

Watch the birdies

Greetland CC - The Holme

In 1970 I moved house from County Durham to Greetland. I asked the woman whose house I was buying: 'Do you know any good cricket clubs nearby?' She said: 'Greetland CC is just down the road - they're pretty useful.'

[Chairman of Greetland CC, Les Forester]

Greetland's headquarters, on Saddleworth Road, plays host to cricket, bowling...and pigeon-racing.

Perched high on the scoreboard side of the ground are half a dozen sizeable pigeon coops. Members of Stainland and District Homing Society use Greetland Cricket and Bowling Club (as it is formally known) as their base, and the pavilion noticeboard is full of race details and times. (One local pigeon-fancier drives a vehicle with the number-plate: PIGON).

As one sits in the pavilion, one can actually see the pigeons looking out of their wire cages - a rare and possibly unique sight at a Calderdale cricket venue. Sometimes a Greetland cricket fixture coincides with a race day, so on such occasions there are two attractions for the price of one.

'Holme' is an ancient Scandinavian word denoting 'a flat piece of ground near a river' - hence the name of Greetland's pleasant, well enclosed ground. The cricket club has never played anywhere else.

In the 1930s a local blanket manufacturer, John Horsfalls (based on Stainland Road), donated the ground to Greetland as a gift. The club was charged just a pepper-corn rent - sixpence a year.

During the early years of the twentieth century, Greetland had its fair share of colourful characters: for instance, Jack Hayes, who started at the club as a junior, and Percy Smith, the village cobbler and a man who emerged as one of the club's most important patrons. It was Smith who also helped flood the bottom of the ground in winter so that locals could play ice hockey and go skating! There is also evidence to suggest that a Greetland Ladies team existed in the early part of the last century.

Nothing much has changed at Greetland's ground over time. Billy Betts, club chairman, explains: 'Things are pretty much the same as they ever were. A few decades ago, the pavilion was half-demolished - the clock came off and the scoreboard came down - but I can't give you a date for when that happened. To be honest, the ground is a little run down at the moment. The main problem we've got is money. Every year it costs us £1,000-plus just to maintain the square, so we're always going to be up against it. So if anyone's got any spare brass, we'll gladly have it.'

Greetland is located two and a half miles south of Halifax and a mile or so west of Elland. Indeed, in days gone by, it was part of a township called Elland-cum-Greetland. The small village is home to three noteworthy buildings: Clay House, Sunny Bank and Toll-Bar House, from where, centuries ago, a turnpike official used to monitor all users of the main road that passed through Greetland. And a bit of modern-day trivia: the Calderdale Way, no less, begins in the village.



Greetland CC, 1931

The village is only small, but it boasts two cricket teams. In addition to Greetland CC there is Greetland Village CC, formed in the 1980s by three or four former Greetland CC players. Greetland Village are members of the Halifax Association and play at the Goldfields complex on Rochdale Road.

The Holme may have seen better days, but it still has its charm as a local league cricket venue: the distinguished-looking scoreboard set back from the playing area, the trickling stream that runs nearby (the Black Beck, which eventually joins the Calder), not forgetting the quaint (and slightly narrow) mini-bridge that the scorers must navigate to get to and from the scoreboard. Then there's the unusual white corrugated boundary

board on the same side of the ground, and the huge, elaborate, almost spherical clock that sits in the backyard of Andy Thornton, architectural antiques merchant, whose premises back onto the cricket field on the opposite side. And for the record, none of the clock's faces tell the right time!

That a cricket ground is wedged between Rochdale Road and Saddleworth Road is not obvious to the first-time visitor. It is enclosed on one side by large buildings and on the other by a dense wooded area - and hidden from view behind the Shears pub - but it has been Greetland CC's home patch for more than a century. Today, some visiting players reckon it's one of the flattest grounds in the area.

No-one quite knows when cricket was first played at the ground (the 1890s is the best bet), but a dust-ridden framed photo hidden away in the pavilion features five key personalities in the early history of the club - JW. Sykes (1894), F. Webster (1929), JJ. Fielden (1911), N. Saville (1931) and AL. Richardson (1934). So the cricket club is at least 108 years old.

Club stalwart Betts continues: 'Greetland were a top side in the 1950s and 1960s, but now things are different. When opposition sides come here, they're almost guaranteed the points! But the club has its own ground, which has got to be a blessing, and in people like Les Forrester and Harold Sykes, we have been blessed with wonderful, wholehearted servants in recent times.' A plaque in the pavilion lounge pays tribute to another dedicated club man, 2nd XI captain John Redhead, who died tragically in 2001.

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