

# A surgeon and a merchant

## 19. Almondbury C.C. - Fernside Avenue

*Last winter the players themselves not only stripped the turf at the bottom end of the field but also levelled the ground with tipping from the adjoining housing estate, and re-laying the turf made a great improvement to playing conditions.*

*[60 Years of Glorious Cricket! Huddersfield and District Cricket League Diamond Jubilee 1891-1951 - 1951]*

Almondbury C.C. was founded in 1874. Not a lot is known about this event, but two local men were instrumental: Edward Dyson, a surgeon, and Charles H. Taylor, a merchant. In the same year - on 24 November - it acquired a lease for Fernside Avenue, and has played there ever since.

Almondbury were one of the founding members of the Huddersfield Central League in 1913. They won the championship two years later but decided to join the Huddersfield & District League in 1926. They were a force to be reckoned with in the 1940s and 1950s - they won Section A in 1950 and 1951 - and in Francis Bedford and Eddie Leadbeater they had two outstanding players (Leadbeater went on to play for Yorkshire, Warwickshire and England, served as Almondbury pro in later years, and also had experience of the Bradford League).



EDDIE LEADBEATER sends down another teasing delivery.

Today, Almondbury are renowned for bringing on talented professionals. One recent example was Shahid Nawaz, who began his career at Fernside Avenue before moving on to Read C.C., in the Ribblesdale League, in 1996.

Almondbury - or 'Ambry' or 'Awmbrey' or 'Alemanberie' - means 'stronghold of the whole community' and rated a mention in the Domesday Book of 1086. In ancient times it was designated a 'township' or 'parish' (or occasionally even a 'city'), but it has come to be known as 'the village on the hill'. It is situated three miles south-east of Huddersfield - uphill - and once upon a time it was a key staging post on highways heading south. Almondbury's claim is that it has been continuously settled for more than 1,000 years.

In 1991 Almondbury had a population of 7,041. Historically, it is most famous for its wool markets, its textile mills and its rebellious streak (in 1829 fancy weavers in the village were in revolt). Its parish church - All Hallows - goes back to 1150 (some parts of it at least) and is noted for its eight tuneful bells. Almondbury received its Market Charter in 1294 and is also famous for its unique dialect, its tradition of rushbearing and bull-baiting, its annual gala, its special line in oatcakes, and its stocks and gallows ('for martyrs, criminals and witches'). In the National Commercial Directory of 1834, it was described as 'a populous township and respectable village'.



Almondbury is a pleasant area. Apart from Castle Hill - a key landmark and the most important local archeological site (900 feet high, surrounded by very steep slopes, and boasting a history that goes back to 590BC) - Almondbury is noted for its 'villagey' atmosphere and its pubs. One writer says that 'in bygone days Almondbury was a place of distinction', on account of its markets and courts, and in the twenty-first century it is still regarded as a comfortable and distinguished place to live.

The Fernside Avenue ground is located close to three schools - Almondbury High, Greenside Infants, and Almondbury Juniors - in the heart of Almondbury village. Emley Mast together with the High School (built in 1964 as a secondary modern, extended in 1964 and 1998, but a school that was fearing for its future relatively recently) are the dominant landmarks, but all around there are interesting views looking out towards Lepton, Kirkburton and beyond. The rolling hills of South Kirklees are there to admire in all their glory. The perimeter of the field is surrounded by trees, a low white wall at the bottom end, the odd bench for spectators, and a decent-sized parking area near the main entrance.

The venue has certainly impressed Huddersfield League officials. In 1963 and 1996 it won the F.E. Greenwood Ground Trophy, awarded annually to 'the club whose ground was of a particular high standard and created improvements to the playing area and amenities whilst maintained by a part-time groundsman.' (It also shared the award with Honley in 1975).

Even in the immediate post-war years, the ground was surrounded by houses. Half a century on, this is still the case. In fact, if you are visiting the ground for the first time there is a good chance that you probably won't find it. As you cruise up and down Fernside Avenue, it is not at all easy to spot the little track and the handsome white gates that mark the entrance to the arena.

In 1950 club members spent weeks and weeks taking up turf at the bottom end of the ground in an effort to level the ground, and the benefits of this hard work can be seen today. Club chairman Donald Earnshaw says: 'Apart from the levelling-off, which has reduced the impact of the slope, there have been very few changes at the ground over the years. We've certainly worked hard on the wicket. Before 1993 there were a few problems, but since that date we've taken expert advice and it's paid off. We've had to shell out a bit of money, but the square is an important issue. And I should know. I'm the groundsman too!'

The 'no smoking' pavilion is an interesting building. It is a long, low

bungalow-style structure, yellowy-cream coloured, with a garage attached and the scoreboard also incorporated into the design. It was opened on 16 May 1970 and a large plaque inside tells us that it is dedicated to the memory of G.C. Garrard Esq., club president between 1966 and 1970. Mr Garrard's financial help made the construction of the building possible.

When you step inside the pavilion you find the kitchen and tea room to the left and the dressing rooms to the right. At Almondbury a full tea costs £2.20 (this includes two teacakes, a cake and a mug of tea), a sandwich teacake or pie 65p, a piece of cake 45p, tea/coffee 45p, and canned drinks 35p. Attached to the wall are a club fixture list, a 'Welcome to Almondbury Cricket Club' sign, and a colour poster featuring the dazzling mugshot of Yorkshire and England fast bowler Ryan Sidebottom - a man with local connections. The dressing-room area has recently been redeveloped thanks to help from the Sports Council, and the new facilities were officially opened on 15 August 1989. Just outside the pavilion are some vividly-coloured flowers - red, white and pink - and a set of green benches.

Earnshaw says: 'In the early twenty-first century, I would say that Almondbury is a "town club" in many ways. We're surrounded by a big post-war housing estate, but we were here first. A hundred years ago, we were surrounded by green fields and were very much a club located out in the country. How things have changed!'

Almondbury are also an entrepreneurial club. They installed an artificial wicket in 2003, and they currently lease out Fernside Avenue to a pair of Evening League sides: Natwest and J.T. Ellis, the Aspley-based furniture company.

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