

The new *Holme Valley Echo* newspaper has started serialising Cricket Heritage Project club histories, starting with Honley CC and Holmbridge CC

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SUMMER IS HERE... AND THAT MEANS THE CRICKET SEASON IS UPON US AGAIN IN THE FIRST OF A SERIES OF Peter Davies, LEADER OF THE £50,000 CRICKET HERITAGE PROJECT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HEDDERSFIELD, SURVEYS THE HISTORY OF HONLEY CRICKET CLUB

Cricket Through the Ages

ACCORDING to a regional newspaper which published a series of historical articles about leading local clubs in 1932, 'around about 1848, Honley was quite a noted centre of cricket'. At this time the club was renowned for 'the stern fights which it waged against the strongest clubs in the district, and particularly against the...Lascelles Hall team'. Apparently, the first 'cricket field was situated at the top of Westgate, being the greater portion of the land which until later built upon was known as the 'Feast Ground'.

Over 130 years ago, the cricket club in Honley was closely linked to the Parish Church. In 1932 the Huddersfield Daily Examiner explained that the club was at one time 'run under the auspices of the Parish Church' and was called Honley St. Mary's Cricket Club. However, the relationship was ended in 1879, when the name Honley Cricket Club was adopted.

G.W. Littlewood was the first professional cricketer to be employed by Honley Cricket Club. He was engaged in 1884 and paid 35/- per week. The following year Herbert Lodge became both professional and groundskeeper for the club. Lodge was paid 36/- a week and given a benefit match by the club and, as can be seen, he certainly earned his money.

By the end of 1915 the effects of the First World War had begun to bite. The club's annual report for the 1915 season explained that 'practically all the eligible players having joined the Army or Navy to the extent of about 60!'.

It was later decided, at the 1916 AGM, that 'we discontinue cricket for 1916... write to the League Sec. that we have abandoned cricket' and 'inscribe a Roll of Honour to the men who have joined the Army and Navy during the Great War'.

Throughout its existence, Honley CC has assisted many other local organisations. Between the late-1890s and the 1930s, Honley Tennis Club and Honley Victoria Cycling Club were allowed to use the ground, as was the local Football Club from 1906 to 1921.

In the 1930s Holmfirth Harriers, Holme Valley Grammar School, the British Legion and the Wesleyans also became tenants, while the Huddersfield Hockey Club remained in residence from this

time into the 1980s.

At the beginning of the 1950s, Sykes Cup ties were played to a finish, with no restriction on time or overs. Each innings was compulsorily suspended after either 2½ hours or when 150 runs were scored, and then played to completion upon its resumption.

This format resulted in a remarkable contest taking place at the semi-final stage in 1952. Honley, who were to win the second division title that year, faced Broad Oak from the first division at Fartown.

In a period of 7 hours 17 minutes Honley had amassed 527 runs in 187 overs, with Jim Wood scoring 189 runs in 6 hours and 25 minutes. For Broad Oak the daunting final run chase began that Monday evening and ended on Tuesday 22 July at 269 all out. By this time John Crowther (139) had scored the second century of the match and Jim Wood had completed his marvellous contribution to the game by taking 7 wickets for 70 runs in 29 overs.

After several unsuccessful appearances in the final, the Honley Sykes Cup hoodoo was finally broken in 1982, with a seven-wicket victory over Prinrose Hill. Skipper Bruce Jakeman (1 for 24 and 35 not out) and Mike Bocarro (2 for 8 and 37 not out), were prominent in a solid team performance, while 15-year-old Jamie Hincheliffe took 4 for 45.

For stalwart Peter Green, the success had come after 27 years with the club and three previous final appearances. He summed up the sense of euphoria and relief at Far End, by describing the win as 'the best moment of my cricketing career'.

Today, Honley are an ambitious and prestigious cricket club, with a beautiful ground and forward-thinking officials.



Honley Cricket Club has been the scene of some dramatic matches over its history.



