

On top of a mine

41. Lepton Highlanders C.C. - Wakefield Road

We've been here a long time and it's a nice spot. I've got so many memories of this place. I loved playing here as a player, and now as a cricket-watcher I love to bring my granddaughter and relax. In the summer it's a real sun-trap.

[Club chairman, Jack Waring]

In July 1953, three Lepton men put their signatures to a very important letter:

Dear Sir/Madam,

On behalf of [Lepton Highlanders C.C.], we are pleased to state that we have negotiated the purchase of the Cricket Field and the adjoining Plantation, approximately 12 acres. By doing this we safeguard for all time a Cricket Field for the residents of Lepton. Our Cricket Club has been functioning as such for more than 100 years, therefore you will note that this is no new venture. The cost of the Field etc will use up all our reserves and we shall find the future running of the club very difficult without some public support. We appeal to you for a donation for the purchase of the ground. All donations will be gratefully acknowledged. Cheques etc should be made payable to the 'Lepton Highlanders Cricket Club' and sent to either of the undersigned.

Thank you in anticipation

Yours faithfully

E. Brook, Chairman (Highroyd, Lepton)

B. Ellis, Treasurer (Oak Cottages, Highgate Lane, Lepton)

J.M. Yelland, Secretary (Lepton Field, Lepton).

This is one of the most important and illustrative documents in the history of Lepton Highlanders C.C. - the moment when the club began the process by which it bought its own headquarters. It did eventually raise the money, and thus it was able to do business with the Whitley Beaumont Estate, and buy up their Wakefield Road premises.

Exactly 50 years on, the club is in the midst of another key development. Plans are afoot to develop a brand new pavilion building in place of the existing facility at their HQ. A similar plan was hatched in 1997 but this fell through. So everyone at the club is hoping that the current proposal gets the green light. If it does, the existing building will be knocked down, and it is hoped that the new one will be up ready soon.

But Highlanders are not just a cricket team. The Lepton Highlanders Sports and Social Club runs football XIs for both sexes (during Season 2003-4, when the pavilion is being redeveloped, they will use the nearby White Horse pub as their dressing-rooms), and also boasts darts and dominos teams. But arguably the main sport is cricket.

The walls of the soon-to-be-ex-pavilion are plastered with momentos of Highlanders' glorious past: a photo of the side that won the 1922 Huddersfield Association title and of the team that also collected silverware in 1930. The former players in the pavilion also reckon that 1948 was a vintage year - and a team pic from that season was also doing the rounds quite recently. (One veteran recalled that legendary West Indian cricketer Learie Constantine presented a book to the Lepton skipper at the end of that summer).

And things look pretty good for the future. In September 2002 the *Huddersfield Examiner* stated: 'Lepton Highlanders juniors have given the club something to celebrate this season. Having seen the senior team struggle and subsequently get relegated, the Wakefield Road club's youngsters won the Huddersfield Under-15 League's Champion of Champions Trophy when they fought back from the verge of defeat to beat Rastrick by three wickets.'

The cricket club was founded in 1854 - which makes it one of the oldest in the area. It started in the Association (and its ground was used in 1906 for the 'Rest Match'; the minutes of the league reveal that a Mr. Moorhouse was designated to 'make arrangements to meet the players at Waterloo not later than 2.30pm'). From the Association it graduated to the Huddersfield Central League (even though it was turned down for membership in 1914), and then to the Huddersfield League in 2000.

In the early days the Lepton club was linked to the local parish church (St. John the Evangelist, built in 1868). This meant that the club was forbidden from playing home games on a Sunday. The ground also lacked running water once upon a time, and this forced club officials to scamper across to a little cottage just beyond the boundary's edge in order to solve the drought.

The ground is situated midway between Lepton and Lepton Edge on the busy main road between Huddersfield and Wakefield. It is actually sited right on top of a colliery. In years gone by this meant that many a groundsman heard the sound of digging underground as he tended to his beloved wicket.

All in all, it is an interesting and attractive cricketing venue. The pavilion houses the 'food and drink' facilities (buffet tea and Joshua Tetley beers). The players actually change in different locations: one side take their big cricket cases to the far side of the pitch where they encounter a quaint little construction which was built over a century ago, and which is now a listed building (this mini-pavilion - which was once the main pavilion - also incorporates a simple scoreboard in its roof); the other team changes in a large room adjacent to the bar. This arrangement may be unique in the

Huddersfield area!

In recent years, the Highlanders have also hosted a caravan site on the area of land just beyond the cricket field. As a backdrop to local league cricket, this would seem to be unusual, especially as one year a huge bouncy castle was provided for the caravan- owners and their children by way of entertainment.

Lepton was mentioned in the Domesday Book. Centuries later, in 1834, it was described as 'a populous township, in the same parish as Dalton, about three miles and a half east by south from Huddersfield. In addition to manufactories for woollen cloth and fancy goods, several scribbling and filling mills are dispersed through the township and its vicinity. Population, according to the returns at the last census, 3,320.'

Today, the village is a key landmark on the road to Wakefield, located high up above Huddersfield, and bordering onto Little Lepton, Lepton Edge and Rowley Hill (a district that boasted its own cricket team not too long ago). The place is famous for fireworks, handbell ringers and Albany House, a distinguished-looking Victorian building.

Lepton's most famous son is Seth Lister Mosley. Historian Stuart Davies describes him as 'in many ways the most extraordinary of the Huddersfield naturalists'. Mosley was noted for his drawings of butterflies, but later in life he became famous for his 'stuffed birds'. He also established 'Mosley's Museum' on Woodside Road, Beaumont Park, which housed, 'fine collections in all branches of Natural History, educationally arranged'.

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