

AROUND THE WICKET

with historian Peter Davies

A potted history inserted into a HCC minute book says that there was a club with a ground in Holme in 1868 but visiting teams felt it was 'too far out', so fixtures were presumably a problem.

Following this difficulty, a nucleus of players moved to Holmbridge in the late 1870s to a field opposite the pub (the Commercial Inn, now the Bridge Tavern) and behind the church (St David's).

The earliest newspaper reference to a cricket club at Holmbridge comes in 1871, when the *Huddersfield Examiner* reported on a match between Holme Bridge Britannia and Little Hayfield.

The present field has been the club's home since 1886. It was levelled by members and rented from local mill-owners (W H & J Barber) until purchased from them on the mill's closure in 1975.

A retaining wall was built by the riverside and a spokesperson said that '50 runs was regarded as a good score' in the very early days.

Reports in the *Holmfirth Express* of the club's presentation dinner in 1954 refer to remarks about an incredible game in 1888 when Holmbridge were dismissed for 35 - but then bowled out local rivals Scholes for just 13. This prompted a letter from someone signing himself as 'The Lad from Scholes'.

The writer 'well remembered seeing that match as I was then a lad from Scholes, just at the beginning of my teen age (sic).'

The general feeling was that Holmbridge had already lost with such a low score and there was great excitement.

Fred Lockwood, uncle of Kenyon Lockwood, the Scholes captain, 'took some of the Scholes spectators to the Commercial Inn in anticipation of Scholes winning easily.'

Sometime in the 1900s the club left the Alliance League and joined the Huddersfield and District Cricket Association League.

In 1909 Holmbridge 1st XI were crowned champions of the Huddersfield Association League and also lifted the Lumb Cup.

The club joined the Huddersfield Central League in 1915, at the same time as Leymoor, Meltham, Scholes and Thongsbridge.

The club was immediately active in the corridors of power, as the minutes of Central League committee meetings make plain.

'4 November 1915: Holmbridge moved that the matter of playing without professionals be considered 12 months hence but received no support.'

Holmbridge left the Central League in 1916. The First World War meant an acute shortage of players.

After re-joining the league the previous year, the club enjoyed its first Huddersfield Central League success in 1921. The 2nd XI won the league and cup double, a feat the side was to repeat the following season.

In 1933 the club bought a horse for £10. However, by 1937 it was made redundant after the club's first motor mower was purchased. The horse was then sold for 10/- (50p).

Because Holmbridge leased their ground from a local mill owner, the club was not allowed to play after 6pm on

HOLMBRIDGE CRICKET CLUB: the twelfth in a fascinating series of cricket histories

Low scores, double glory and bus fears!



CHAMPIONS of the Central League in 1931 and (right) ground fears reported in the 1980s

a Sunday - such was the bond that existed between their landlord and St David's parish church, just a six-hit away from the cricket pitch on the other side of Woodhead Road.

When the club came into ownership of the ground (in the 1970s and 'in perpetuity'), it no longer had to take account of the church bells, and no longer had to adjourn Sunday games to Monday.

The Club Improvement Scheme (CIS) was set up in 1952 and existed until 1967. Its aim was to increase the amount of money coming into the club by involving more people.

The incentive of a prize draw was offered and, for example, in 1964 there was a first prize of £5 and five others of £1.

By its last year, 1967, the prize offered was 50% of total takings but a diminishing number of sellers was the main cause of the demise of a scheme which had been a lifeline for 15 years.

In 1955 Holmbridge CC junior XI won the Thornton Cup, while in the same year the 1st XI brought home the Huddersfield Central League Section B title.

An Extraordinary General Meeting was held in 1966, 'concerning whether the club still carries on in season 1967'.

No formal record of what was said at the meeting is recorded, but it was decided to carry on and, indeed, soon afterwards it was decided to approach S Cartwright with a view to his being engaged as a professional.

By 1968 the crisis had returned and another EGM was necessary before the players renewed their commitment to keep the club alive.

Woodhead Road is famous for the grass bank that runs alongside the boundary to the left as you look out from the pavilion.

A good two-thirds of this banking was cut away and demolished in 1954 - to leave it as it is now. In the mid-1990s, the wall on the same side was rebuilt. In between, in 1980, the pavilion building was extended.

In 1975 a decision was made to buy the ground for £750 as Barber's mill (the previous landlord) was closing. The decision was taken at an Extraordinary General Meeting held on 19 October 1975.

A sub-committee was formed to coordinate fundraising efforts and the encouraging sum of £65 was collected on the night. It was decided to apply for

grant aid to Kirkstiles, which was duly forthcoming, and four club members, T Swift, J Taylor, J Booth and R Gapper, became trustees.

The following year's AGM (1976) reported that there had been good money-raising efforts and particular thanks were given to members of the committee, wives, Kirkstiles MC (which had provided a £1,000 grant), with one individual, Mr D Mellor, singled out for special mention.

So charming is Holmbridge's ground that the producers of TV series *Last of the Summer Wine* once asked permission to film at the venue.

John Booth, club secretary for 20 years and now league representative, takes up the story:

'At one point in the late-1970s we received a call from the BBC. They asked us whether they could do some filming at the ground and we were happy to oblige.'

'We put out 13 cricketers and two umpires - and the umpires, batsman and bowler had to wear make-up for the occasion. All in all it took about four hours to film, for about 30 seconds of TV action!'

During the 1980s there was a proposal to create a bus turning circle and this would mean that a section of what was already the smallest ground in the league would

BUS TURN SHOCKER



lose part of the outfield.

Club objections were well supported by, among others, Kirkstiles Sports Council, the Huddersfield Central League, the Yorkshire Cricket Association and near neighbours Cartworth Moor CC.

Initial opposition succeeded in putting the plan on hold but the issue resurfaced in 1983 when a public meeting was held.

Yet again, no firm decision was taken and the issue of the turning circle was still not settled in 1984, although it was said that the likelihood of part of the field being used was remote.

A questionnaire was circulated in the local community in 1985 which suggested that local opinion was in favour of the proposal but it was felt that this view reflected, for the most part, the feelings of those who lived lower down the valley.

To the club's relief, the matter was shelved and a modified pull-in bay was constructed which had no effect on the playing area.

The Woodhead Road side was also mentioned in a curious league minute of 4 May 1982: 'The Secretary said that he had been asked to bring to the notice of the League the excellent sporting spirit and appeals at the recent Bradley & Colnebridge versus Holmbridge game. Mr Barry Leadbeater said that he was very impressed with both clubs' attitude to the match and wished to compliment them both via Mr Gordon Littlewood.'

● Readers are asked to contact Peter Davies on 01484 472405 or via p.j.davies@hud.ac.uk if they have any more photos or information relating to local cricket history.



WOMEN RULE: A Holmbridge Ladies' team - date unknown