

The Opening of Station House Cricket Ground

‘Players in the league will this season be testing Bridgeholme’s new ground at Eastwood. It is understood that the wicket is in fine shape, but it will be some weeks before the outfield is up to the required standard.’

Hebden Bridge Times and Gazette, 24 April 1953

Preparation of the Station House ground had been underway since the summer of 1952. Drainage, levelling and the laying of the square had been the priorities.

The first match, against Hebden Bridge Salem in the first division of the Hebden Bridge and District League, was scheduled for 9 May 1953 but the ground was not quite ready and the game was switched to Salem Field. Bridgeholme captain John Martin hit 125 of his side’s 222 all out that afternoon, the first century by a Bridgeholme batsman and the first time the team had scored 200.

The ground was opened ten days later on the evening of Tuesday 19 May, just a fortnight before the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. The first eleven beat Heptonstall Slack seconds by eight wickets in the Hebden Bridge League’s 20 overs-a-side knockout cup, Jack Kaye taking 7 for 20 with his off-spinners as the visitors were dismissed for 40.

The first league match on the ground was played the following Saturday when the second team beat Old Town seconds by 54 runs. The first eleven made their home league debut on 30 May and suffered one of only three defeats that season, replying to Birchcliffe's 174 with 99 all out.

With the square reasonably prepared, work continued apace on the outfield, including digging out the banking under the road to widen the playing area. In January 1954 an application to enter the Halifax Parish Cup was rejected, in part because the ground was deemed 'unfit', yet five months later Bridgeholme was selected to host the Hebden Bridge League's knockout final between Heptonstall Slack and Birchcliffe. Presenting the trophy, league president Dr AH Clegg congratulated the club 'on the efforts they have made to make the field into a good ground'.

Further improvements saw the club admitted to the Parish Cup and to the Halifax League for the 1956 season.

'The advent of Bridgeholme was one of the year's successes,' commented league secretary NE Crossley at the league's AGM. 'The club has shown a wonderful spirit in developing their ground, and has proved their intention of holding their own in the league.'

There was further praise from the *Hebden Bridge Times* in April 1957:

'... the biggest improvements have taken place on the Bridgeholme ground at Eastwood. For several weeks work has been going on widening the field and painting the pavilion and last weekend the overall picture of the ground gave a pleasing appearance.'

Twelve months later the same newspaper referred to 'the tremendous amount of work and money' put into the ground.

Founded in 1951, Bridgeholme's progress on and off the field was a model for any new club. Within eight years, through careful planning, sustained effort and commitment, they were established in the top division of the Calder Valley's best amateur league and had created a ground to be proud of.