

Twos, fours and a Golden pub

Blackley CC - Lindley Moor Road

The cricket square was kept in trim during the great wars by playing bowls on it ready for when 'The Lads Come Home'.

[New Pavilion Commemorative Brochure, 1978]

In July 2001, Yorkshire under-13s took on Cheshire under-13s at Blackley. One online reporter described the venue as 'small and neat...an Emmerdale setting and a family-run club'. No doubt officials at the club would be pleased with this verdict.

Blackley is a modest, unassuming area on the cusp of the Calderdale-Kirklees border (but located just inside Calderdale). The first recorded mention of Blackley comes in the sixteenth century, when the Golden Fleece pub - which is located in the bottom corner of the cricket ground - was just a farmhouse. In 1734, the population of Blackley was 112, and it is probably not much more today. Traditionally, Blackley people were employed in farming and coalmining, and over time the place has become famous for its Whit Walk, brickworks, Baptist church (built at the end of the eighteenth century) and reservoir (created in 1860).

The Lindley Moor Road ground - notoriously chilly according to some seasoned cricket-watchers - is situated on the southern fringes of Elland, and is one of those sporting venues that you can spot from all around. For those in the vicinity of the Junction 23-24 stretch of the M62, BCC's headquarters is easy to locate. From Outlane CC's motorway-adjacent ground, it is easy to pick it out in the distance - it's the patch of green with all those little white men scurrying around.

Actually, from Outlane, Blackley looks quite a long way away. But when one saunters down Kew Hill, and then drops down onto Lindley Road, it seems to be a whole lot closer. For the record, OCC to BCC is a gentle 15-minute stroll. On arrival, one is greeted by a tidy sporting arena with much character: the Golden Fleece in the bottom corner of the field (surely the winner of the 'Closest Pub in Yorkshire to a Cricket

Field' award?), the handsome white changing rooms, and the bungalow-like pavilion, complete with new gate and delightful garden. The views are also stirring, especially southwards, and upwards, towards the M62.

Lindley Moor Road is not Blackley's original ground. In the 1870s, the club played its home games at Blackley Field, at the top of South Lane. However, by the turn of the century, this venue had been sold, with developers eager to start building houses on South Lane. So, the club moved to the current site. (In the late nineteenth century, the ground was owned by the Ainleys, a family connected with the Wappy Spring brewery).



Blackley in 1948

In the early days, the playing area was so small that 'local rules' applied. If a ball hit the boundary it was two; if it cleared the fence it was four. And there was no pavilion as such - just a small wooden hut adjacent to where the Golden Fleece now stands. And there were tennis courts too, sited adjacent to the pub. Today, the playing surface is of a reasonable size, incorporates five marked-out wickets (plus an artificial strip), and is surrounded by benches (raised up slightly on the pub side of the ground) and a neat little path. The two sightscreens are top-notch - they're wide and wheeled.

After a freak storm destroyed the old pavilion around 8.30am on 29 November 1976, a BCC 'Disaster Appeal' was launched (apparently, one local pensioner saved up £5 over five weeks and donated the

money to the club!) On 13 August 1978 the new pavilion was officially opened by Yorkshire fast bowler Tony Nicholson and dedicated to the memory of Richard M. Wilkinson, president of the club between 1974 and 1978. The booklet produced to accompany the big event included this statement from the club: 'Because of the generosity and the love for village cricket that is so much part of Yorkshire life this pavilion stands...as a symbol of that generosity and sentiment...A new pavilion at Blackley that will span at least the next 100 years.'

Two other tributes were included in the brochure. From RM. Wilson, club president: 'When I became President of Blackley Cricket Club in 1974 I expressed my concern regarding the rapidly deteriorating condition of the old tea room. It was clear in my mind that unless something was done quickly, our cricket club would die with the village.' And from Roy Smith, Halifax League president: 'Many remember the difficulties you [at Blackley CC] had to overcome at the start, but quickly these were put aside and your new venture began. Your new pavilion is a credit to you all. I hope your ground never gets surrounded by houses, as cricket grounds do more for the local community and the environment than planners realise.'

Today, the pavilion is particularly welcoming. The bar greets all visitors; the catering area is at the far end (the tea ladies can rustle up a very nice ham salad for the visiting spectator at very short notice); and the changing areas beyond that. The rest of the building is dominated by photos and memorabilia. There's a portrait of Fred Wilkinson, the man who donated the ground to the club in 1946, and two team photos from 1924 (1st XI and 2nd XI). Due prominence is also given to the Blackley XIs who won the Lumb Cup in 1936 and the Armitage Shield in 1948.

Blackley, in fact, is one of the oldest cricket clubs in the area. No-one is sure exactly when it was formed - maybe 1878? - but there is evidence to suggest that a group of local men each chipped in 1½d per week to get the club up and running. Club historians are pretty certain that the first recorded fixture involving a side from the village took place in 1869: on 7 May, Blackley United went to Elland and lost by 20 runs, and later on in the summer visited Lindwell Victoria, going down this time by 18 runs.

The club still possesses a book of minutes that stretches back to the early twentieth century. The highlights? An official call for a lawn-mower price list (1903); a motion in favour of a weekly 'dancing' night in the pavilion (1904); and a suggestion to the effect that a fixture against Salendine Nook be accompanied by a garden party (1906). In the first decade of the last century, one also gleans that the club was about to

paint the pavilion and add wire safety netting to the windows. We also find out that in yesteryear the print-run for the matchday programme was a massive 250, and that skipping was all the rage in the village.

Extract from P.Davies, *Home Soil* (2003)