

A very good wicket to bat on

Sowerby St. Peter's CC - St. Peter's Avenue

We're on the rota for 1st XI and 2nd XI cup finals, and we've got to view this as a compliment to the ground.
[Club secretary, Chris Hanwell]

Sowerby St. Peter's CC lies high above the A58, directly opposite Ryburn County Secondary School, in Sowerby.

Sowerby ('farmstead on sour ground') is a hilltop village that in its heyday specialised in textile manufacture. It was also the name of a township in the parish of Halifax before 1842. Its claims to fame are various: it is mentioned in the Domesday Book; its most famous son is John Tillotson, who became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1691; and in the 1720s the writer Daniel Defoe gave his opinion of the place: 'Among the manufacturers' houses are scattered an infinite number of cottages in which dwell the workers that are employed, the women and children of whom are always busy carding and spinning. If we knocked at the door of any master manufacturer, we presently saw a household of busy fellows, some at the dye vat, some dressing cloth, some in the loom.'

It is a long way up from the main road to the St. Peter's ground - up Fore Lane and then St. Peter's Avenue - and invariably the walker is out of puff when he or she reaches the ground. And for the visiting spectator, this is Sowerby rather than Sowerby Bridge - a small but important geographical point.

According to club officials, cricket has been played on St. Peter's Avenue for around 100 years. Nobody is sure of the exact figure, but the fact that a 1904 fixture card and a 1906 team photo are on display in the pavilion bar suggests that the club is at least 98 years old.

Things have changed a lot since the early twentieth century. Once upon a time the tea room used to be located with the scoreboard on the St. Peter's Avenue side of the ground and the dressing-room facilities sited in the other top corner. The new pavilion took the place of the old one (an ex-army Nissen hut) around 30-35 years ago. The building was extended in 1985, and there was also a re-opening ceremony on 4 September 1988, presided over by the

then club chairman, J. Alan Whitehead. (The recently erected pavilion flagpole was dedicated to Whitehead, who served the club in various capacities between 1965 and 1996).

Historically, the cricket club is linked to nearby St. Peter's - one of the 'finest Georgian churches in the provinces', according to a noted local historian. As one wanders round the tree-lined boundary's edge on the Sowerby side of the ground, one can just see the church tower popping out on the horizon.



1930s

In the view of a seasoned local: 'The St. Peter's track is good to bat on - well, it usually is anyway.' The club employs a professional groundsman to keep the surface up to scratch.

Because the ground is situated so close to a bustling comprehensive school, it becomes something of a thoroughfare on weekdays, with local kids scuttling home for lunch across the outfield. St. Peter's also seems to attract its fair share of dog-walkers.

The club clock doesn't seem to keep very good time but the sightscreens are majestic. They're not only large but are set up on elongated rails for easy movement. The seating by the pavilion is also convenient. One bench is engraved with the following words: IN MEMORY OF TOM NICHOLL 1915-1988. PRESENTED BY HIS FAMILY AND FRIENDS.

Club secretary Chris Hanwell is pleased with the reputation the ground has: 'A recent inspection was glowing and said that the venue was a credit to the league. We've also hosted fixtures involving Halifax League representative

sides. At one point in time we used old railway carriages as our dressing rooms, so the club has definitely come a long way.'

As regards the wicket, Hanwell says: 'I'd say it was consistent and reliable. We take a lot of care over the square. Volunteers work on it in their spare time and we try and look after it in the best way we can. This also goes for the playing area as a whole. We recently installed better drainage facilities, because the slope does occasionally leave us with excess water.' A visiting player adds: 'Large ground, good wicket and good facilities.'

The club fields three senior teams, plus under-17, under-15 and under-12 sides, and it also boasts its own website: <http://sowerbystpeters.play-cricket.com/>. A visiting fan comments: 'Excellent facilities, good atmosphere and good for children. A nice traditional ground with a nice ambience.'

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