

HOLMBRIDGE CC

DOWN YOUR WAY

PICTURE POSTCARD LAND

The Village

The picturesque village of Holmbridge has much in common with its near and more famous neighbour, Holmfirth. Not only is it a filming location for the popular *Last of the Summer Wine* but it also shares the prefix of its name and a similar history, growing up mainly as a result of the Industrial Revolution and the arrival of the mills in the valley in the early nineteenth century.



Henry VII

However, the village has had some kind of settlement since at least the Middle Ages when records show that the place was known as Holmebrig and certainly by the time Henry Tudor

had settled the Wars of the Roses and installed himself on the throne in 1487, a family named Littlewood were living in the village.

As for the bridge, from which the village takes its name (Holmbridge meaning the bridge of the Holme), the earliest recording of this crossing over the River Holme is 1430. It was in fact the building of this bridge that caused the population to grow and encouraged the erection of an inn in the village, offering the increasing numbers of trans-Pennine travellers refreshments and accommodation.

Generally at this time the houses in the area would have been built higher up the slopes on the steep sides of the valley. Many of the old stone farmhouses that are dotted on the hillsides today are among the oldest buildings in the village and one such settlement at Upper Stubbin bears the date 1678. These farmhouses had, and some still have, the rows of long mullioned windows indicating that, along with farming the land, the occupiers were supplementing their meagre income by the weaving of cloth.

Mullioned windows were put in to allow as much light as possible into the weaving chamber (generally on the top floor) enabling the weaver (usually the male of the household) to work long hours. The manufacture of cloth became so important in Holmbridge that by the 1790s a water-powered fulling and scribbling mill had

been built, along with Field End Mill (1797), all in the valley bottom close to water supplies.



The plentiful supply of water encouraged more mills into the area and by the end of the nineteenth century there were over 50 mills in the Holme Valley, four of which were based in Holmbridge.

Unfortunately, for Holmbridge's expanding population (during the 1800s Holmbridge was described as 'a busy and populous place') the trigger for the influx of the mills – the abundance of water to power the mills – also brought with it devastation and tragedy.

In February 1852 the event known as 'the Great Flood' occurred when Bilberry Reservoir, which looms high above Holmbridge, burst its banks and released 90 million gallons of water into the villages below. By the time the water reached Holmbridge it had already demolished mills, houses and machines in Digley.

The floodwaters went on to destroy houses, roads and mills in Holmbridge itself as well as depositing its earlier loot of broken machinery, trees and furniture in the village.



The recently built St David's Church was one of the floodwaters early victims; the church wall was demolished, trees in the churchyard were uprooted, the floor of the church was torn up and graves were forced open. It took weeks and months to repair the damage caused by the floodwaters but eventually the mills, church, roads and houses were all repaired or rebuilt. The church today does have a memento of this horrific experience – it has appropriately become the home of the Flood Bible (see 'Holmbridge facts').

During the twentieth century Holmbridge suffered damage and destruction once more when in 1944 a dramatic cloudburst caused the River Holme to swell and the water eventually spilled out into the valley. Holmbridge Cricket field, Holmbridge Mill (as well as causing damage to the mill the waters apparently carried away bales of wool), the parish hall and houses at the bottom of Holme Bank were among the victims this time.

As the floodwater depleted it apparently left behind a rather unpleasant smell to remind villagers of its visit. Holmbridge suffered a more permanent problem during the latter half of the twentieth

century when foreign competition forced many of the area's mills to close – Barbers going into voluntary liquidation in 1975. At least the 'wuzzing holes' (holes where buckets containing wool were placed to dry the wool by wuzzing it – turning it round) on Brownhill Road serve as a reminder of Holmbridge's textile past.

Holmbridge today is described as 'a lovely village...offering picture postcard views' and it's difficult to disagree with this.



Indeed, it is the beautiful scenery and the Holme Valley's association with the BBC's long-running series *Last of the Summer Wine*, rather than the employment offered by the mills that attract people to settle in the village. Indeed, the popularity of Holmbridge is evident by the number of housing developments in the village at the present time.

It is perhaps the numbers coming into the village that supply players for the cricket team, the football teams and Holme Valley Band as well as providing members for Holmbridge's branch of the WI. However, it remains to be seen whether Holmbridge's new residents will embrace all of the village's past traditions. Perhaps if any newcomers are asked to join in a game of 'Ring Th'owd Adam Bells' they ought to think very carefully before agreeing to keep this tradition going!

BIBLES & BARBERS

Holmbridge: 5 Key Facts

1. You can ring my bell!

In the nineteenth century people of the Holme Valley and indeed, some Holmbridge residents, took part in a rather bizarre game known as 'Ring in th'owd Adam Bells'. A kind of party game, it was played at someone's home and usually took place towards the end of the evening after much singing, dancing, drinking and general merry-making.

