

A black sightscreen?

14. Broad Oak C.C. - Broad Oak Farm

In 1904 the premises were extended, with a foundation stone for the extension being laid by Mr J. W. Lockwood. It was also at that time that the canny Broad Oakers hit on a way of keeping the outfield closely cropped. Sheep were bought to graze on the field and the club got an extra cut by shearing the sheep and selling the wool. Not only that, when the animals were later slaughtered they sold the skins and carcasses!

[Little Acorns... - A Century of Cricket at Broad Oak 1880-1980 - 1980]

The walk from Cowlersley Junction to Broad Oak C.C. is long and uphill. You pass lots of houses, three corner shops and a bowling green. And then, just as you're looking rightwards across the Colne Valley and admiring the spectacular long-range panoramas, you see a lovely patch of greenery on your left. When you enter the ground, you feel that you are on top of a very high plateau. The air is cool, and there seems to be little higher ground. Is it the highest cricketing venue in the area? A Broad Oak regular supplies the answer: 'Marsden and Hall Bower will be higher - there's a bit of wind up there.'

Broad Oak are members of the Huddersfield League, and before they moved to Broad Oak Farm they had already played at three other venues: Barrel's Field (Well Oil), a mowing field at The Rock, and a school playground. The club was founded in 1880, and in its infancy there were two very significant dates: 1883, when a local weavers' strike enabled members to spend time doing maintenance work on the ground; and 1884, when the club engaged its first professional, membership cards were introduced, the first 'athletic festival' was held at the ground, and the club became a founder member of the Huddersfield & District Cricket Alliance.

Initially, the club's nickname was 'The Roadsiders'. They had some early problems. One was particularly bizarre: after hardworking members turned the wall at one end of the ground into a sightscreen by painting it white, a local farmer sabotaged their plans by painting it black!

Broad Oak owe a debt of gratitude to a number of people who made a contribution in the 1880s and 1890s:

Mrs. Edmund Walker - who offered the Broad Oak Farm site to the embryonic

club.

John Varley - local farmer whose cows used to trample all over the wicket (often quite a useful service).

James Dyson - Linthwaite churchwarden who helped negotiate the Broad Oak Farm deal.

J.E. Kaye - Linthwaite churchwarden who was an early president of the club.

Joseph Sykes - publican at Th'Alma who organised a match between married men and bachelors, which helped the club pay its annual rent (he actually donated £5).

It should be noted here that the local church and the local pub played a key role in the emergence of Broad Oak C.C. - a pattern that has been repeated in many other villages up and down Yorkshire, and throughout the country.

The story of the infant club can also be told through numbers: the annual ground rent was £10; the number of players in early sides was 18; the cost to the club of creating the main entrance to the ground was 2s 6d; the cost of building the wall on the Church Lane side was £25; the weekly wage paid to Broad Oak's first professional player, Bradley Thornton (who was expected to practice two nights per week), was 7s 6d.

Broad Oak came of age in the 1930s when they won the Sykes Cup three times (1930, 1931 and 1934) and the Section B title twice (1932 and 1935). They carried this form into the post-war years, claiming the Section A title in 1953 and 1955.

It may not be the highest ground in the area, but it is certainly one of the most pleasant in terms of setting and immediate environs. On one side, trees and empty fields; on the other, Linthwaite parish church - a distinguished looking building that, for some locals, marks the centre-point of Linthwaite village. Church Lane and Cowlersley Lane border the playing surface at the top and bottom ends. Th'Alma pub is only a six-hit away, and as one Broad Oak member revealed, the locals like nothing more than supping their ale on a Saturday teatime and then, weather permitting, strolling across to yell a few supportive noises at the home team's players. And when the sun is shining, the club sometimes puts on a BBQ at home fixtures.

Players and club officials alike talk about the wonderfully friendly atmosphere at the venue. It's not just the pub on the opposite side of the road but the refreshing mixture of people who congregate on the boundary's edge or around the TV and pool table in the club bar. One current player explained: 'It's a good family atmosphere. There are a lot of youngsters at the club and a lot of

enthusiastic locals. Sometimes when the first team is at home, and it's a nice summer's day, you can get a crowd of between 50 and 70.'

The playing surface is of a reasonable size, and slightly undulating; in early season it can actually become a little mossy. There are a variety of wickets available for usage - including an artificial one - and as one local cricketer confirmed: 'The outside tracks are used more in April and May and those located towards the middle come into their own as the season goes on. The 1st XI tend to play on the more central wickets.' But whichever tracks are used, the Broad Oak venue has a reputation to keep. Another player said: 'It's usually a very good batting track, but also helpful for bowlers, particularly quickies and slow bowlers. Opposition batters like to bat here because it's pretty dry.'

The pavilion is a neat two-storey building - with dressing rooms upstairs and a double garage below for the current groundsman, Craig McCreadie, to work out of. McCreadie is an ex-Broad Oak player and is also employed by Thongsbridge C.C. and Slaithwaite C.C. to tend to their grounds. As if to emphasise his credentials, McCreadie runs a company called McTurf, whose business seems pretty clear from its name. The reverse 'L'-shaped clubhouse that greets the visitor on entering the ground houses a bar (complete with framed memorabilia), toilets and tea room.

The kitchen staff are very organised. The long narrow tables are normally set for 22+ eaters, and posh cake dishes are used. No wonder that as far back as 1969 the club wanted to publicise its 'high-class teas' and 'modern bar and surrounds'. There is ample parking space adjacent to the pavilion with room for probably 30+ vehicles. On a cold day, the parking area offers car owners and their passengers the ideal vantage point.

As Malcolm Hoyle, club president, put it in 1980: 'Thanks to...the hard work of a dedicated band of volunteers, both men and women, Broad Oak now offers modern amenities for players, spectators and club members.' And the Broad Oak Farm venue still boasts spectacular views.

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