

Reminiscences of Meltham Cricket Club – author unknown

The sun is warm today, come let us make our way
To the grandest place of all on a summer Saturday
To hear that lovely sound on Meltham's cricket ground
Where peace and tranquility and friendship can be found
The sound of the King Willow as the ball to the boundary speeds
Though soon we'll find we're talking of famous cricket deeds
Performed upon this cricket ground across the passing years
Then surely some white figure in our memory appears
Let's drink a toast to those we know and those who've long passed on
Who helped to make this cricket club the pride of everyone.
So rise my friends just raise your glass to Meltham's fairest name
Long may our children gather here to play this greatest game.

My first introduction to Meltham Cricket Club was very soon after World War 1 when I was placed on top of the old roller by my father so that in addition to giving me great satisfaction, my 4 stone odd would help in some little way to put the final touches on yet another perfect Meltham wicket. That was about 46 years ago and I now try and recapture some of the happenings that took place from then up to year 1950.

There was a 'squad' of regular rollers for the first team, Charlie Firth, Tom Hirst, 'Bob' Woodhead, Ernest Armstrong, Allen Wood, Willie Wright and 'Tommy' Mosley who was at that time the scorer. The barman was a Mr. Baron Schofield, a small built man -the bar was at the left-hand entrance near the recreation ground. Beer had to be drawn direct from the barrels in the cellar and the 'White Lady' was very much in evidence. My personal excursions into this place were of course limited to fetching a bottle of cider (with a glass poppy in the neck) which my father bought for me on the understanding that I sat still and watched the match. The secretary at this time was a well-known local stalwart, Tom Hirst, he was a very busy man as he was a first team player in addition to carrying out his secretarial duties. Tom along with Fred Southern as club treasurer and also their wives served Meltham well for a number of very difficult years. The pavilion was better than most cricket clubs possessed and I was later informed that the money for its purchase had been loaned free of interest by 'Bob' Woodhead, captain of the side for a number of years and later a highly respected member of the local council.

George Goulder was the professional, a tall silvery haired man and I recollect him turning the fast bowler easily to fine leg. The 'handy-man' around the club was Allen Dyson, affectionately known as 'owd Spinker'. I understood him to own some fine racing pigeons and at one time these were on display (stuffed) in the pavilion. He was a very clever old man and carried out or supervised most of the major alterations to the ground. The small raised stand was a bit of his handiwork and a large photograph of Mr. Dyson hung in the club room for many years. A number of the visiting teams brought their cricket tackle on a horse-drawn 'shandy' and on a number of occasions when these have arrived at the last moment, arrangements had been made between the

captains for the visitors to 'borrow' their requirements from the home club. I was getting a little older now and rarely missed a home match whether first or second eleven and of course like many other youngsters I thought that the professional was the most important person in the village. The local church school used to be allowed to play their knock-out games on the ground and in this way many a village youngster played his first game on this lovely turf. The tennis section at this time had their courts marked out on the cricket ground about half way down on the recreation ground side.

In addition we had a few very successful athletes who did their regular training on the ground and I quickly bring to mind Noah Howarth, John Edward Hinchliffe and Lewis Manchester whilst 'Ned' Coldwell and Fred Baker spent hours perfecting their various jumps. There was a game of lacrosse played one Saturday but this created little or no interest. In 1922 there was an arrangement between the club and the headmaster of the local school whereby about half-a-dozen of the most promising boy cricketers got free membership for 1 year. This was a great thrill after graduating from the 'oils and bumps' experienced in the recreation ground with the cork ball. The youngsters played down at the bottom of the field near the brickworks and occasionally we'd be paid a visit by the professional and I can remember 'Bill' Ellis telling one red-faced pupil that he handled his bat like a scythe. At the age of 11 John Steel and I used to spend a great deal of our summer holidays on at the cricket ground and between US we must have wheeled away tons of horse manure and grass cuttings. This should have been the job for the professional who was at that time a weekly paid man and in addition to his cricket ability was responsible for the upkeep of the ground. The story goes that one of our paid men who had no previous experience with horses was one day having a heck of a time trying to gear the cricket club's horse in the shafts with the scared animal facing the roller.

My idol when I was a youngster was the Meltham born Herbert Haigh who had a wonderful run of success with various teams in the local league. He was a counter-hand at the Co-op. in the early twenties and would come on to the ground on a Wednesday afternoon to practice, this being his half day of. Herbert would put up the wickets and often using coins for the bails would invite us to bowl at him - needless to say I was quite often to be seen on Ai's field retrieving balls that he had clouted for he was a punishing batsman. If I was sent to the Co-op. I always went to Herb. to be served, but more about this fine cricketer later.

