

Meltham CC

Meltham play in the Huddersfield League, but in years gone by have also turned out in the Alliance and Central Leagues. With the demise of Meltham Mills CC (they did not re-form after the Second World War) Meltham CC now represent the town alone, and currently boast a 1st and 2nd XI, plus two under-13 elevens and under-15 and under-17 sides. Mean Lane is also the headquarters of the Pennine Nomads women's cricket team.

In the early days of the club, Holmfirth were Meltham's main rivals; in the last couple of decades it has been Slaithwaite and Elland. Times have definitely changed. Many moons ago, beer in the pavilion was served straight from the barrel. But rest assured - techniques have improved since then.

Back in 1951 one observer wrote: 'The club has always been progressive in outlook and the amenities to be found on this picturesque ground are such that the Meltham club may be regarded as having one of the best grounds in the league.'

The Meltham Cricket & Athletic Club, as it is formally known, was founded in 1867 - a fact that is now commemorated on the iron gates in the far corner of the ground. At first, their Mean Lane HQ, located in the Broadlands district, was owned by Glebe trustees, but 55 years on from formation, in 1922, the club was able to purchase the land itself. Since then a number of top players have turned out for the club, including Dilip Doshi, Madan Lal, Shahid Mahmood, Ryan Sidebottom and Paul Booth.

For almost a century, the club has been improving and redeveloping the ground. On Wednesday 18 May 1921 a new £350 pavilion was opened by Clr. J.H. Preston and D.R. Gellantly. It took the place of the small old hut that stood before, and an interest-free donation of £150 from R.F. Woodhead enabled the building to be erected. 'Comfort' was the watchword in those days, and the new construction - complete with changing rooms and bar - scored highly in this regard. In time, the building came to be known as the 'Green Dragon'.

Some key dates in the club's history include:

1927 - First professional player is taken on.

1938 - Joseph Brook takes 10-8 for Meltham at home to Bradley Mills, all clean bowled, and the opposition are rolled over for 63 ('Details of this exceptional performance have been recorded herewith,' says a notice on the pavilion wall).

1958 - Presentation to mark the 500th wicket of Alfred Topp.

1975 - New scoreboard built.

2004 - New multi-sport clubhouse opened.

Many of the ground improvements have stemmed from the club's determination to maintain, and extend, their support base in the local community. And today, when you visit Mean Lane - bordered by new housing, a tool and machine factory, and a noisy football pitch - you are certainly struck by the amount of spectators who line the boundary benches in small clusters, and the number of pensioners and kiddies who follow the action from inside, or just in front of, the pavilion. Many supporters sit in their parked vehicles close to the scoreboard.

In 1951 it was claimed that 'few grounds in Yorkshire have a more delightful turf than is to be found on the Meltham ground'. The playing area is particularly flat; the square incorporates a variety of batting strips and there's also an artificial wicket. Locals say that Meltham tracks traditionally play slow and low, and that bowlers usually have a tough time.

The most notorious date in the history of Meltham C.C. is 1972 - when no cricket at all was played on the Mean Lane square. The year before, the wicket had been treated for weeds, but turned a horrible shade of brown. So the square had to be re-seeded, and Meltham had to play all their 1972 fixtures away from home!