

Old Town CC

Old Town CC was formed as far back as 1885, although it temporarily disbanded between 1891 and 1894.

Originally, it played its home games at Middle Nook Farm on the far eastern fringes of the village. In time, the farm became the site of a house called 'Stalheim', now known as 'Burnside'.

In the early days, Old Town elevens competed in the Calder Valley League and the Hebden Bridge League, and in 1895 five members of the local Greenwood family turned out for the first team.

But times were hard in 1906. In another match Old Town came up against local rivals Cragg Vale. After traveling to the game in a specially-hired wagonette, the Old Town 1st XI was skittled out for a paltry total of 11!

In 1895, the Club moved to Old Laithe, in the Chisley area. In *Old Town Cricket Club: A Short History*, this ground is described in the following terms:

It was in a bleak and isolated position, 1,100 feet above sea level, occupying one of the last flat patches of land before the moors started. If the "Summer Game" has an unlikely home in England's climes, then at Old Laithe it was even less hospitable.

The description continued: 'Still, if it didn't lend itself to the cultivation of refined skills, it was suited to the grittiness of local cricket. Most of the clubs had small grounds and surfaces that made good fortune an important deciding factor in results. Many have fond memories of their years at Old Laithe: "the wicket was good but you did tend to lose the ball in the long grass."'

Old Town, playing in the second division of the Hebden Bridge League, were the visitors when Birchcliffe played their first match at Nell Carr on Saturday 11 April 1896.

'It was altogether too cold for the game, and at that altitude the breeze was something shocking...under the circumstances, the match hardly lends itself to criticism,' commented the Hebden Bridge Times.

The players must have been thankful they were not playing at Old Town's ground at Old Laithe which was several hundred feet higher!

During the Second World War, Old Laithe was requisitioned by the National Fire Service - with compensation duly paid to the club.

In 1956 Old Town Cricket Club introduced a Ladies membership category. The subscription rate was 2/- 6d and in the first year 28 Lady members joined adding £3 10/- to club funds.

The ground at Old Laithe had served Old Town well for over 50 years but in 1951 the Club had the foresight to realise that its inhospitable location, 1,000 feet above sea level, would be a major handicap as other clubs improved comfort-levels for players and spectators.

The match against Heptonstall Slack on 4 June 1955 was not the first at Old Laithe to be abandoned because of low cloud and fog.

By then Old Town were already preparing their new and current ground on the Boston Hill estate at Wadsworth. The land belonged to the Heptonstall Rural District Council who had bought it from the Mitchell family for housing purposes.

After considerable delays in the granting of permits by the Ministry of Town and Country Planning, the Club bought the land from the council for £450 in 1954.

Grants of £300 from the National Playing Fields Association and £30 from the West Riding Playing Field Association contributed around 30% of the cost.

The rest, plus all the labour, was provided by Club members who, among many other tasks, reassembled the Old Laithe pavilion at Boston Hill.

After the War, the Club announced the formation of a special sub-committee, 'for the purpose of securing a field more convenient'. The feeling was that Old Laithe was too

small and the pitch too uneven. The official history of the Club says: 'Conditions were very spartan...Water had to be brought to the ground for each match and toilet facilities were distinctly elementary. Something better was needed!'

Ground improvements were essential to the survival of cricket clubs throughout the Calder Valley in the 1950s. Developments at Bridgeholme, Hebden Bridge and Mytholmroyd Methodists enabled them to escape the collapsing Hebden Bridge League for the Halifax League, while other clubs disappeared.

The most ambitious venture was at Old Town.

In 1957 the Club eventually relocated to Boston Hill. The Club history says: 'The land was in a beautiful setting surrounded by trees in an area containing approximately 3¼ acres. There was a fall of about 21 feet in 120 yards across the site. To one side was a circular tank 25 yards in diameter and six feet deep, formerly used as an ornamental pond...There were also the little matter of at least 130 trees to be felled and cleared from the proposed playing area. To transform this into a cricket ground was going to take a colossal effort and a faith that was literally going to move mountains.'

