

ARMITAGE BRIDGE: the 11th in second series of cricket histories...

Picturesque Bridge still making history!

ARMITAGE Bridge CC was founded in 1839, although there are reports of cricket being played in the village in 1835 and of the club 're-forming' in the 1870s thanks to some ex-Honley players.

We are told that: 'In the early stages of the club's development, bowlers were not allowed to raise their arm above the shoulder when delivering the ball.' Equally interesting is that friendly games were often played for a prize which consisted of a ball or two bats.

The Bridge moved to their current HQ in 1876. It was originally leased off Brooke's Mill for a peppercorn rent. Previously, they had spells at four other venues: one at Bank Foot Lane, Marten Nest; another on pasture land near Netherton Moor; a third called Neddy Field; and a fourth near the river in the surrounds of Armitage Bridge House. But the 1876 switch was not without its problems. Volunteers had to be recruited to help move hundreds of tons of soil required to level the ground. One observer noted: 'The result provides the visitor with a ground which may be regarded as one of the most beautiful playing areas in the country.'

A pavilion was erected in the same year, scoreboard and tea room followed the year after, and in 1889 the levelling work continued.

The club was a founder member of the Huddersfield & District League - and shared the championship with Slaithwaite in the first year. It spent six years in the Huddersfield League between 1892 and 1898, rejoined briefly in 1906, and has been a permanent member since 1920. It also spent some time in the Central League.

In 1893 W A Oldfield broke many records in scoring 236 against Paddock. In 1894 a bowling green was built; in 1895 a bazaar raised valuable funds for the club. Committee meetings were few and the following statement in the Annual Report for 1917/18 confirms the plight of the Club at the end of the 1918 season:

'Owing to the prolongation of the war and, mainly, the calling up to the Colours of still more men, the difficulties of the Club existing in its playing sense were greater than at any other previous time.'

'However, the remaining clubs of the Central League desired every club to continue playing and so we decided to try our utmost to keep the game on till the War was over.'

Following on from the disastrous effects the war had on the club, it was decided to hold a concert in the Co-op Hall on Saturday 1 February 1919, admission 1/6d and 1/-. It realised £20 for club funds. A similar amount was raised on October 23 1920. The effort was supported by some 500 people.

Garden fêtes, galas and concerts were the normal fundraising methods used during the 1920s. The Armitage Bridge Handbell Ringers performed at several of the concerts. The Co-op allowed the club free use of their hall and the club reciprocated by allowing the Co-op free use of the grounds for a while.

Due to the Second World War the 1939 season was not completed. The club was second in the league table when the action stopped. As with all clubs, the period of the Second World War was traumatic, but the club struggled on. The pavilion was also refurbished.

With the war over, the club reverted to being all-amateur.

Armitage Bridge had a prosperous 1961. The groundstaff scooped the Greenwood Trophy, and the cricketers just missed out in the Sykes Cup final.

Yorkshire and England hero Len Hutton visited Armitage Bridge in September 1973 to open the new tea room and bar. The friendly match he played in at was his last-ever game.

The atmosphere at the club was positive in 1975, not least because families like the Moorhouses were playing an enormous part. But tragedy hit in the spring of 1975 when fire swept through the pavilion building. To add insult to injury, most of the club's archives were lost as a result.

A series of planning applications put the future of the club at risk in the 1970s and 1980s. Thankfully, members raised £2,000 and the premises were secured.

As the result of a great deal of work and no little imagination and enterprise, notably by committee men Peter Butler, Andrew Sugden, David Bailey and Roy Moorhouse, the club, after a tenancy of more than a 100 years, purchased the ground and premises from its landlord.

In 1984 the pavilion was extended by the creation of ladies' and gentlemen's lavatories which replaced the antediluvian outdoor cesspits which had bedeviled every social function at the club for decades.

The necessity for the club to own its own ground had become apparent after nearby Lockwood CC had been turfed out of their ancient Birka Bottom premises.

It was reinforced by the discovery, from local authority searches, that planning permission for residential development had been sought for the ground on five occasions in the 1960s and 1970s.

On the field, it was a major achievement for the club's Under-16 team to reach the final of the Yorkshire 6-a-side Indoor Competition in 1988.

To finish off the decade, the club celebrated its 150th birthday in 1989 by way of various activities throughout the season.

The President's Open Day started off the celebrations with a period costume lunch followed by a Victorian cricket match which had to be called off due to the weather.

Later, there was a 150th year celebration match between a President's XI and a Yorkshire League Invitation XI.

Club historian Alan Buck produced a 92-page history to celebrate Armitage Bridge's 150th birthday.

What of Armitage Bridge CC in the twenty-first century? Club secretary John Bunch comments:

'We've made a definite decision to put money into facilities rather than professionals, and as a result it's a very sociable club.'

'I think we've got four father-son combinations in the 2nd XI at present. Out of season we also have a walking group, which enables families to get together socially in the winter months.'

'I think we've got one that is both attractive and scenic. There are only two buildings. The rest is all green - a bowl of trees and quite a lot of well cared-for vegetation.'

'Even the turf outside the main playing area is of a good condition and ideal for children to play on or for parking.'

'I would say that the cricket field itself is one of the biggest in Huddersfield - with only Honley perhaps on a par.'

AROUND THE WICKET

...with historian Peter Davies



150TH ANNIVERSARY: Joyce Buck, Philippa Dyson, Nancy Beaumont and Christine Harrison with the president Ralph Beaumont in period costume



SO NEAR: Armitage Bridge in 1901: Sykes Cup runners-up: J White, R Booth, K Woodcock, D Wilcock, G Morell, B Pennington, J Booth, I Duncaif, E Wood (capt), G Hutchinson, F Dyson.



CLUB STALWART: Armitage Bridge player Les Duncaif



PAST GLORIES: Armitage Bridge CC take part in the Lumb Challenge in 1887. Pictured are: H Turner, C Heigh, G Moorhouse, M Bakely, J H Barrand, R Moorhouse, T Broadbent, F Shaw, G W Oldfield, E R Benson (capt), T E Offield and B Gedchil