

**TT No.20: Mike Latham** - Sat 31 October 2015: Huddersfield & District Association Football League, Division One: **Britannia Sports** 1-3 Newsome; Attendance: 30 (h/c); No admission or programme.

There's something very sad, eerie almost about an abandoned cricket ground, especially on Halloween where the ghosts of crickets past come out to play.

A good friend of mine is a cricket follower and Sheffield United supporter and he's convinced that a curse was put on the football club when cricket was abandoned at Bramall Lane in 1973, such has been the perceived bad luck he maintains has plagued his beloved Blades since.

So, to Paddock Cricket, Bowling & Athletic Club in Huddersfield, erstwhile members of the Huddersfield Cricket League and with a notable past. They once had the great Gary Sobers as professional and a fantastic photo of him in a Paddock CC team group of 1962 is one of the exhibits that form part of the excellent Huddersfield University archive in cricket clubs in the area.

Even if you no interest in cricket the site is well worth a look for its social history and collection of stories, histories and memorabilia. It can be viewed here: <http://www.ckcricketheritage.org.uk/southkirklees/paddock/clubhome.htm> .

Paddock is now a multi-cultural part of Huddersfield located off the Manchester road out of town and not far from J23 of the M62 motorway.

The club was formed in 1872 by a group of men from the local Methodist church. Initially, the club, known as Paddock Rangers, played rugby and football, but soon introduced cricket as well. Sadly, the cricket club folded in the Spring of this year, severing their tenure of the league that had stretched back 100 years.

Now Britannia Sports occupy the ground and have turned the venue into a decent football arena with facilities that must be the envy of many others clubs in the league. Britannia Sports' origins are as a sports club of the Britannia Mill nearby.

There are few hints that seven or eight months ago there was a cricket club located here that was preparing for another season, save for a few whitewashed walls and some abandoned cricket nets located in the far corner of the ground next to the bowling club.

During the afternoon a youngster, while searching for the ball which had gone out play into a hedgerow found an old cricket ball much to his delight. On the other side high netting stops footballs from disappearing into the steep gorge created by the railway line. Goodness knows how many cricket balls have been lost over the years.

But other than that, the old score-box has gone, so too the sightscreens and there's no way that you could imagine the centre circle of the football pitch ever being in the middle of the cricket square. In the pavilion a rather austere but well-built

brick building that looks like it could withstand a nuclear bomb there's a distinct lack of cricket memorabilia- great effort then by the university project to at least preserve some of the important social history of the district for future generations to enjoy.

In the 1950s an Onlooker wrote about Paddock: "Over one boundary fence, a raw, narrow railway quarry (only a few hundred yards down the line from the main Huddersfield station); over the other, Johnny Moor Hill; and in the distance, massive grass banks, new industrial units and the glory of the Colne Valley.

"It is not pretty but there is something magnificent about the rawness of the immediate industrial environment." Those well-written words still apply today.

By coincidence Britannia's opponents were Newsome who also play at an old cricket ground, in their case Primrose Hill, another club whose history is preserved on the university site.

The visitors looked the better team almost throughout what was an entertaining game played on a mild afternoon, leading 2-0 at half-time and then clinching the game with a third goal after the home side had pulled one back just after the interval.

I like the Huddersfield League. It has four divisions, is well organised and the matches I've seen have invariably been played in a good spirit and well refereed. It also has an excellent and well-maintained website and the result of this game was posted very soon after the final whistle.

I think it's fair to say, however, that the concept of groundhopping hasn't quite caught on in this league and some clubs can unwittingly initially appear to be rather parochial and wary of the outsider.

I wish Britannia Sports well, at least the cricket ground is still in use for sport rather than becoming the site for yet another supermarket and they have an excellent base to develop their club.

And it's far removed from their old home ground, which I visited in 2013 at Lindley Recreation Ground.

Ironically one of Paddock CC's best-known players was the late footballer-cricketer Chris Balderstone who was one of the last players to play professional cricket in the summer and football in the winter.

Famously, on one occasion on Monday 15 September 1975 he did both on the same day, playing for Leicestershire at Queen's Park, Chesterfield in the day and then for Doncaster Rovers against Brentford in the evening, thought to be the only person to achieve this feat.

51 not out overnight, he played in the 1-1 draw at Belle Vue and then resumed his innings the following morning, going on to reach 116 before being run out. Leicester also clinched their first ever County Championship title in that game.

I wonder what he would have made of the change? Another of their alumnae, was Willie Watson who was a prolific run-scorer with Paddock as a teenager and moved on to play for Yorkshire, Leicestershire and England at cricket. As a footballer, Watson was a cultured wing-half for Huddersfield Town, Sunderland and Halifax Town and won four caps for England.

In 2013 I watched cricket at Paddock CC in what proved to be their penultimate season in the Huddersfield League. I've attached a few photos for comparison purposes.

I'd recommend a visit to this historic and atmospheric ground and would also add the excellent Huddersfield League is worthy of inclusion of any groundhopper's list.

04/20