

Batsman's paradise

13. Linthwaite C.C. - Hoyle House

The Linthwaite club's ground is typical of those of the many central Yorkshire League clubs, situated at the foot of rolling hills with the mill bounding one side. A lovely field with a wicket noted for its run-getting.

[Roy Genders, *League Cricket in England* - 1952]

The village of Linthwaite - or 'Linfitt' to locals - has two centres. Up the hill, on the 'top road', there is the distinguished-looking parish church, the school (Colne Valley H.S.) and the *other* cricket club: Broad Oak. Down on the 'bottom road', there is a collection of shops, the local post office, and Linthwaite C.C., situated behind a row of wonderful emerald green trees. (In recent years, the village has actually become a hot-spot for tree-planters, who roam the countryside on Saturday mornings with their bags of seed).

In terms of location, this ground has a real curiosity factor. It is not just hidden from the traffic whizzing along the A62 - the main Huddersfield-Marsden road - but you only discover the entrance to the venue when you wander down a little track by the side of the Coach & Horses pub on the main road. Then you encounter a large factory belonging to Thornton & Ross, the cough-medicine producers. At last you locate the cricket ground, but even then you could be slightly put off by the warning sign that greets you: PLEASE KEEP OFF THE CRICKET FIELD. (This of course is the 'official' entrance; you can also risk life and limb by sliding down the bank through the trees, but this is not just the 'unofficial' entrance but also life-endangering).

As you wander round the boundary's edge, you are struck by the interesting surrounds: the gorgeous trees (again), the adjacent football field (a sign welcomes 'Footballers and Spectators', and in April and September soccer balls often land on the outfield), the exquisite (and floodlit) bowling green, the huge, gaping factory wall that acts as a mammoth-sized boundary board (some clubs have a 'lost ball' problem; not here, where any four or six will rebound off the wall into the ground - and no, you're not allowed to claim a catch after the ball has hit the wall!)

The pavilion buildings are set together underneath the roadside trees. Diametrically opposite is a fantastic Colne Valley vista that rises up to the rail line that links Huddersfield to Slaithwaite and Marsden, and then Stalybridge and Manchester Piccadilly. You can hear the sound of the trans-Pennine trains as they fly past, but you've got to be sharpish if you actually want to catch sight of them. The ground is also close to the Huddersfield Narrow

Canal and the River Colne - both of which run parallel to the railway just beyond the bowling green. The telecommunications mast at Pole Moor can also be seen in mid-distance.

The village is located three miles south-west of Huddersfield and is famous, above all else, for its mills and textile industry - an industrial culture symbolised by the gigantic, and magnificent, Titanic Mill. By 1361 Linthwaite had received its first official mention as a *bona fide* place; by 1838 it had a population of almost 3,000. Thereafter, it grew on the back of cloth manufacture and the dyeing trade. Colne Valley High School is also a key landmark: it was the first purpose-built comprehensive in the West Riding, and now has a student roll of more than 1,500.

One of the many local traditions is called 'Old Folks' Treat'. This is a summer event - in effect, a glorified 'food crawl'. It involves a group of villagers hopping from house to house, with 'drinks' being hosted by one family, the 'starter' being consumed at another location, the 'main course' at a third, and so on. By the end of the night a lot of food has been eaten and, more importantly, a lot of money has been raised for local OAPs.

The playing area at Hoyle House is neat, tidy and relatively flat. It is surrounded, in part, by a tasteful white wall and a cute white 'trim' that makes its way round three-quarters of the perimeter. There are clusters of benches on all four sides of the ground (some coloured), a small white terrace below the roadside trees, and decent, wheeled sightscreens at both ends. There is also a gravel track all the way round the edge.

The pavilion complex is interesting. As you look at it, there is (from left to right) a scoreboard and tea room (the former is actually above the latter), umpires' room, bar (with yellow and green panelling), and double-decker changing area and garage (with an advert for Quine Ltd. attached to it). When teatime comes, a few unlucky home players have to go and roll the wicket; the rest of the cricketers enjoy their salad meal seated either inside the tearoom or outside on the patio, with kids in tow (who at last have the freedom to play football on the outfield). And for the record, a full tea costs £2, a turkey salad sandwich £1.20, coffee 40p, tea and a piece of cake 30p each.

An elderly female supporter explained: 'It is gorgeous here on a hot day, a real sun-trap. But on a cold day it is...cold. We always have to bring our gloves and rugs just in case. We're always prepared. We've been coming here for decades. It may not be the prettiest cricketing venue, but it's nice enough and compares favourably with other grounds in the Huddersfield League.'

Linthwaite C.C. was formed in 1873. The club was one of the founder members of the Huddersfield League, and it has had continuous membership ever since. For many years it also had another cricket club in the village to contend with: Linthwaite Hall C.C.. The Hall itself was built in the sixteenth century and extended in the seventeenth, and become notorious for its

'headless horseman' ghost.

At first, Linthwaite played on a field at Crack Hill, but in 1876 moved to their present headquarters. On 30 October 1876 a ground rent was agreed: the club would pay £7 per year to John Schofield. Soon after, on 20 November, an area of turf (40 x 30 yards) was laid thanks to George Telford, a local man, at a cost of £18.

Curiously, the club has had great success during wartime periods:

It won Section A in 1917 and 1918 (and also 1920).

It won trophies in 1941 and 1942.

And 1941 proved to be a doubly significant year, for the club was able to purchase its Manchester Road HQ off the Radcliffe Estate.

In the immediate post-war years, a group of members set to work on building the wall that now surrounds the ground on the side directly opposite the factory. In 1951 an informed observer described Linthwaite as a 'hotbed' of local league cricket.

Over time, Manchester Road has gained a reputation as a batsman's paradise. Against Kirkheaton, Linthwaite once scored 495; against Golcar, two of the club's more adhesive batters broke all records by putting on a partnership of 231. And at one point in time, Linthwaite's George Knight had shared in both the 1st and 2nd-wicket record partnerships in Huddersfield League history. Joe Redfearn was the club's first professional: he earned 8/- per Saturday appearance and 2/6 per coaching session.

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