The signal for the commencing of the game was the locking out of the children, who had been employed to keep the adults' mugs of beer topped up. Women and men sat opposite each other on the floor whilst the women sang a song which began with "Ring in th'owd Adam Bells," and ended with the words "Who can see my bare arse?" At this point the women would all fall backwards throwing their skirt over their heads. The rest of the game is best left to the imagination.



2. Child labour

Contrary to what many people believe, long hours, low pay and the employment of children were not products of the Industrial Revolution. Children had been working in the privacy of their own homes, long before the nineteenth century; gathering corn and carding and spinning wool.

However, during the early phase of the Industrial Revolution child labour became more visible, more systematic and more prevalent. Cotton factory owners employed children both to ‘spin’ and to ‘scavenge’ (moving underneath machinery to pick up loose cotton), jobs for which small agile bodies were well suited. But most of all, they employed children because they were cheap and plentiful.

The mill owners in the Holme Valley were no different from the cotton factory owners across the border in Lancashire. Many, including Joseph Barber & Co at Holmbridge, had children under the age of 10 working for them (in 1833 Barber & Co employed five). These children were expected to work a fourteen-hour day; from 6.00 in the morning to 8.00 at night with only 3 breaks (30 minutes for breakfast, one hour for lunch and 30 minutes for an afternoon drink).



The mill owners told factory inspectors visiting the premises in 1833 that ‘there should be some restriction as to the hours of labour performed by the children’ but they did nothing about the hours themselves. It is hard to believe that mill owners, who were often churchgoers and contributed much both financially and socially to local life, did not feel any sense of guilt about employing children so young.

Yet it was only with the introduction of various pieces of legislation during the nineteenth century that employment became seen as unacceptable and eventually illegal (the 1874 Factory Act made it illegal to employ children under the age of 9; this was raised to 10 in 1875. Children over 11 continued working half time until after the First World War).

3. A miracle?

When Bilberry Reservoir burst its banks in 1852 one Mrs Hirst of nearby Digley, was reading her bible. As word spread of the impending flood, Mrs Hirst took off her reading glasses and placed them inside the bible. She then left the house. Shortly thereafter her house, bible and all were carried away by the floodwaters.

During the several weeks of cleaning up Mrs Hirst's bible was found buried in mud. Her glasses were no longer inside it but there was a glasses-shaped mark on the pages where she had placed them. This bible, known as the Flood Bible, is kept in St David's Church, Holmbridge.



4. Unusual architecture

Holmbridge is famous for its unusual architecture.

The valley sides are so steep that some houses had to be built on top of each other, sometimes in groups of four. These unique residences have been labelled 'tenement blocks' by some but the top 'bunk', so to speak, certainly offers views that one would not expect, not even in the tenement blocks of New York.

BRIDGES & BANDS

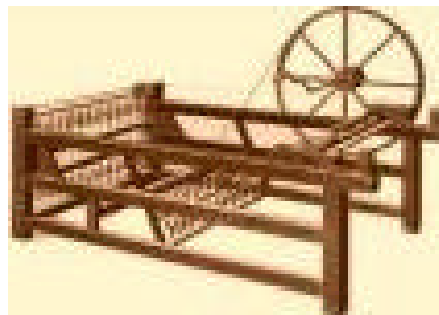
Key Dates in the History of Holmbridge before the Birth of the Cricket Club

1000-1200 First recorded settlers, although it is possible that the area had been inhabited prior to this.

1086 Holme, the village just above Holmbridge, is mentioned in the Domesday Book.

1400s The bridge over the River Holme is built.

1776 The first Spinning Jenny is introduced in the area.



1790 Holmbridge Mill is built.

1833 Factory Inspectors visit the village's mills.

1840 The parish church of St. David is built.

1850 Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway Company opens the branch line to Holmfirth.

1852 5 February - 'The Great Flood'. This flood has been described as 'probably the greatest single disaster ever to befall the Holme Valley', claiming 81 lives.

1860 Holme Silver Band, based in Holmbridge, is founded.

180 NOT OUT!

KEY DATES IN THE EARLY HISTORY OF CRICKET IN KIRKLEES

1825: Lascelles Hall Cricket Club founded.

1842: Dalton play Sheffield for £30.

1867: *Huddersfield Examiner* publishes scores or reports on 209 matches featuring 107 different teams.



1868: Fartown ground leased by Huddersfield St. Johns C.C.. Savile Ground, Dewsbury, hosts game between All England XI and United All England XI.

1873: Batley legend Louis Hall makes Yorkshire bow.

1883: Lumb Cup and Heavy Woollen Cup born.

1886: Huddersfield Cricket Association is formed.

1887-9: Dewsbury Savile C.C. win hat-trick of Heavy Woollen Cup titles.

1892: 10 Clubs take part in inaugural Huddersfield & District Cricket League competition.