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A club with a rich history

In the second of his reports on the history of cricket in the Holme Valley, DR PETER DAVIES, Leader of the Cricket Heritage Project at the University of Huddersfield, turns his attention to Holmbridge.

A ~~putted history inserted into a~~ Holmbridge Cricket Club minute book says that there was a club with a ground in Holme in 1868 but visiting teams felt it was 'too far out' so fixtures were presumably a problem. Following this difficulty, a nucleus of players moved to Holmbridge in the late 1870s to a field opposite the Commercial Inn, now the Bridge Tavern and behind St. David's Church.

The present field has been the club's home since 1886. It was levelled by members and rented from local mill-owners W.H. & I. Barber until purchased from them on the mill's closure in 1975.

The ground was never the easiest to play on and a spokesperson from the time said that "50 runs was regarded as a good score" in the very early days.

Reports in the *Holmfirth Express* of the club's presentation dinner in 1954 refer to remarks about an incredible game in 1888 when Holmbridge were dismissed for 35 - but then bowled out local rivals Scholes for just 13. This prompted a letter from someone signing himself as 'The Lad from Scholes'.

The writer "well remembered seeing that match as I was then a lad from Scholes, just at the beginning of my teen age." He told of a general feeling that Holmbridge had already lost the match with such a low score - apparently the visitors were so confident that Fred Lockwood, uncle of Kenyon Lockwood, the Scholes captain, 'took some of the Scholes spectacles to the Commercial Inn in anticipation of Scholes winning easily'.

In 1909 Holmbridge 1st XI were crowned champions of the Huddersfield Association League and also lifted the Lumb Cup.

The club joined the Huddersfield Central League in 1915, at the same time as Leymoot, Meltham, Scholes and Thongsbridge.

Holmbridge, however, left the Central League in 1916 as the First World War meant an acute shortage of players.



In common with other clubs, Holmbridge had a Ladies Team in the early part of the 20th Century



Holmbridge Cricket Team, photographed in the 1920s

Just one year after re-joining the league, the club enjoyed its first Huddersfield Central League success in 1921. The 2nd XI won the league and cup double, a feat the side was to repeat the following season.

In 1933 the club bought a horse for £10 to keep the grass on the pitch in check.

However, by 1937 it was made redundant after the club's first motor mower was purchased.

The horse was then sold for 10/- (50p).

Because Holmbridge leased their ground from a local mill owner, the club was not allowed to play after 6pm on a Sunday - such was the bond that existed between their landlord and St. David's parish church, just a six-hit away from the cricket pitch on the other side of Woodhead Road. This meant any match not concluded by 6pm had to be adjourned until Monday.

Holmbridge Cricket Club almost didn't survive the 1960s. An Extraordinary General Meeting was held in 1966, 'concerning whether the club still carries on in season 1967. No formal record of what was said at the meeting exists, but it was decided to carry on and, indeed, soon afterwards it was decided to approach leading player S. Cartwright with a view



A prize-giving dinner programme from 1956, signed by the legendary Len Hutton



to his being engaged as a professional. But by 1968 the crisis had returned and another EGM was necessary before the players renewed their commitment to keep the club alive.

Woodhead Road is famous for the grass bank that runs alongside the boundary to the left as you look out from the pavilion. A good two-thirds of this banking was cut away and demolished in 1954 - to leave it as it is now. In the mid-1990s, the wall on the same side was rebuilt. In between, in 1980, the pavilion building was extended.

In 1975 a decision was made to buy the ground for £750. A sub-committee was formed to coordinate fundraising efforts and the encouraging sum of £65 was collected on the night. It was decided to apply for grant aid to Kirklees Metropolitan Council, which was successful, and four club members, T. Swift, I. Taylor, J. Booth and R. Gapper, became trustees.

So charming is Holmbridge's ground that the producers of TV series *Last of the Summer Wine* once asked permission to film at the venue.

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