

SOWERBY BRIDGE CI CC

# THE ASTLEYS TODAY

***'We may not have the highest ground in the league - Stones and Warley may pip us in this respect - but we've certainly got the coldest weather and the best views.'*** This opinion was proffered by a seasoned spectator at SBCI, and it is difficult to disagree.





From high up above Friendly and Sowerby Bridge, the vistas are spectacular. Unlike many other grounds, this one is not lined by tree upon tree. Rather it is open and slightly isolated; as a result the Calder Valley is exposed vast and gaping beneath and around the hillside arena.

The church bought the ground originally and still owns it today. Even so, the club has full management rights over the venue - unless it should ever cease to be a sporting arena.



Over the decades there have been significant changes. The playing surface had to be levelled up at the bottom end and the story of the pavilion is a saga in itself.



In the early days of the Club - the period after the First World War - the pavilion took the form of a Nissen hut at the bottom end of the ground; then a big shed at the top end was used; finally, in 1999, a new building was erected thanks to several large-scale grants. (The big shed is now used by the groundsman).



The new pavilion is impressive in all respects. It is spacious and well-appointed, houses various framed images (of the ground and famous SBCI elevens), and its front porch is constructed out of sponsored bricks - always an excellent fundraising idea. A Union Jack flag also flutters in the wind. A visiting spectator comments: ***'Good facilities and good views!'***









The playing surface is a good size, though it slopes gently downhill from the pavilion side. The boundary is marked out by little red flags, there is just the one sightscreen, and an artificial strip has been laid in recent years.



Two notices also catch the eye. One says dog owners can be fined £1,000 for 'foul' behaviour; while a second, close to the pavilion, says simply 'PRIORITY PARKING'.

Recently, a local wag got out his marker pen and altered this to 'PRIORITY BARKING'. The canine issue is obviously a big one up at SBCI headquarters.



Today, Sowerby Bridge CC and Warley CC are the club's local rivals. Paradise Lane - Warley's HQ - is only three-quarters of a mile up the hill.

Secretary John Scholefield explains the unique attraction of the place: ***'When people come here to play or watch, they are usually impressed by the views. They also remark on how big the playing area is, and I would hazard a guess that it is one of the biggest grounds in the Halifax area.'***



Over the past decade, SBCI have spent a lot of money on their wicket. Once upon a time, it was a

bowler's treat, but now teams regularly pile up decent scores.

***'The other thing visitors comment on is the climate,' adds Scholefield. 'It's a very exposed ground and it can get very chilly. But when it's a hot day there is nowhere better to play cricket because there's always a lovely breeze to cool everyone down.'***



SBCI is a peaceful cricketing venue but occasionally, just occasionally, the solitude is broken. Scholefield explains: ***'One day a few years ago, I took my daughter up to the ground. She was learning to drive and I thought I'd take her on a few laps of the outfield to get her into practice. We were merrily going about our business when a police helicopter landed just beside us. The officers were relieved to hear that we were innocent club members; they thought we were vandals just about to ran amok!'***

