

# Well played, Fiaz!

Southowram CC - Ashday Lane

MAY ALL WHO SIT HERE ENJOY AS MANY HAPPY AND PEACEFUL HOURS AS GORDON DID, AMONGST HIS SOUTHOWRAM CRICKET FRIENDS.

These words are inscribed on a plaque attached to one of the comfortable pavilion benches looking out over Southowram's pleasant and well maintained ground. 'Gordon' is Gordon Ingham, a stalwart of the club, who died on 26 June 1993, aged 57. This bench dedication emphasises how much local cricket fans appreciate the tranquil ambience at the Ashday Lane venue. The three other pavilion benches also carry heartfelt cricket-orientated dedications.

Southowram lies halfway between Halifax and Brighouse, just to the north of Elland and only a few hundred yards from the eastern stretch of the Calderdale Way (on the Halifax side). In days of old, Southowram was the name of a township within the ancient parish of Halifax, and the area was, and remains, the centre of the local quarrying industry (at one point in time, nearly every man in the village was employed in quarrying). In 1807, a Wesleyan chapel was built in Southowram, at a cost of £1,040.

On a map, Southowram looks extremely adjacent to Siddal, but in reality Southowram is a few hundred feet higher, and as such, the walk from Siddal to Southowram along Park Lane, Change Lane and West Lane is a daunting uphill challenge; however, the spectacular views of Halifax town centre from on high help to soften the blow.

The cricket ground lies far off the beaten track. Indeed, as one looks out from the pavilion, one can see no other buildings at all - except for a plethora of large steel pylons. Ashday Hall - whose history goes as far back to 1275 - is just up the road, but the residential areas of Southowram are nowhere to be seen. This is the venue's chief charm - the serenity that envelops the arena.



**Undated Team Photo**

The ground is extremely well appointed. The SCC website (<http://southowram.play-cricket.com>) states, 'Facilities: Rollers, Changing Facilities, Pavilion, Score Box', but this, of course, does not tell the whole story. The playing surface is of a good size and there are several pitches for captain and groundsman to choose from (in high summer the strips can look very parched). The person who cuts the outfield does so effectively, and also creates some pretty 'mowing' patterns in the process. In addition, the sightscreens are definitely above average in quality. One Halifax League player says: 'It's a nice ground to play at - the facilities are good but there is a downward slope to the playing area that makes things slightly tricky.'

There are baskets of colourful flowers by the pavilion - a nice touch - but the most appealing aspect of the ground, apart from its almost timeless, semi-rural location, is the seating: seven brown-and-white wooden benches to the left of the pavilion, double that amount to the right, and four more perched in front of the pavilion. The seats are not just attractive in themselves, but together give the venue a relaxed feel and a pleasant aura.

The pavilion is akin to a large modern bungalow. When there's no cricket going on, it is shuttered up, but the blue and yellow 'SCC' flag flutters continually from the roof - signposting a highly impressive local landmark.

In 2002, Southowram CC celebrated their 25th anniversary year by winning the right to host the Parish Cup final. (The club's 1st XI actually battled their way through to the final - so they had the bonus of home advantage). However, after days of torrential rain, the showpiece fixture had to be postponed a week - a huge disappointment for club officials, who had already ordered extra toilets for the big occasion from Leeds!

Southowram CC is one of the youngest clubs in the Halifax area. Club official Keith Walker explains: 'We were formed in 1975, but many years ago there was another club in Southowram. It was based at Kitson's Field at the top of Pinnar Lane - just down the road from the current venue.'

The 'new' Southowram CC was originally a pub team based at The Cock and Bottle, at the other end of the village. Walker goes on: 'The ground we've got today was once a quarried tip. It was converted into a cricket ground and then leased from Marshall's, a local company. At first, the pavilion was a hut, but in 1990, with the financial assistance of the Sports Foundation, members of the club erected the pavilion that stands today.'

In recent years, other work has been undertaken at the ground. At the end of the 1990s the whole playing area was 're-levelled' and in 2002 a new wicket was laid. Walker says the square has always been good: 'I would say that at one point, it was the fairest in the league. We dug it up, flattened it

out, and now it's both fast and true. And all the plaudits have got to go to former groundsman Mick Pollard.'

Ashday Lane is also unique. It was the first ground in the Halifax League to witness six sixes being hit in the same over. The year: 2001. The opposition: Greetland. The man with the muscles: Fiaz Haider.

Overall, club stalwart Walker is very proud of what Southowram CC has achieved in the last couple of decades: 'We're a young club, but we're flourishing. We've got three senior and two junior sides, and we've won our fair share of silverware in the league and cups, particularly in the last decade or so. And for all of this, a lot of credit has got to go to the club committee and to the people who have put so much time and effort into organisation.' ●●●

Extract from P.Davies, *Home Soil*, 2002