

# Flying the flag

## 42. Skelmanthorpe C.C. – Lidgett Lane

*Welcome to Skelmanthorpe Cricket Club. Please note these are private grounds and cars are parked entirely at the owners' risk. Please keep dogs on a lead. No ball games whilst a match is in progress. Thank you for your support.*

[Notice at Lidgett Lane]

Skelmanthorpe's impressive ground on Lidgett Lane is situated just off the B6116 from Huddersfield into Scissett. You see a charity shop, a church, an exotic restaurant called Volare, and also the community fire station as you near the ground. Three houses and three bungalows look out over the venue on Lidgett Lane - and they, like the many passing cars, are in serious danger every time a big-hitting batsman gets to the crease. The village is famous for its brass band, its proximity to Emley Mast, and its cricket club.

At Lidgett Lane, there is invariably a sizeable crowd - spread right round the boundary's edge. Club officials are pretty busy on matchdays: collecting gate money (£1 per person), collecting beer money for the batsman who's just made a fifty, and vending raffle tickets. There are four advertising hoardings by the main entrance and others on the boundary's edge (Hillam Tyres, Mower World and Garden Centre, Nortonthorpe Industrial Units, Gawthorpe's Butchers, for example). These adverts enable Skelmanthorpe to pay their professional. Overall it is a very pleasant setting - up on a level and set back from the road. However, seasoned cricket-watchers say that on a cold day, it is *very* cold.

Neat and compact, the playing area undulates slightly in one corner. There is a narrow ditch around the perimeter of the ground, but grass now grows there. Locals claim that the playing surface is small compared to some in the Huddersfield area, but that the quality of the outfield has improved in recent years. The white-sheeted sightscreens are on wheels, and there's also white gravel and a whitewashed dry stone wall to further enhance the batsmen's vision. Benches are dotted all around, which gives

the place a nice professional feel.

According to one club official, the Skelmanthorpe square is 'well kept and looked after'. One Sunday in 2002, the home side made 320-8 and the opposition totalled 313 - so there are plenty of runs to be had. There are three wickets, plus one artificial strip. The garage under the handsome scorebox contains everything a local league groundsman could wish for: mower, wheelbarrow, spades, rakes, bits of wood and rope, and thousands of white paint pots. The arena is surrounded by pretty fields and farm tracks, and according to one ex-Skelmanthorpe groundsman, 'it is a lovely little venue'.



**A Team Photo from the 1970s**

Skelmanthorpe C.C. was founded in 1892 and joined the Huddersfield Central League in 1919. It was several decades later, in the 1950s, when the current pavilion was built, and in the early-1980s when the distinguished-looking clock was relocated from the scorebox to the pavilion. On the field, the last two decades have been extraordinary. The club did the treble in the 1980s, switched to the Huddersfield League in 1987, and did the 'new double' in 1990. In 2003 they just lost out to Kirkburton in the Sykes Cup. The final was staged at Elland, but this

didn't stop bus-loads of Skelmanthorpe fans from making the journey.

The pavilion is an attractive bungalow-style wood building, with a smart patio in front (usually inhabited by wine-drinkers). The cricketers' tea is laid out on small, neat tables, there's always homemade food on the agenda (for visiting spectators a full tea costs £2, a salad tea £1.50, a piece of cake 30p, and tea or coffee 25p), and the beer mats carry the Carlsberg logo. On the walls are pictures of former pros, framed photos of famous XIs, and a limited-edition souvenir plate (complete with view of the ground - only 200 were produced). The pavilion was extended, the changing rooms were improved, and showers were installed after Skelmanthorpe joined the Huddersfield League. And a tricolour 'S.C.C.' flag (red, white, blue) is hoisted on a pole just outside. There are ads for Romida Sports and Solo's Tandoori visible, and as one visiting spectator says: 'Skelmanthorpe give off the impression that they are an extremely aspirational club.'

Over the years, the club has had its fair share of top pros: Ronnie Irani, Paras Mhambrey, Shahid Mahboob and Mike Bocarro. On the administrative side there have been big names aplenty: Trevor Heeley, the club official to whom the pavilion building is dedicated (he acted as club secretary for 37 years); Adrian Whittaker, a Central League VIP; and Keith Clarkson, an ex-player and groundsman who is remembered via a dedication on one of the boundary benches. And the club is very progressive. On matchdays it publishes a special customised programme, and it should also be noted that S.C.C. is managed by two female members (Margaret Dollive, club chairperson, and Beverley Crossland, vice-chair) and puts out a women's XI too.

In yesteryear Skelmanthorpe was known as 'Skilmannathorpe' or 'Skelmansthorpe'; until a few hundred years ago that is, when it was realised that Skelmansthorpe meant something like 'Town of the Liar and Murderer' and the name was changed to 'Skelmanthorpe'. It is known colloquially as 'Shat' on account of the navvies who used to 'shatter' rocks as they built the old railway.

The village is archetypal West Yorkshire: it boasts spectacular rural vistas and a rich textile heritage, plus a host of local traditions, like Skelmanthorpe Feast, a time for bull- and bear-baiting and organised dog fights. According to writer John Wilkinson, the place is also renowned for 'rough behaviour'. Another local writer put pen to paper to describe one particular Feast: 'The village green...was a scene of wild confusion. The public houses were crowded with drunken revellers, who caroused all day and made night hideous with their quarrels and disturbances...Often two

powerful young men would strip and enter the ring for a brutal prize fight, or a match of wrestling. Among these scenes of revelry would be mountebanks, showmen, fortune-telling gypsies, vagabonds, and thieves from every quarter. The din, uproar and strife lasted day and night...'

In terms of industry, Skelmanthorpe was once a centre for handloom weaving, and as late as 1890 there were 200 working handlooms in the village. It is also known for its dyeing and finishing trades. Today, it is full of former clothiers' cottages, and according to Wilkinson the centre of the village is a 'labyrinth of narrow winding roads'. Skelmanthorpe is famous for other things: its Mechanics Institute, its Mutual Improvement Society and its Naturalists' Society. In 1819 the village was at the forefront of political struggles and a special flag was taken to many rallies and demonstrations. 'Skelmanthorp,' it proclaimed, 'will not rest Satisfied with the Suffrage being anything but Universal' (note yet another way of spelling the place-name and the interesting use of capital letters). Skelmanthorpe also has a tacky claim to fame: the 1970s comedy *Oh No It's Selwyn Froggett* was filmed in the village.

The cricket club is a focal-point for the local community. It has forged links with St. Aidan's CE First School and also hires its premises out to local organisations such as Skelmanthorpe Band.

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