

AROUND THE WICKET

with historian
Peter Davies

GOLCAR CRICKET CLUB: the seventh in a fascinating series of cricket histories

Early tussle with the Cold Water Army!

GOLCAR Cricket Club was founded as St John's Golcar Cricket Club in 1871, the name reflecting links with the nearby church.

The founders of the club were T P Taylor, D T Bailey, D Gledhill, Humphrey Dyson, James Bolton and Arthur Shaw, who went on to become one of the most influential figures in cricket across Huddersfield.

Meetings were held in a conservatory in St. James's Street and then in the Church School. In that first season, 1871, the team played at Scar Bottom in Scar Wood, near to the railway line.

In 1872 the club moved to Low Westwood Bottom where they rented a field for £1 15s per annum, an amount so extortionate that one of the local clergy, said to be the curate of the parish, had to become 'surety' for the rent.

The club switched to a third venue, Knowle Bank, in 1874. The Knowle Bank ground was known locally as 'The Tennis Court' and when the club moved to a fourth home in 1877 it may have taken the tennis club with it. The cricket club continued to support a tennis section until the middle of the twentieth century.

In 1876 St John's Golcar held its first major fundraising activities, two concerts which raised £13 5s 6d in total.

By the end of 1876 the club had 21 members and £13 (about £400 at today's values) in the bank. Confident about the future, it moved to improved surroundings at Town End (Swallow Lane) in 1877, and has played there ever since.

The new ground was rented from Bob Firth of The Commercial pub at £5 per annum and was only half its current size. A strip of 40x10 yards, presumably a small square, was laid in 1877 at a cost of £5 and as a consequence the annual rent doubled. St John's Golcar's first recorded match was against the curiously-named Milnsbridge Cold Water Army on 28 June 1873.

Through the 1870s a succession of very local teams appeared in the fixtures, including Longwood Castle (1874), Cliffe End (1875), Parkwood (1875), Golcar Liberal (1876), Golcar Church Institute (1876) and Leymoor (1878).

In the 1880s some journeys to matches were made by train, as the club took advantage of the regular service from Golcar Station (19 trains per day), further evidence of the club's financial prosperity and growing status.

By 1891 Golcar Cricket Club - the club dropped 'St John's' from its name in 1882 - was ready to take its place as founder members of the Huddersfield & District Cricket League.

Substantial fundraising activities after World War I enabled the club to buy the Swallow Lane end of the ground in 1922 and the bowling green end in 1928.

In 1924 a bazaar raised the 'princely sum' of £900 for club funds. By 1928 development work on the ground had commenced, with the club employing an architect and also masons, joiners, plumbers, plasterers and printers.

The economic depression at the time meant that building work was constantly delayed, but today an inscription on the front of the clubhouse tells us that it was finally erected in 'A.D.1933'.

We are told that Golcar borrowed £750 to pay for the construction costs. We can learn a lot about the nature of Golcar Cricket Club from entries in its various minute books:

1926 - Complaints about the quality of the beer.

1928 - Women are excluded from 'celebratory dinner'.

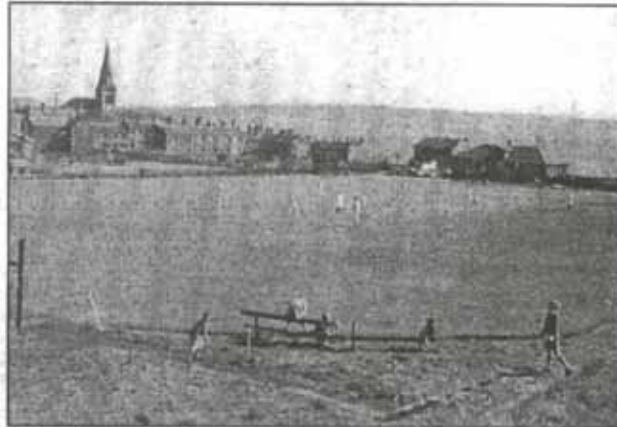
1934 - Meat ten costs 1/3.

1939 - Billiard table and wireless donated to the club.

1940 - Club helps with Golcar Comforts Fund.

In the middle of the twentieth century, Golcar C.C. had a huge number of members: 1935 - 480, 1938 - 450, 1943 - 350, 1945 - 370 (+120 women), 1953 - 340 (+80 women/juniors), 1958 - 450 in total

Golcar Cricket Club was severely depleted during the Second World War. As early as 1940 the Committee's Annual Report stated:



'TO ALL MEMBERS who have joined, and will join His Majesty's Forces, we wish God-speed and safe return.'

This message remained unchanged until a more optimistic note was sounded in January 1945: 'We wish God-speed and a safe return to all our Members, who are helping to bring this long and terrible war to an end.'

In 1940 Golcar Cricket Club awarded free membership to all members serving in the forces.

West Indian legend Sonny Ramadhin starred for Golcar in 1963 because Peter Eyre, the club's professional, was playing for Derbyshire.

The Golcar Sing was also held every year at Golcar cricket ground to raise funds for the Huddersfield Royal Infirmary.

The Golcar page of the 1969 Huddersfield

& District Cricket League Handbook showed the club at its most welcoming:

'Teas provided in the pavilion by our Ladies Committee. Come and enjoy yourselves. Bring your friends. Bowling Green available. Let the Lilys relax you with a good game of cricket. Golcar and Scapegoat Hill buses stop one minute from the ground.'

In the post-war era, Wilson's Brewery helped to renovate the clubhouse, and the club stated: 'The ground is kept in beautiful condition and the wickets play fast and true.

'The whole place is steeped in cricket tradition and since the League was formed the club has held a most important place from a playing and legislative point of view.'

The club make a special tour to the

Golcar bag Lord's trip



GOLCAR MEMORIES: The picturesque Swallow Lane ground in 1951 (above left); above: in 1958 the club scooped a trip to Lord's after qualifying for the final stages of a national six-a-side tournament below: The Golcar 1st XI line-up from 1953

Caribbean every two years, and their international connections have been extended by Atul Bedade, Indian professional from 1999 to 2004.

Through him several Indian touring teams have played friendly matches at the ground.

Last year the club erected a new changing-room block.

Today, Swallow Lane remains a cricket venue with plenty of character and personality.

