

Prayers stop play

31. Holmbridge C.C. - Woodhead Road

We've got a superb track, and all credit must go to John Moorhouse, our groundsman.

[Club secretary, John Booth]

Once upon a time, when 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. When the club came into ownership of the ground (in the 1960s and 'in perpetuity', as a result of public subscription, and at a total cost of £100), it no longer had to take account of the church bells, and no longer had to adjourn Sunday games to Monday.

This tale says a lot about Holmbridge. Situated two miles south-west of Holmfirth, it is a sleepy Pennine village, with a strong community spirit, and it is no surprise that one of the most popular picture postcards of the place features summery views of the cricket ground and church. Pop into one of the local pubs and you'll spot the same picturesque scene painted onto a popular ornamental plate.

So charming is the Woodhead Road ground that the producers of the TV series, *Last of the Summer Wine*, once asked permission to film at the venue. John Booth, club secretary for 20 years and now league representative, takes up the story: 'At one point in the late-1970s we received a call from the BBC. They asked us whether they could do some filming at the ground and we were happy to oblige. We put out 13 cricketers and two umpires - and the umpires, batsman and bowler had to wear make-up for the occasion. All in all it took about four hours to film, for about 30 seconds of TV action!'

Other aspects of the venue add to the effect: the cute white pavilion, the small flower gardens, the turreted white wall at the top end of the ground, and the various poignant plaques and dedications: ROBERT GRIFFITH 'BOB' CAPPER - 3RD DECEMBER 1925-4TH APRIL 1999; IN MEMORY OF NORMAN ELON BARBER 1926-1990 - HOLMBRIDGE C.C.; HOLMBRIDGE C.C. REMEMBERS NEIL

RICHARD BEAUMONT, AGED 24 YEARS, CRICKETER AND FRIEND. Players may complain about the occasional undulation, but one local writer is in no doubt that, 'the two flattest fields in the Holmbridge area are home to Holmbridge Cricket Club and Holmbridge Football Club.'

Holmbridge C.C. was founded in the 1880s and in its early years was based a quarter of a mile away from its current headquarters, at the top of Holme Banks. The club moved to the Woodhead Road site in around 1910. The club joined the Huddersfield Central League in 1915, at the same time as Leymoor, Meltham, Scholes and Thongsbridge. However, within the space of 12 months, they had temporarily withdrawn from the competition, alongside Broad Oak, because of 'player shortages'. Quite predictably, world war was impacting upon local league cricket.

Holmbridge look back to the 1950s as their 'golden' decade. They captured the Allsop Cup in 1954, the Tinker Cup in 1957 and 1958, and also won various section titles. In the Central League, the club's local rivals are Thurstonland and Cartworth Moor; however, in yesteryear it was Scholes (before Scholes moved into the Huddersfield League). Indeed, Holmbridge-Scholes used to be a regular Bank Holiday fixture.



1920s

On the local circuit, Holmbridge is renowned for its short boundaries. Booth explains: 'The ground is approximately 100 yards long and 50 yards wide. This means that at both ends the leg-side boundary is pretty close. Needless to say, a lot of balls get lost in the nearby River Holme and the fields surrounding the ground. It's a horrendous problem.' The

boundaries are so close that local rules apply: umpires at Woodhead Road only signal six when the ball has cleared the ground; if it hits the boundary on the full (and doesn't go out of the ground), it is only a four. Booth says: 'I can remember a time when you scored three rather than four by hitting the boundary on the full. Today, in a 45-over match, a par total is about 250. But just because there are short boundaries doesn't necessarily mean that scores are always high. Batsmen can start to cut and pull before they're really in, and this can give the bowler a chance.' Two of the club's greatest-ever players were Denis Schofield and Bruce Jakeman, a former Holmbridge pro.

The club has also been active in the corridors of power, as the minutes of Central League committee meetings make plain:

4 November 1915, 'Holmbridge moved that the matter of playing without professionals be considered twelve months hence but received no support.'

26 May 1948, 'The Holmbridge rep. raised the question as to Holme Valley Grammar School boys playing in Central League cricket. The reason why he mentioned this was because one of their members had refused to play in their 2nd XI, stating as his reason if he did so he would be debarred from taking part in school matches...'

The Woodhead Road side was also mentioned in a curious minute of 4 May 1982: 'The Secretary said that he had been asked to bring to the notice of the League the excellent sporting spirit and appeals at the recent Bradley & Colnebridge versus Holmbridge game. Mr. Barry Leadbeater said that he was very impressed with both clubs' attitude to the match and wished to compliment them both via Mr. Gordon Littlewood.

Not surprisingly, the history of the village and the cricket club is linked to water. Holmbridge translates as 'bridge over the Holme', and the river runs straight through the centre of the village and parallel to Woodhead Road for long stretches. The pub next to the club is called The Bridge and midges are a big problem on the river side of the ground in mid-summer. It is also a fact that in 1852 44 villagers were killed in floods after 90 million gallons of water seeped out of the nearby Bilberry Reservoir.

Once, the club considered filling in part of the nearby river and extending the playing surface, but the cost was prohibitive (£200 per square yard). On another occasion, the Water Board dug up part of the

outfield at the road end to do some filtering work.

Woodhead Road is also 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.

Today, Holmbridge is a gorgeous old-fashioned village. There's a general store, a well known Sunday School (which has its own annual 'Feast' and was once famous for its bazaars), and a burgeoning branch of the W.I. ('Our members have enjoyed an interesting programme of events over the past few months. A trip to Helmsley walled garden and Sutton Park was delightful').

One writer depicts the place thus: 'It stands at the head of a steep-sided valley...Some of the cottages date from the 1700s and the valley is noted for its unique style of architecture - four-decker cottages dug into hillsides...Holmbridge is a lovely village.'

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