

1926 and all that

46. Flockton C.C. - Hill Top

We do make a big effort to get the local youngsters involved - and keep them off the streets.

[Club stalwart, Harry Marsden]

Harry Marsden is a key man at Flockton C.C.. He's secretary and treasurer of the club, captain of the 2nd XI, and also groundsman. And he's a proud groundsman at that: 'It's a big job. I spend all my free time on the wicket and I won't let anyone else near it. Joking apart, I think it's a decent track. It was in a bit of a dodgy state in the mid-1980s, but we've put it right.' In his sterling work for the club, Marsden follows in the footsteps of Reggie Dodgson, veteran club member and groundsman, whose services were recognised in 1975 when a special event was held to mark his 50 years of hard toil.

Hill Top, situated in the middle of the village amid houses, hedges and trees, is a charming venue. The playing area undulates but the spectacular views out over to Emley more than make up for this (you can spot the parish church and the Welfare Ground floodlights quite easily on the horizon). The tea room and changing rooms are sited next to each other - both are old-fashioned buildings, painted smartly in green and white. The kitchen dispenses excellent egg mayonnaise sandwiches and specialises in hot dogs (25p) and bacon rolls (50p), and the official scorers park themselves at a table next to the large drinks fridge. Among the items on the wall are an artist's impression of what Hill Top would look like if the club won a Lottery windfall, and also a framed photo of the 1935 side - a gift to the then president, Joshua Haigh. In front of the dressing-room block is a bench that was donated to the club by Kirkburton Parish Council in April 1984, and adjacent to it the W.C. (for which you need a special key).

The cricket club enters two teams in the Huddersfield Central League plus an under-13 side. In 2003 it put out an under-15 team, and in the past it has run an under-17 side. Flockton C.C. is also closely linked to Flockton F.C.. (The football club, formed in 1970, uses the cricket club changing

rooms and plays at the nearby recreation ground).



Flockton Juniors, 1950

Flockton is halfway between Huddersfield and Wakefield. Nearby we find Flockton Moor, Flockton Green, Over Flockton and Nether Flockton. The history of the village is tied up with coal. Once upon a time it was dominated by mines and miners, so much so that a pair of local coal seams were officially named 'Flockton Thick' and 'Flockton Thin'. In 1842 a parliamentary report explained: 'In the Flockton and Thornhill pits the system is...indecent: for though the girls are clothed, at least three-fourths of the men for whom they "hurry" work stark naked, or with a flannel waistcoat only, and in this state they assist one another to fill the corves 18 or 20 times a day: I have seen this done myself frequently.' But the same enquiry also discovered another side to the village. It commented on the 'substantial dwellings, considerable educational resources, strong horticultural and temperance societies, and generous sporting facilities'.

Since the demise of the coal industry, Flockton has had a tough time, but it has survived and now has a range of interesting features, including Kirkby Hall, a seventeenth-century gabled house, and the 500-year-old George & Dragon Inn, a black-and-white timber structure – in the words of author John Wilkinson, 'a delightfully unexpected sight'. Key dates in the history of the village include: 1699 - when Flockton Grammar School was founded; 1838 - the year in which the Flockton United Band was

established; 1860 - when Flockton became a separate ecclesiastical parish; and 1861 - when it is claimed that there were 11 pubs dotted around the place!



1974 Team Photo

Today, Wilkinson talks about 'Flockton's mixture of council housing estates, commuter dwellings and older cottages'. The National Mining Museum is sited nearby, at Caphouse Colliery. Its publicity material says: 'A plan dated 1791 and showing workings from 1789 to 1795 includes a shaft on the Caphouse site. It is probably the oldest coal-mine shaft still in everyday use in Britain today. Before 1827 the colliery was owned by the Milnes family...By 1985 the coal at Caphouse was exhausted and its conversion to a Museum began.' In addition, the village is famous for its animal hospital: 'Flockton Hedgehog Rescue cares for sick, injured and orphaned hedgehogs. Each year we care for over 300 prickly patients and with your support we can continue to provide the very best care for hedgehogs in need of rescue, treatment and rehabilitation.'

As to the cricket club's origins, the details are hazy, but everyone at Hill Top believes it was founded in 1895. Apparently, it was in this year that the local parish magazine, *The Lamp*, reported that the village church - St. James the Great - had made a special grant of one and ninepence to the embryonic club. But no-one is absolutely certain of the formation date, and

that is why the club has never felt able to celebrate its centenary.

In its early years, the club played its home games at a venue called The Rough - just 200-300 yards to the north of the current ground. The Rough doesn't sound like the ideal kind of venue, and the search was soon on for something better. In 1926 the club authorities settled on Hill Top. But the players and their friends in the village had to do all the hard work; they literally made the ground themselves. In this, however, they were helped by the fact that 1926 was the year of the General Strike, and so most local people had plenty of time on their hands. The club took over the ownership of the ground, aided significantly by a grant from the Miners Welfare organisation. This is when the modern history of the club commenced.

Since 1926 there haven't been that many developments at Hill Top. Marsden says: 'Nothing much has changed over the decades. The Miners Welfare people paid for a new tea hut and changing-room block in 1950, but that's about all.' A female spectator agrees: 'My late husband played for Flockton. I've been watching cricket here for the last 50 years and I can tell you - it's just like it always was.' And she adds: 'I like the village - it's a very nice place.'

Interestingly, the club has played in three different leagues. They competed in the Denby Grange League until it folded in 1964. For the next 12 years, Flockton were members of the Wakefield & District Cricket Union - and won almost everything in sight during this period. And then, in 1977, they joined the Central League, entering a pair of teams at the same time as Almondbury Wesleyans were admitted.

In the early-1980s the club made its mark - off the field and on it. At the Central League committee meeting of 1 July 1980, 'A letter was read from the Flockton representative apologising for not attending the previous meeting, but he had to take his wife to hospital to have a baby.' Meanwhile, the club's 1st XI surprised everyone by reaching the final of the Allsop Cup at Penistone, and only just lost out to Thurstonland in a close finish. In fact, if you believe the locals at Hill Top, they only lost this match because the weather intervened - and knocked the Flockton boys off their game.

Today, the club's closest rivals in the Central League are Emley, Upper Hopton and Nortonthorpe. And the village cricketers still drink at Flockton Green Working Men's Club, situated on the main road only a few hundred yards away from the cricket ground, and a place that is a permanent reminder of the good old days.

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