

As if by magic

Shelf CC - Witchfield Hill

From Bradford Interchange, 681, 682 (to Halifax) or 570, 571 (to Brighouse). By car, take A6036 from Bradford to Halifax. From Odsal Top, carry on A6036 towards Halifax, passing Tesco's on right. Ground behind Shoulder of Mutton.

[Directions to Shelf CC - Official Bradford Central Cricket League Handbook]

Once upon a time, Shelf's ground was one of three cricket venues in the immediate environs of Witchfield Hill and Carr House Road.

A chapel team used to play at a ground just off Shelf Moor Road, adjacent to The Paddock and Ayreville Drive, and some maps also show a 'Parish Wood Cricket Ground' on Riding Hill (the continuation of Manorley Lane), only yards inside the eastern boundary of the Calderdale region.

Today, there is only the Shelf CC ground left. On one side it is surrounded by new housing, but as club official Malcolm Walker explains, there's no problem: 'We get on fine with the local residents. Of course there's the odd complaint, but the cricket has been here for 100 years and the houses for 30 years, so we've got to get on.'

The place lies in the 'grey zone' where Halifax and Bradford telephone numbers almost merge, and where 'HX' and 'BD' postcodes sit side by side. Officially, Shelf is part of Calderdale - and many people from Shelf would certainly describe themselves as 'Halifax folk' - but, nevertheless, Shelf CC are members of the Bradford Central Cricket League, and have been since the formation of the club in 1903. And they have an intense rivalry with two nearby clubs in the same league: Jer Lane (to the north) and Buttershaw St. Paul's (to the north-west).

Very recently, the Shelf ground has been the scene of unprecedented development work. Out went the old, increasingly dilapidated pavilion; and in have come two semi-permanent steel portakabins. Walker, a member of the club committee, explains: 'We had to do it - the old building had been falling down for a number of years. It was definitely on its last legs.'

He goes on to describe a common problem: 'For a small club like ours, we just didn't have the time or the expertise to put together a full business plan and then apply for grants and funding. It was too much work. We've got enough on our plate just existing, and trying all the time to attract new members. So we decided on the two-portakabin idea as a halfway house. They'll do for changing rooms and tea room. They're as permanent as they need to be. We've still had to raise a lot of cash to afford the portakabins, but at least it was manageable.'

This major recent upheaval notwithstanding, locals agree that nothing much has changed at Shelf CC since 1903. However, Walker fills the first-time visitor in: 'Fifty years ago, the pavilion was on the top side of the ground - where the houses are now. But for some reason, it was moved to the bottom side, near the main entrance and car park. I think back then it was viewed as a temporary measure, but it stood the test of time until 2002, by which time it definitely had outlived its usefulness.'

The playing area at Shelf slopes slightly down towards the main road. There is a wheeled sight screen at the pavilion end, a red corrugated hut situated nearby, and two white-coloured maintenance buildings at the top end, just in front of the new modern houses that overlook the venue.

And the wicket is excellent. Walker declares: 'It's superb - just ask the bowlers! Two of our players take care of the wicket, and they do a great job. If you bat first, you've really got to aim for 200 or 220. But saying that, on the last afternoon of the 2002 season, 618 runs were scored at the ground.'

In the vicinity of the venue are a number of interesting buildings: Shelf Village Hall, Shelf Balti House and the Shoulder of Mutton. The pub is only a full-blooded six-hit away from the playing area - very convenient.

Shelf, the place, is famous for its primitive magic (note the local street names - Witchfield Hill and Burned Road) and of course its curious name.

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