

Quintessentially English

40. Kirkburton C.C. - Riley Park

One cannot forget the enthusiastic...lady workers who maintain the reputation of serving such splendid teas, which has been a feature of the club's social side for a large number of years.

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

Kirkburton - just south of Fenay Bridge, just north of Shelley - lies almost five miles south-east of Huddersfield, 700-800 feet above sea level. One local writer has described the place as 'a friendly conglomeration of Yorkshire stone cottages nestling amid pleasant pasture and woodland'. In days gone by it forged a reputation for coal mining and wool manufacture, but today it is an attractive commuter village with an extremely enviable image.

There is something particularly English about Kirkburton: the immaculate homes, the hedgerows, and the parish church with a George Cross fluttering from on top. All Hallows, or the 'Church of Burton', boasts a 78-foot tower and is the key landmark in the village. There are horses and sheep in the nearby fields, not forgetting dandelions aplenty. It is a lovely rural location, but the village does have a significant industrial heritage. In yesteryear its specialism was woollen and worsted manufactures, and as such it was home to a variety of factories and mills - the most famous being Springfield Mill (built in 1834).

There are other interesting things about Kirkburton: once upon a time, in the hey-day of the railways, it had its own branch line; it possessed a pair of Methodist chapels (Wesleyan and Primitive); and in 1921 a War Memorial was erected in the village. In the post-war years, it also became famous in political terms. 'Kirkburton Urban District' was not a pretty-sounding municipal entity; nor did it do the place any favours in terms of public relations (the area is anything but *urban*); but the body existed, and put the place on the map.

Kirkburton C.C. were founded in 1860 and currently play in the Huddersfield League. Their hilly ground, on Riley Lane, is surrounded

on one side by luxury houses and bungalows, built in the 1960s and 1970s; most have grown tall hedges or covered their rear windows with iron covers or netting to save a large glazier's bill in the event of a middle-order batsman swinging to leg. (Some of the bungalows also boast verandas - perfect for cricket-loving residents). On other sides, it is farmers' fields and greenery that border onto the turf. The village church looks on, as does Emley Mast in the far distance.

The playing surface at Riley Lane is undulating in certain regions (it falls away slightly at the far end from the pavilion). In places too, the field is slightly raised. The boundary's edge is littered with benches, bins, and animals (look out for cats and dogs). A club member says: 'It's always been a good batting wicket here - a bowler's deathbed in many ways.' There is also an artificial wicket, just to the left as you look out from the pavilion. Club spokesmen describe Riley Park as an 'elevated site' and 'a superb piece of land in a delightful setting', with a 'commanding position above the village'.

The club - whose mascot is a terrier - was founded in 1860, at a meeting in the Rose and Crown Inn. In the early days, it was linked to Carlton Working Men's Club; in fact cricket club members had to be members of the Carlton too. The cricketers played their first home fixtures in the Oaklands Park area of Turnshaws - the first reported game was against a Hepworth XI - but they moved to Riley Park in 1878. Their first president was Rev. R. Collins M.A. and building work on the new ground started almost immediately. On 11 November 1878 the club signed a contract for 'a dry wall in the Cricket Field, the said wall to be built at 4/6 per rood of seven yards long and four feet high, including copings with 2/6 returned off the total sum, the said wall to be finished in a workmanlike manner to the satisfaction of the aforesaid Committee on or before the 2nd day of February, One Thousand Eight Hundred and Seventy Nine.'

Initially, Kirkburton were members of the Alliance League, and were actually champions in their last year in that competition - 1910. In 1911 they switched to the Huddersfield League. The club had plenty of memorable moments in the inter-war period, but three stand out. They totalled 355-9 in one epic performance, and in 1933 went through the entire season without losing a game. We are also told that the local curate, the Rev. W.E. Barrett (a future Dean of Brisbane), took 6-3 in one astonishing bowling display against Lascelles Hall, who totalled a meagre 7.

A pavilion was built in 1920 and a tea room purchased in 1932 (soon after, a Ladies Committee was formed). In 1951 one observer looked on

admiringly at the club; he talked about the 'enterprise and sacrifice' of members, the 'happy manner' of Kirkburton cricketers, the 'charming' and 'entertaining' way they played the game, and the excellent wicket ('one of the finest...in the league').

Exactly 100 years on from the founding of the club, the original pavilion burnt down. The disaster occurred in April 1960 - the fire destroyed the dressing rooms and much equipment. For a short space of time, the club used an ex-Huddersfield Corporation bus as their pavilion. A new pavilion arrived in 1962 - the one that still stands today. It is a converted bungalow, with a garage next door. It took two years to build, and was then extended only two years after it was opened. (As a plaque inside the building announces: THIS EXTENSION WAS ERECTED BY VOLUNTEER MEMBERS OF THE CLUB WITH FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FROM MR STANLEY KINDER OBE, VICE-PRESIDENT AND TRUSTEE, APRIL 1964).

By 1969 the powers-that-be at Riley Lane were pretty satisfied; in the Huddersfield League handbook, they described the new structure as 'attractive' and 'well built', and their ground as a 'modern and pleasing home for village cricket'. They went on: 'Enjoy a pleasant afternoon at our picturesque ground and a pleasant evening in the comfort of our modern clubhouse'. Today, the building incorporates kitchen, bar area and lounge (named after the aforementioned Mr. Kinder), plus a small cricket library, which members and visiting spectators are free to borrow from. Adorning one of the inside walls is a superb watercolour painting of Riley Park - the work of Jean Sutcliffe.

The scoreboard, built in the early-1970s and almost a 180-degree walk from the pavilion, is an interesting feature. A warning notice on its frontage says: SCORERS ONLY PLEASE (there's also a lock and padlock to scare off intruders). There is a cute set of steps up to the top floor and there are five small advertising boards affixed to the bottom. And three bits of trivia: (1) Steve Waugh visited Kirkburton CC in July 1995 - and a photo in the pavilion commemorates this fact; (2) Riley Park has witnessed its fair share of women's cricket; and (3) In 2002 a full tea cost £2, a sandwich £1.20, and it was 40p for a mug of tea, a cup of coffee, or a slice of cake. Great value.

And when Kirkburton won the Sykes Cup at Elland in 2003, it appeared that the whole of the village was there. The travelling support was exceptional, and obviously spurred the team on to victory.

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