

# **The Rise and Rise of Bridgeholme CC**

## **The Hebden Bridge League Years 1952-55**

After a solid first season in the Todmorden and District League in 1951, Bridgeholme carried all before them in the Hebden Bridge League.

Second division champions and cup winners in 1952, they completed the double in 1953, winning the first division and repeating their cup success. In these two seasons they played 43 matches, winning 35 drawing 5 and losing just 3.

1953 saw the club operate a second eleven for the first time, the team finishing third in the Hebden Bridge League's second division.

Bridgeholme's success had been built around the devastating bowling of Jack Horsfall and when he was unavailable for most of 1954 the team went into temporary decline, finishing fifth in the six team league.

The progress of another bowling spearhead, R Albinson was apparent in the club's first tied match at Nell Carr in May 1955. Bowled out for 23, Bridgeholme appeared doomed with Birchcliffe on 16 for 3, but Albinson took 7 for 7 and the home side were also dismissed for 23. It was the closest Bridgeholme came to defeat all season as they walked away with another league and cup double.

Albinson took 6 for 37 as Old Town were bowled out for 67 in reply to Bridgeholme's 126 for 4 in the cup final at Todmorden's Centre Vale ground.

Encouraged by their successes, Bridgeholme's pioneers had made rapid progress on and off the field and were ready for a greater challenge.

In hindsight, the Hebden Bridge League was a stepping stone for the club. The days of cricket played in hilltop fields with the most Spartan facilities were drawing to a close. By the start of the 1956 season, all the Hebden Bridge League's champions of that decade had left. Luddendenfoot St Mary's had joined the Halifax Amateur League whilst Mytholmroyd Methodists, Hebden Bridge Salem and Bridgeholme had all moved into the Halifax and District League. Old Town, whose new ground at Boston Hill would be ready for 1957, seemed destined to follow, leaving the league impoverished for grounds and players.

The Hebden Bridge League, founded in 1894, folded on 30<sup>th</sup> December 1957, but its legacy lives on in all the clubs who cut their teeth there.

## Into the Halifax League

Bridgeholme played their first match in the Halifax League at Blackley on Saturday 21 April 1956, losing by 45 runs. After a second defeat seven days later the *Heben Bridge Times* explained their poor form:

‘It would appear that with so much work having to be done to get the ground at Eastwood into shape, the Bridgeholme players have had little chance of practice, and once this worry has been removed there will probably be an improvement in the side’s performances.’

Bridgeholme avoided defeat for the first time in a tie at Dean Clough, both teams 131 all out. Encouragingly, Jack Horsfall was back to his best with a tally of 15 wickets in three games.

Bridgeholme’s Station House ground was not ready until 12 May, the fourth weekend of the season, when the second XI beat Dean Clough seconds by 48 runs. On the same day the first team made their debut in the Parish Cup, a competition for which the club was refused entry in 1954 because of the condition of the ground. A 13 run victory at Dean Clough saw Bridgeholme progress to round 2, where they were beaten by first division high flyers Copley.

The first team’s home debut in the Halifax League produced a hard-earned draw against Mytholmroyd,

Bridgeholme replying to 213 with 90 for 7. Despite this poor start, the team gradually found their feet and rose from second bottom at the end of May to finish a creditable third behind the two Mytholmroyd clubs who were promoted. Jack Horsfall and Neil Whittaker both took 42 wickets, Horsfall at 9.17 to finish fourth in the league's bowling averages.

Optimism was high for 1957, particularly when Bridgeholme signed the former Essex and Glamorgan batsman Richard Horsfall, to date the only first class cricketer to play for the club. Horsfall had a frustrating time, making 58 runs in four innings - one not out, two run out and one lbw – before returning to Todmorden where he had played in the Lancashire League double winning side of 1938.

It is typical of cricket's unpredictability that Horsfall scored more against the 1948 Australians, when he fielded through the famous day at Leyton where the tourists hit 721, than he did at Dean Clough where he was run out for one.

A less auspicious but more effective signing was that of future Todmorden and Hebden Bridge bowler – and future Mayor of Todmorden – Stanley Hollows. Hollows, with 44 wickets, supported by Jack Horsfall with 39, spearheaded the bowling attack as Bridgeholme won promotion as champions of division 2.

**Halifax and District Cricket League  
Division 2  
Final Table 1957**

	<b>Played</b>	<b>Won</b>	<b>Drawn</b>	<b>Lost</b>	<b>Points</b>
Bridgeholme	18	12	3	3	39
Siddall	18	12	1	5	37
Northowram	18	9	1	8	28
Stones	18	9	1	8	28
Blackley	18	8	1	9	25
Websters	18	8	1	9	25
Bradshaw	18	8	0	10	24
Dean Clough	18	6	3	9	21
Hebden B'ge Salem	18	6	1	11	19
Stainland	18	5	2	11	17

The *Hebden Bridge Times* was accurate in its prediction about Bridgeholme's first season in the Halifax League Division 1:

'No doubt Bridgeholme will find the going harder in the senior division, but with their playing strength should be able to hold their own.'

The club's first match was a rain affected draw against Mytholmroyd and they secured their first victory in the top flight by 86 runs against Barkisland the following Saturday. Despite this promising start, Bridgeholme hovered just above the relegation zone until a late run lifted them to fifth place in the ten-team league.

Outstanding performances included an unbeaten 103 not out by Albert Leeder against King Cross and Stanley Hollows' 62 and 6 for 31 against Siddall

which secured a semi-final berth in the Parish Cup. Bridgeholme lost the semi-final by 54 runs after eventual winners Sowerby St Peters recovered from 53 for 8 to 127. The club's graph had nevertheless continued its upward course in a highly satisfactory first season in the top flight.

Performances by the second eleven, who were runners-up in the first division for second teams, and the newly formed third team gave plenty of cause for optimism.

Playing in the Halifax Junior League, the third team won the Websters Cricket Club Cup, topping their section ahead of Mytholmroyd, Booth and Hebden Bridge Salem before overpowering Sowerby St Peters in the final at the Ramsdens. Doug Mitchell (4-26) and Graham Wrench (3-14) were instrumental in bowling Sowerby out for 52, and Brian Hudson and Michael Greenwood knocked off the runs without loss.

The first significant blip on the Bridgeholme radar came in 1959. On the fringe of the title race for the first half of the season, Bridgeholme's form inexplicably fell away. In Ernest Travis, who hit 508 runs at an average of 36, the club possessed one of the league's finest batsmen, but a fourth from bottom finish did not augur well.

Relegation followed in 1960. Only five points covered the bottom seven in the ten team league and Bridgeholme's six wins and three draws from

18 matches would have seen them safe most seasons. But they could hardly claim misfortune when, with issues to be settled on the final day, they could field only nine men in the first team and eight in the seconds. Inevitably, both teams lost.

Club fortunes go in cycles and, after almost a decade on the rise, Bridgeholme were past the peak and falling. The next test of the club's mettle had begun.