

165 years old

24. Armitage Bridge C.C. - Armitage Fold

Cricket at Armitage Bridge changes little. Members are prepared to work for their play and enjoy the game after cutting and rolling and, while honours may not have come the club's way as often as with other clubs, it does not cause either envy or worry.

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

The cricket ground at Armitage Bridge is situated on the bank of the River Holme as it wends its way from Lockwood to Holmfirth. Indeed, if you are visiting the venue on foot, and approaching it from Woodhead Road, you are forced to navigate a rather old, rickety bridge that straddles the water close to Dodds Royd and Riverside Riding Stables.

As you enter the playing arena through the swathe of tall green trees that line the eastern side of the ground, you are struck by the ultra-flat, ultra-expansive outfield. Late in the afternoon, when the trees unleash huge shadows on the turf, the venue is a glorious sight. The clubhouse (complete with bar, tea facilities and walls of ABCC memorabilia) and the white-walled changing-room block (and blue outdoor seats) are located close together, to the left as you stand on the Woodhead Road side of the ground. To the right there are more handsome trees, nine benches (dotted round the boundary's edge at regular intervals) and a tall brown perimeter fence, over which you can just make out the contours of Woodfield Park, another attractive cricket ground. (Interestingly, the only noise that tells you there's another cricket ground in the vicinity is that of bowler and over-zealous fielders appealing for a leg-before decision or catch). Armitage Bridge's ground was originally leased off Brooke's Mill for a pepper-corn rent.

The club was founded as far back as 1839, although there are reports of cricket being played in the village in 1835 and of the club 're-forming' some time in the 1870s thanks to a group of ex-Honley players. It was a founder member of the Huddersfield & District League - and shared the championship with Slaithwaite in the first year of competition. 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 the fact that friendly games were often played for a prize which consisted of a ball or two bats. In the latter years of the nineteenth century, Armitage Bridge had an excellent side; and in 1893 W.A. Oldfield broke many records in scoring 236 v

Paddock.

'The Bridge' moved to their current HQ in 1876 after 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, scorebox and tea room followed the year after, and in 1889 the levelling work continued. In 1894 a bowling green was built; in 1895 a bazaar raised valuable funds for the club.

Early in the twentieth century, the club minute-book was full of interesting news:

23 June 1917 - Resolved that L. Dawson procure eight packs of cards from the Monkey Club to replace those lost at the whist drive.

6 January 1933 - Resolved that the manure be put off until committee passes.

6 May 1935 - Moved that we send inside measurements of lavatory to A. Grinders for them to recommend a closet.

26 May 1919 - Resolved that Joe Goddard have power to supply refreshments to workers on the field when necessary.

30 January 1934 - Resolved that the secretary write to the corporation to get on with the gas fitting at a cost of £4 - 43 yards of pipe to lay.

9 September 1935 - Resolved that the secretary see about some sods at Newsome.

Armitage Bridge spent six years in the Huddersfield League between 1892 and 1898, rejoined for one season in 1906, and has been a permanent member since 1920. It has also spent some time in the Huddersfield Central League. Key personalities in the club's history include Schofield Haigh (legendary Yorkshire spinner), Roy Moorhouse (five generations of his family turned out for the club), and Alan Buck (the man who compiled the ABCC centenary brochure). In recent decades, the club has faced its share of tribulations: a flood in 1944, a fire in 1975 - when the club archives were lost - and a series of planning applications in the 1980s which put the future of the club at risk. (Thankfully, members raised £2,000 and the premises were secured).

What of Armitage Bridge C.C. today? A club spokesman says: 'I would say that Armitage Bridge is an unpretentious club, if that's the right word. We've made a definite decision to put money into facilities rather than professionals, and as a result it's a very sociable club. We've got lots of families involved and 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. And the ground? 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.'

Armitage Bridge - the place - lies adjacent to Woodhead Road and Wakefield Road. It is named after an old wooden bridge, erected as far back as the thirteenth century. All things considered, it is one of Huddersfield's most pleasant suburbs. In 1868 *The National Gazetteer of Great Britain and Ireland* described Armitage Bridge as 'a chapelry in the parish of Almondbury, and wapentake of Agbrigg, in the West Riding of the county of York, not far from Huddersfield.' In 1981 the *Huddersfield Examiner* said: 'It is easy to see why the village lays claim to being unique...The contrast from a busy road to a leafy village scene is as sudden as it is pronounced.'

Armitage Bridge is also noted for Armitage Bridge House - which was built in 1825, stands amid a 51-acre site, and was eventually taken over by Huddersfield Corporation (as was). St. Paul's Church is also a landmark. This building was constructed in 1848, and it was destroyed by an arson attack in 1987 (it has been rebuilt since). In terms of industry, Armitage Bridge is dominated by mills or ex-mills. The Brooke family owned a woollen mill in the village; or put more accurately, the Brooke family owned a woollen mill around which the village developed. Other things to know about Armitage Bridge? It was ravaged by floods in 1848 and a tornado in 1964, and it has a flourishing branch of the Mothers Union.

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