In 1954 the Hebden Bridge Times and Gazette stated: 'The [Boston Hill] ground, in an ideal setting and surrounded by trees, is in marked contrast to the bleak exposed field at Old Laithe, which has the unenviable distinction of being one of the highest cricket grounds in Yorkshire.'

Boston Hill was christened on 27 April 1957, with Old Town 2nd XI taking on Stones 2nd XI.

The new ground not only hosted cricket but the Whit Monday Gala - a big local event - and various functions and dinner dances, many of which were fundraisers for OTCC.

The Hebden Bridge Times explained how a thunderstorm had interrupted the opening proceedings – extremely appropriate if you've ever witnessed the climactic changes on a summer Saturday at Boston Hill!

On this red-letter day, and in modest, unassuming terms, a Club official described OTCC as 'a small obscure club on a remote hillside'.

Officials revealed that local farmers had loaned the Club tractors, and local businesses an array of industrial equipment. The local press estimated that 'voluntary labour' had saved the Club between £1,000 and £2,000.

Club spokesman Peter Sutcliffe puts the ground move into historical perspective: 'Where our current ground now stands, there was once a big house, ornamental gardens and a pond. I think that in the early 1950s the club was getting itchy feet and saw the potential in upping sticks and moving to Boston Hill.'

Sutcliffe goes on: 'The Club saw it as a better ground, but the members had to do quite a bit of work before the venue was ready - including levelling off the playing surface and adding clay in certain places. In all it took three or four years to get the place ready so we could move in. A few decades later, a group of particularly dedicated members traipsed through the village pulling a heavy roller, and eventually depositing it at the ground. So, all in all, we're not afraid of hard work up here!'

Old Town capped the momentous year of 1957 by winning the 'top-four play-off cup'.

Old Town's first season at Boston Hill (1957) was also the last season of the Hebden Bridge League. Remaining loyal to this local league to the end, it was fitting that Old Town should win what proved to be the league's last match, the top-four play-off final against Halifax 2nd XI at Thrum Hall. Old Town, dismissed for 75, bowled Halifax out for 55.

The loss of four teams from the Hebden Bridge League in the autumn of 1957 threatened its very future and that of its remaining clubs. Although the Old Town committee was prepared to arrange friendly matches if necessary, the expenditure involved in creating and maintaining Boston Hill made competitive cricket essential and they made a provisional application to join the Halifax and District Amateur Cricket Association.

It was a wise step. The Hebden Bridge and District Cricket League, founded in 1894, had haemorrhaged clubs for the last time and was officially disbanded on 30 December 1957.

At Old Town's Annual General Meeting on 6 January 1958 President Raymond Ashworth revealed that the Club had made firm its application.

Five days later, the 1st XIs and 2nd XIs of Old Town and Heptonstall Slack, the last remnants of the Hebden Bridge League, were admitted to the Halifax Association where they dominated the third division in 1958.

Old Town won the title with ease and the Club's labours in preparing Boston Hill bore fruit in 1959 when, along with SBCI, they were admitted to the second division of the Halifax League.

The Boston Hill ground was crucial to Old Town's acceptance. The hard work of the members had paved the way for a new chapter in the Club's history.

Men of this calibre do not allow a sense of achievement to foster complacency and Raymond Ashworth was already looking to the challenges ahead: 'We have a lovely ground, but shall have to face heavy expenditure on up-to-date equipment if we are to keep it so.'

A lost ball brought an abrupt end to Old Town "A" team's game against Waller Bros. at Copley...Old Town had knocked up 150 runs for five wickets when the ball was sent into the river which runs alongside the ground.

The home side did not have a spare ball and Old Town had lost two of their practice balls in similar fashion before the game commenced.

No effort was made to secure another ball by the home side and the umpires had no option but to end the game.

Old Town played only one season in the Halifax Association, 1958, winning the third division.

In that season, Albert Harding achieved the rare feat of taking all 10 wickets in an innings – and they were all Old Town batsmen!

The first and second teams were in the same league and Albert's performance came in the match between the two. The first eleven were all out for 132 and Albert took 10 for 43 as the seconds were dismissed for 73.

Today, the club runs three senior teams and two junior sides. Mytholmroyd Methodists and Booth are the traditional local rivals.