

Beware the Green Dragon...

27. Meltham C.C. - Mean Lane

Meltham has a professional feel - a proper scoreboard and proper teas.
[A first-time visitor to Mean Lane]

Meltham is one of the most impressive of all cricket clubs in the Huddersfield area. They play in the Huddersfield League, but in years gone by have also turned out in the Alliance and Central Leagues. With the demise of Meltham Mills C.C. (they did not re-form after the Second World War) Meltham C.C. now represent the town alone, and currently boast a 1st and 2nd XI, plus two under-13 elevens and under-15 and under-17 sides. Mean Lane is also the headquarters of the Pennine Nomads women's cricket team.

In the early days of the club, Holmfirth were Meltham's main rivals; in the last couple of decades it has been Slaithwaite and Elland. Times have definitely changed. Many moons ago, beer in the pavilion was served straight from the barrel. But rest assured - techniques have improved since then.

Back in 1951 one observer wrote: 'The club has always been progressive in outlook and the amenities to be found on this picturesque ground are such that the Meltham club may be regarded as having one of the best grounds in the league.' Half a century on, the observation still carries weight, and not surprisingly, the club has won the Greenwood Trophy for the best ground in the Huddersfield League on several occasions. A notice in the clubhouse says: 'Our facilities are available for private functions'.

The Meltham Cricket & Athletic Club, as it is formally known, was founded in 1867 - a fact that is now commemorated on the iron gates in the far corner of the ground. At first, their Mean Lane HQ, located in the Broadlands district, was owned by Glebe trustees, but 55 years on from formation, in 1922, the club was able to purchase the land itself. Since then a number of top players have turned out for the club, including Dilip Doshi, Madan Lal, Shahid Mahmood, Ryan Sidebottom and Paul Booth.

For almost a century, the club has been improving and redeveloping the ground. On Wednesday 18 May 1921 a new £350 pavilion was opened by Clr. J.H. Preston and D.R. Gellantly. It took the place of the small old hut that stood before, and an interest-free donation of £150 from R.F. Woodhead enabled the building to be erected. 'Comfort' was the watchword in those days, and the new

construction - complete with changing rooms and bar - scored highly in this regard.

In time, the building came to be known as the 'Green Dragon' (and that is why Meltham are nicknamed the 'Green Dragons' today). It lasted until 1963, when it was replaced by a more modern structure (an ex-Yeadon RAF hut measuring 102ft by 21ft), which cost between £700 and £800, and which was opened by Clr. H.B. Dearnley. Six years later the building was extended further - 'without detrimental effect to the appearance or comfort' - and more improvements, including the installation of showers and a tea room, followed in 1975. It now houses lots of memorabilia, including a lovely line drawing of the ground (by S. Bull, 1978).

Some key dates in the club's history include:

1927 - First professional player is taken on.

1938 - Joseph Brook takes 10-8 for Meltham at home to Bradley Mills, all clean bowled, and the opposition are rolled over for 63 ('Details of this exceptional performance have been recorded herewith,' says a notice on the pavilion wall).

1958 - Presentation to mark the 500th wicket of Alfred Topp.

