

The Origins of the Club

Golcar Cricket Club was founded as St John's Golcar Cricket Club in 1871, the name reflecting links with the nearby church. Consistent with the pattern of life across industrial northern England, the church and its Sunday School were at the heart of village life in Golcar at this time. It wasn't long before the cricket club was adding to this sense of community. Local people took great pride in the team's successes against villages and towns which were rivals in industry and music as well as sport.

The founders of the club were TP Taylor, DT Bailey, D Gledhill, Humphrey Dyson, James Bolton and twelve-years-old 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. There were few other teams to play against and St John's Golcar played Milnsbridge home or away nearly every Saturday.

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.

New members were attracted, including Herbert Whitwam, John Ramsden, Albert Pearson, Thomas Gledhill and Oliver Taylor, who became captain in 1873. 1873 saw the club's first annual dinner which was held at Scar House.

In 1874 the club moved to a third venue, Knowle Bank, and was sufficiently established to formalise the organisation by appointing officers. The first President was Joe Dyson, Vice-President was DT Bailey, Honorary Secretary James Bolton and Honorary Treasurer John Ramsden. 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 fund raising 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 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 40 × 10 yards, presumably a small square, was laid in 1877 at a cost of £5 and as a consequence the annual rent doubled. Yet in 1878 the club could still afford to print its first fixture cards - 80 of them - and introduce talent money and annual prizes for the leading batsman and bowler.

By 1880 the ground was enlarged as the club rented adjoining land - the current clubhouse and Bowling Green End - from Edward Pearson. Within ten years St John's Golcar had progressed from most modest beginnings to rent a substantial piece of land.

The club flourished because it took full advantage of the growing popularity of cricket in the area, reflected in large crowds and an explosion in the number of cricket teams. More teams meant more matches generating more income, particularly as St John's Golcar kept the locals happy with a string of victories. By 1879 the fixture list had expanded to 22 matches and the club went through the season unbeaten, winning 13, drawing 4 with 5 abandoned.

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).

Oliver Taylor recalled: 'There was no riding to matches. We had to walk and carry the baggage. But we got plenty of fun and satisfaction out of it.'

Through most of the 1870s St John's Golcar was probably as vulnerable as these other early local clubs. Some survived long enough to play in the Golcar Cricket League around 1900, alongside Longwood Wesleyans, Scape, Pole Moor and Westwood, but most have long since withered and died. Surprisingly, even Cliffe End, founder members of the Huddersfield League in 1891, didn't make it beyond 1894.

The club's officials realised the need to expand horizons and by 1879 the players were travelling further a field by Whitwam's Wagonette, a four wheeled open-topped vehicle pulled by two horses. That unbeaten 1879 season established the club on the road to the upper tier of club cricket in Huddersfield. They lowered the colours of such clubs as Aspley United, Marsden Mechanics, Meltham, Netherton, Kirkburton Amateurs and Slaithwaite St James.

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

In 1881 the club was able to employ a professional, Whiteley Haig from Cliffe End. He was followed in 1882 and 83 by Lewis Wrathmell of Lascelles Hall. In 1884, for the only time in its history, Golcar employed two professionals, David Eastwood, another from the famous Lascelles Hall nursery, and David Townend of Lockwood.

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 and District Cricket League alongside Huddersfield's longer established clubs.

These included Lascelles Hall and Lockwood from whom Golcar had so recently employed professionals.

In just twenty years - roughly one generation of cricketers - Golcar had risen through the ranks to compete with the best in one of Victorian England's cricketing strongholds. The club's membership had increased from 21 in 1876 to around 700.

Such progress is testimony to the determination and vision of the club's early pioneers. One of these pioneers, Alfred Shaw, was a founder of the Huddersfield and District Cricket Association in 1886, from where he inspired others with his idea of the Huddersfield League, which was formed in 1891. This speaks volumes for the respect in which just one of Golcar's high calibre officials was held.

Substantial fund-raising 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. Reflecting the growth of the area, the Town End ground is today more commonly known as Swallow Lane.

Appropriately, Golcar Cricket Club is one of four proud members - along with Holmfirth, Lascelles Hall and Slaithwaite - to have played continuously in the Huddersfield League, Arthur Shaw's brainchild, since its formation.