

Station House Today

‘Small, but perfectly formed’

Bridgeholme’s Station House ground lies just below the A646 in the Upper Calder Valley, marginally closer to Todmorden than Hebden Bridge in the district of Eastwood. Nestling under a steep bank on one side and beautiful hillside woodland on the other, the ground is a natural amphitheatre with its own special atmosphere. The club moved here in 1953 after one season playing in a rented field to the east of Cross Stone Road, across from the second fairway of Todmorden Golf Club.

The ground gets its name from the Station House Hotel. This building, originally called Bottoms Hotel, pre-dates the railway and was re-named to advertise its proximity to Eastwood Station. Bass Charrington owned the Station House Hotel and two adjacent fields on the Todmorden side, the second of which is the Bridgeholme ground. The club initially rented the ground and then bought it from the brewery for £1000 in the 1970s. The field between Bridgeholme’s ground and the hotel, now shrub land, was also once a cricket ground, the home of Calder Valley League side Eastwood. The hotel is now a Masonic Lodge and private apartments, and the Station House name of Bridgeholme’s ground is one of few remaining clues to the building’s history.

Approaching the Station House Ground on match day, a row of cars, apparently parked in the middle of nowhere, are the only clue of an event in the area. Then, alongside the ground, a glance over the wall reveals a tiny, flat, beautifully kept playing area squeezed between the road and the River Calder.

The river which, as melt water from the last ice age cut the lower parts of this narrow valley, is so close that one visiting player, unfamiliar with the terrain, leapt the four foot boundary embankment to retrieve the ball and plummeted ten feet into the water.

Just beyond the river is the Rochdale Canal, whilst on the opposite side, just above and beyond the road is the Leeds-Manchester railway line, completed in 1841. With these lines of communication competing for space on the valley floor there hardly seems room for a cricket ground.

Advertising boards on the river side reveal solid local and cricketing support – Ace Bats of Elland advertise here. Opposite, on the steep bank under the roadside wall is a clear, simple, recently constructed scoreboard. Solid sightcreens and a whitewashed stone wall at the Todmorden end enhance visibility for the players and there are the beginnings of a breeze block boundary wall which will be extended around the river side of the ground. In the corner at that end is a row of terraced houses, the nearest of which belongs to Keith Hudson, ‘Mr Bridgeholme’ – player, committee

man, selector, league rep. and groundsman – the very heart of the club.

From Keith's back door is a superb view across the ground to the club's wonderful new wooden pavilion, the envy of many larger clubs in both size and design.

Such an image was hard to imagine following a torrential cloudburst in June 2000. One mile upstream, Walsden Water burst through its retaining wall onto Rochdale Road and careered onto the canal at the Golden Lion. As it rushed down river and canal every piece of flat land in the Halifax valley became a floodplain, including the Bridgeholme ground. Thick mud and debris were deposited across the ground, wrecking equipment and making the old, uninsured wooden buildings uninhabitable.

But Bridgeholme's intrepid clubmen triumphed over adversity. Incredibly the team was playing on the ground within a fortnight. A grant of £400 from the Calderdale Community Foundation helped the club back onto its feet and a lottery grant of £11000 funded the crowning glory, the new pavilion. Built on stilts to reduce the likelihood of damage by further floodwaters, it offers much improved changing facilities and, for the first time, Bridgeholme is able to offer post-match hospitality on the ground.

A condition of the grant is use of the pavilion for community purposes. The main room is used by

Eastwood's Residents' Association and History Group and the club is developing its potential for private functions. As Eastwood's first community building for decades, the Station House Ground's new pavilion is becoming a focal point for local affairs.

It is testimony to the efforts of Bridgeholme's hardy band of volunteers that, just over 50 years after the club's formation and at a time when counter-attractions have never been greater, the profile of Bridgeholme Cricket Club within its locality has never been higher.