

Thank you, Mr Crowther

11. Marsden CC - Hemplow

*The entire setting is one of picturesque and delightful serenity.
[60 Years of Glorious Cricket! Huddersfield and District Cricket League
Diamond Jubilee 1891-1951 - 1951]*

Marsden - or 'March-dene', as it was known in ancient times, or 'Bellas Town' as it is nicknamed - has been described as 'the last town in the Colne Valley...a superb setting within a bowl of green hills' and 'the first town of the western extremity of the Colne Valley'. And it is an interesting, curious place. One local poet has written:

Who says there's nothing i' Marsden
I think the prospects fine...
There's the midweek club for older folk
The youth club for the young
Scouts and Guides and Junior Band
And the local cricket and football
Can always do with a hand.

A significant staging-post on the road into Lancashire, Marsden, with its 'Victorian flavour', is the ultimate Pennine town: green, hilly and dominated by mills. It is famous for two tunnels: one that takes trains (Standedge - the largest in the world when it was built in 1848) and one that takes canal traffic (built 38 years earlier in 1810, and a mammoth three miles 135 yards long). Marsden also has a prize band, some of the highest pubs in England, a Socialist Club (still), and a very distinctive dialect. In 1746 John Wesley visited the town; in 1798 local folk were knocked for six by a particularly virulent bout of Black Fever, and in 1872 Marsden suffered extreme flooding. Once upon a time, there was also a cinema (The Electric) and a 'Miss Marsden' competition.

In addition, the town is noted for its Luddite heritage; in and around 1812 the Marsden Luddites shot William Horsfall, a local mill owner, and violently sabotaged the new machines that were threatening to destroy their livelihood. The place is also renowned for cuckoos. Legend has it that Marsdeners liked the song of the cuckoo so much that they tried to 'trap' the bird and keep it forever; but they failed, and the memory of this strange tale lives on. Hence the amount of cuckoo images that appear on local badges and emblems.

Marsden is seven miles from Huddersfield, 18 from Manchester. According to one local writer, it 'is still a comparatively quiet, peaceful, rural area'. The Mechanics Hall is the main attraction in the town centre; and amid the lush hills one of the key landmarks is the cricket ground.

Marsden C.C. was founded in 1865; the club played at The Tips before switching to Hemplow in 1921. This move came about, 'as the result of the generosity of the late Mr. John Edward Crowther, a most influential Marsden mill owner, who presented to the inhabitants of Marsden a wonderful sports arena, consisting of cricket, bowls, tennis and golf!' It is for this reason that one author has stated that the story of the club 'reads like a fairy tale'. The sports complex took the place of four farms and a pub (the Moorcock Inn) and when the 'new' cricket ground came into existence, the 'old' one, close by, was turned into a football pitch. In total, Hemplow covers 70 acres and today it is managed by the Marsden Recreational Trust.



1953 Team Photo

The Hemplow story also has its tragic side. In 1936 the pavilion burnt down - an 'unfortunate disaster,' according to one observer with a penchant for understatement. A report from the *Huddersfield Examiner* (Monday 19 October 1936) hangs in the clubhouse: 'MARSDEN CRICKET PAVILION DESTROYED - The Marsden Cricket & Bowling Club's pavilion, a wooden building, was completely destroyed by fire yesterday'.

Since this date, a number of individuals have played an important role in the history of the club: Fred Haigh - who on 19 July 1941 took two hat-tricks and 10 wickets in the same innings for Marsden against Huddersfield; D.H. Firth - former club president; Atul Wassan - award-winning bowler in 1989; Sher Ali - prize-winning batsman in 1995; and Carol Gledhill - after whom the 'Millennium Garden' (a small picnic area close to the main entrance) is named.

The ground is set amid a range of rolling Pennine hills and borders onto the football field - complete with decrepit goalposts and grazing sheep. (On occasions the sheep even begin to promenade round the edge of the cricketing arena!) On a fresh summer's day the scene is a still, peaceful one, with various shades of luscious emerald green on view in the middle distance.

The view from the pavilion takes in the Marsden town-centre skyline and Pole Moor - an impressive sight.

The playing area is isolated and exposed, with the potential to be very chilly. The playing surface is reasonably flat, with only minor areas of undulation. Half a dozen benches line the playing surface and a grass bank covers half the ground perimeter. The club owns some excellent sightscreens, covers and practice nets; and there is also a dedicated changing room for the umpires.

Marsden C.C. is a good place for spotting sheepdogs and collies going for their afternoon stroll. There are also some delightful mauve-coloured bushes by the scoreboard. The Huddersfield-Marsden bus terminates at a bus stop only 25 yards from the main entrance to the cricket ground; cars are normally parked by the main entrance or behind the sightscreen at the pavilion end.

From afar, the quaint, turreted pavilion looks like a slightly dated seaside palace - built on the steep bank directly opposite the main entrance. From inside the building there is a wonderful 'aerial' view of the action. Adjoining the pavilion are two flagpoles: one flying the Union Jack, the other the George Cross. Pinned to the large noticeboard inside are teamsheets, averages and details of the fundraising '100' and '200' Clubs - as well as taxi cards, a huge picture of Darren Gough and a publicity poster for the Marsden Band. The wall is also adorned by framed photos of celebrated Marsden XIs, going as far back as 1895. There's a TV, dartboard, pool table, telephone...and a strange contraption called a 'Chalkie Cricket Scorer'. A bowling green backs on to the smartly laid-out tea-room area.

One first-time visitor summed up the Marsden experience as follows: 'There is a very rural feel to the place. It's peaceful, picturesque, and you can hear the sound of sheep bleating in an adjoining field. The pavilion is very 1920s - and this adds to the whole effect.'

Today, a full tea costs £2.50, a cup of tea 40p, and the MCC caterers do a very nice line in sponge cake, with lots of icing cream in the middle (30p a slice). The cake is well worth a try.

Extract from P.Davies, *Pennine Pitch* (2003)