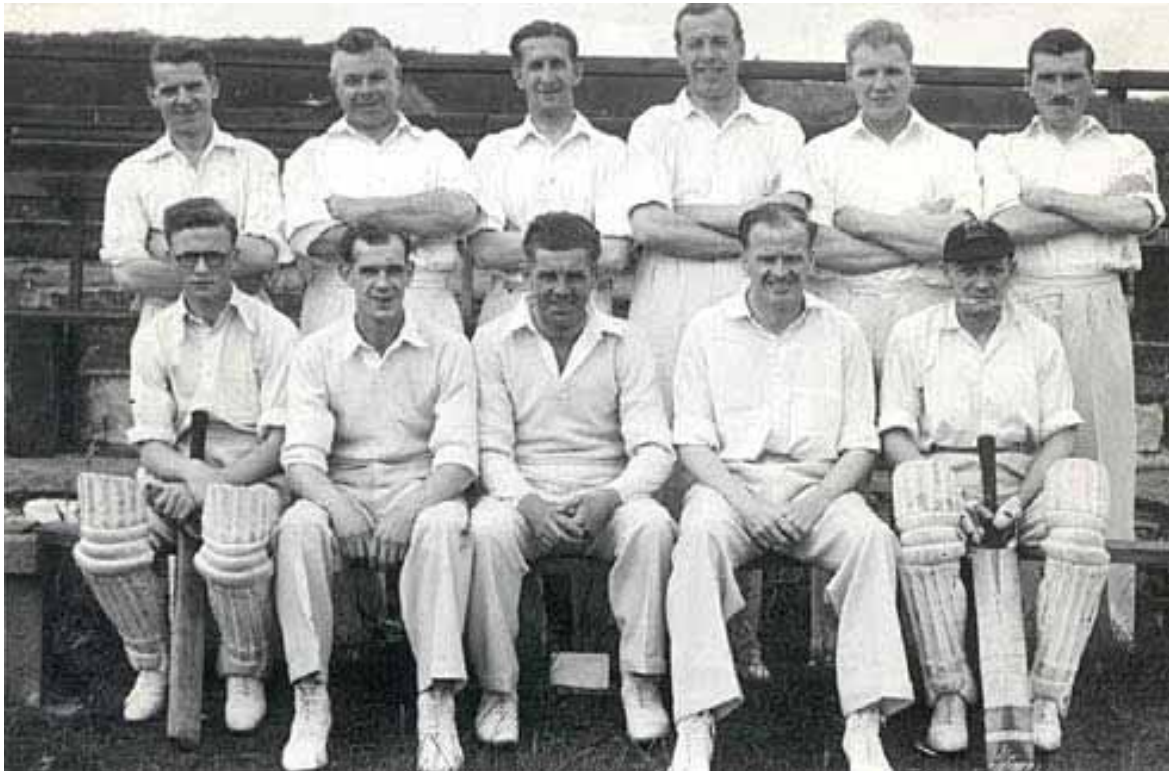
1975 - New scoreboard built.

Many of the ground improvements have stemmed from the club's determination to maintain, and extend, their support base in the local community. And today, when you visit Mean Lane - bordered by new housing, a tool and machine factory, and a noisy football pitch (Meltham F.C.) - you are certainly struck by the amount of spectators who line the boundary benches in small clusters, and the number of pensioners and kiddies who follow the action from inside, or just in front of, the pavilion. Many supporters sit in their parked vehicles close to the scoreboard.

In 1951 it was claimed that 'few grounds in Yorkshire have a more delightful turf than is to be found on the Meltham ground'. The playing area is particularly flat (one green-capped Meltham player admits there is the faintest of slopes); the square incorporates a variety of batting strips and there's also an artificial wicket. Locals say that Meltham tracks traditionally play slow and low, and that bowlers usually have a tough time.

The most notorious date in the history of Meltham C.C. is 1972 - when no cricket at all was played on the Mean Lane square. The year before, the wicket had been treated for weeds, but turned a horrible shade of brown. So the square had to be re-seeded, and Meltham had to play all their 1972 fixtures away from

home. Three decades on, the sight of the Meltham groundsman and his faithful assistants happily watching the cricket from deckchairs inside the scoreboard garage, and then skipping to the middle during the interval to roll the pitch, is a charming sight. The groundstaff also operate a makeshift scoreboard on the side of the scoreboard for spectators who can't see the front of the main scoreboard. There are four adverts on the scoreboard and five on the wall directly opposite the pavilion. Afoot too are plans for a new twenty-first century pavilion, to be located between the cricket ground and bowling green.



1950s

The deli-style counter is excellent for refreshments (tea 30p, homemade chocolate crumble cake 35p) and the women on duty are very good at persuading visiting fans to part with their money. And one tip for visiting spectators: sit on the side of the ground next to the football pitch because the brick wall acts as a wonderful wind-break!

Meltham ('the home amidst the cloudberry bushes') is five miles south-west of Huddersfield. It was mentioned in the Domesday Book and is noted for its silk production, its high-class modern housing, and its celebrated restaurant - Dirker Roods. Writer John Spencer calls it 'a pleasant Pennine settlement', and goes on: 'It is clear from the number of industrial buildings on and close to the main

road through the village that Meltham was once a thriving, bustling place.' It is also home to many traditions, including 'Collop Monday' - the day before Shrove Tuesday and Meltham Carnival.

The key dates in recent history? 1827 - when Meltham Mills Co-op was founded; 1845 - when Meltham Mills Band was established; 1912 - when King George V and Queen Mary passed through the village; 1924 - when 'public transport buses' arrived; and 1949 - when the local railway station was closed down. Today, the population of the place is 9,000, and the local W.I. describes it as 'mostly residential, with only two woollen mills now in operation and other small pockets of industry.'

Extarct from P.Davies, *Pennine Pitch* (2004)