

# Stray cows, bad dogs and 'The Dam'

## Luddendenfoot CC - High Lee Green

*The club leases the ground off a local farmer. One year, however, we were late paying our rent, and we were barred from using the venue. So what did our team do? Yes, they pitched stumps in an adjacent farmer's field...*

[Club secretary, Susan Woolford]

The Halifax area is blessed with cricket grounds boasting spectacular views, and Luddendenfoot's home patch, high up in the Calder Valley, is surely one of the most picturesque. The ground is located 750 feet above sea level, and the vista is predominantly urban rather than local. One local cricketer, who visits High Lee Green on a regular basis, says: 'The views from the ground are superb, just as they are from Stones and a couple of other venues. But the setting at Luddendenfoot takes a lot of beating. Everyone enjoys coming up here but it is pretty exposed and in the winter it can get very cold.'



Luddendenfoot - not to be confused with Luddenden, a separate community that is located in between Midgley and Warley - is three miles to the west of Halifax. In yesteryear it was dominated by shops and mills, but today it is populated mainly by commuters. Some people have trouble pronouncing 'Luddendenfoot', so the place is known colloquially as 'Foot'.

The area has one strange claim to fame: in 1840 Branwell Bronte, brother of the famous sisters, took up the post of stationmaster at the old train station (annual salary: £130), but was sacked rather swiftly for drinking on duty. Luddendenfoot station eventually bit the dust in 1962.

The cricket ground, high up on the south bank of the River Calder, is surrounded by farmers' fields, winding valley roads, dry stone walls, enticing cottages and greenery unlimited. From the pavilion, the Calder Valley panorama is magnificent: to the west, Hebden Bridge and surrounds; to the east, Sowerby Bridge and satellite communities; and straight in front, the handsome north bank of the river, complete with gleaming-white wind turbines on the far horizon.

So, on account of its high, rural location, the ground has its appeal for opposition players. It is also viewed as a good wicket to bat on. One opposition batsman declared: 'I like coming here because it's a small venue and the boundaries are pretty short. But the other side of the coin is that there's a lot of bounce, so some bowlers can put up with the short boundaries because they know they'll always get a bit of life out of the pitch.'

The playing arena is neatly marked out, the sightscreens are on rollers, and there are several rows of benches in front of the pavilion building. There is also a neat little stone path for incoming and outgoing batsmen to navigate.

The pavilion comprises changing rooms, tea area and lounge. As one waits for the barman, one can peruse the many and various team photos that line the top rim of the bar. And from the posters on display, it is clear that there is always a lot going on - even a 'Fun & Frolics' day (whatever that is exactly). One visiting spectator says: 'Great facilities for children and a friendly club - if just a little exposed!'

In the early days, there were two buildings at the ground: one hut housed changing rooms and scorers; the other, the tea room. Both, however, were destroyed by fire.

In the 1970s, the club erected a prefabricated building that, in the context of its era, was state-of-the-art. It was home to changing and tea-making facilities, but still lacked running water and electricity.

Then, in 1997, the club opened a new enlarged pavilion complex - basically, a new prefab added on to the old one. The club got showers, a new storeroom and a new tea room. For this project, the club gained financial support from the Foundation for Sport and the Arts.

To the right of the pavilion is a farmer's field with a pond, known locally as 'The Dam'. It is not a case of losing cricket balls in The Dam, but rather cricketers. After the last match of the season, or as the club celebrates a championship triumph or a famous cup victory, club members have been known to celebrate in soaking fashion.

There is a definite family atmosphere at High Lee Green: mums and dads in deckchairs or picnicking around the ground, teenagers on duty in the scoreboard, and a cosy little playground for younger children just to the side of the pavilion. (This area is cordoned off with high netting, so the kiddies are protected from any firmly hit sixes or fours).

But locals must beware. A sign by the main entrance says unambiguously: PLEASE DO NOT ALLOW YOUR DOGS TO USE THIS FIELD AS A TOILET.

As to the history of Luddendenfoot CC, things are a bit vague, as Susan Woolford, club secretary, confirms: 'The club evolved out of a choirboys team linked to the now-defunct St. Mary's Church, but we're not quite sure when the club came to be called Luddendenfoot. If you pushed me, I would plump for the 1930s.'

High Lee Green is the only ground that Luddendenfoot have played at. 'In the early days, only the square was fenced off,' says Woolford, 'so on weekdays cattle wandered onto the ground and grazed the outfield. Club officials were pleased because it did away with the need to invest in a mower. This situation was fine, but on matchdays we found the turf was covered in cow pats. Even today, with the ground enclosed, we spot the occasional cow on the outfield.'

Luddendenfoot CC also has two claims to fame: (1) It was the first Halifax League club to install movable sightscreens; and (2) It claims to serve the best teas in the area. One visiting player agrees with the second point: 'The ground is cold but the food is good!'

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