hotel. In this period we are told that committee members had to send their apologies to meetings - otherwise they were fined - and that unauthorised persons playing on the cricket field could be fined one shilling per incident. But the most interesting rules were these:

No fielder be allowed to smoke or lie on the ground during play; any member violating this rule will be fined one penny for each offence.

If any member appear intoxicated on the cricket ground or in the meeting room or conduct himself in a disorderly manner, he shall be fined for the first offence 1/-, for the second offence 2/6, for the third offence 5/-, and for the fourth offence he shall be expelled.

In the late nineteenth century, Holmfirth were founder members of both the Alliance League and the Huddersfield & District League. The club won the Byrom Shield in 1897, and in the weeks and months that followed club members composed a special anthem in honour of the skipper, Mr. A. Robinson.

In the 1930s the future of the Huddersfield Road ground was put in jeopardy, but as one club official put it, 'warmhearted support from the public of Holmfirth' saved the day; the money was raised and the ground and its pavilion became the property of the club.

Thereafter, the club prospered on the field and off it. They won Section A in 1940 and the Sykes Cup in 1941. On 4 September 1943 Holmfirth bowled Huddersfield out for a total of 6 (A. Noble, the pro, took 6-3) and claimed victory by 24 runs. Twenty-three years later, in 1966, J. Sullivan produced one of the best-ever all-round performances in club colours, scoring 173 not out with the bat and claiming 6-66 with the ball. By 1969 the upstairs pavilion bar was in operation, and serving 'Double Diamond, Skol Lager, Tetleys and Ansell's ales on draught'.

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