The Meltham Cricket and Athletic Club held an Annual tea and dance and this was one of the red letter days in the village and tickets were very quickly sold out. The tables in the Oddfellows Hall used to be crammed with beef, ham, trifles, home-made sandwiches and cakes and invariably there had to be two sittings-down. In the evening the members and their wives would have a wonderful time waltzing and doing the Lancers to the music of one of our local bands Also the club, for a number of years, held a field day on the cricket ground. The middle was roped off and in addition to items by the Meltham Mills Brass Band there were numerous side-shows such as hidden treasure,

bowling the wicket etc. and of course a good tea. Bad weather on 2 or 3 successive years brought this annual fixture to a close.

In the 1920's there was an important game took place every year between the local tradesmen and a police team. Frank Strickland, a member of the Leeds police force and a former playing member at Meltham was the chief organiser of these very happy affairs. Sometimes a few of the League's Star players would take part and I particularly remember one match (being the scorer) in which Hugh Sykes of pie fame scored 49 runs. Most of these came off the bowling of Fred Webster whom many cricket followers rated the best bowler in Huddersfield since World War 1. He had some remarkable performances when professional at Slaithwaite. In the evening there would be first class entertainment provided by John Drake the Meltham comedian who had engagements throughout the north in his younger days, Reg. Wilson a wonderful singer and actor, recitations by Bill Smith and a special favourite the police always requested - 'The Merry Mountain Child' a song with a rousing chorus.

I feel I must dwell a little longer on the assistance that was given to our club by Hugh Sykes. For many years he provided 'pie-eats' both on at the pavilion and in the village. In addition he organised comic cricket matches, captaining a full team with the surname of Sykes and another of 'coloured' players. Hugh loved to create laughter and he helped the club in many ways but I think he gets full reward when on seeing me he lives again those glorious moments when he played his famous innings against the great Fred Webster. Josa Lunn was a character and on a match day he would sit with his back to the play taking more than his average quota of Seth Senior from his pint pots.

However, if someone watching announced that one of the home players had been given out he would turn his rather bulky figure round and shout, "Nay, umpire, open thi' 'een'. Workshop competitions were run regularly and we had always a good number of entries - the local mills, pubs, clubs, Dreadnoughts, (organised by Marshal Woodhouse) Brook Motors, Hopkinsons, Netherton Cons., Highouse Rangers were regular entrants. If the weather was favourable the gates were excellent and the winners and runners up received such prizes as canteens of cutlery, clocks, barometers etc. Many a player has brought attention to himself by bringing off some noteworthy performance in these knock-out competitions and has gone on to play a prominent part either with the Meltham or Meltham Mills League Side. Even though the name of Marshal Woodhouse is inevitably connected with the winter game at Meltham he was a very good supporter of the cricket club and for a number of years printed and provided the tickets for a weekly draw with every permutation of 2 clubs in the league. The winners were the 2 together scoring the highest and the lowest aggregate of runs on the Saturday with one ticket marked 'No play'. The profit from these draws helped us considerably.

In the late 1920's the club was in the doldrums and each succeeding balance sheet showed the financial position to be worsening. Unable to sign a professional due to this, the playing record was also unconvincing and in spite of various expenditure cuts there seemed to be no halt to the downhill slide. It

must be remembered that the country was passing through difficult times and Meltham like any other village had a lot of men on the dole with little to spare for social pleasure. The old bowls (kindly given by former members of the bowling club) and kept in the lockers of the home team's dressing room, were in great demand for with these our members could enjoy a friendly game on the cricket field -away from the middle of course. There was also a hook and ring game in the pavilion and for a while this scored very popular. The tackle was in poor condition and many improvements were required in and around the 'tent'. The tennis section had worked hard to raise funds but were unable to help the main body sufficiently to stop the slide.

Thus in 1930 the general meeting was exceptionally well attended and new officials were elected with Arthur Carratt as Secretary and Arnold Cox as Treasurer and the club £560 in the red. At the very first meeting of the new committee the treasurer told us that the years immediately ahead would be a great challenge and that unless a special efforts made by every person concerned with the interests of Meltham Cricket and Athletic Club then in just a short time there would be no league cricket played. He suggested that we had pamphlets printed notifying every householder of the seriousness of the position and asking them to help us if they wished their sons and grandsons to have a ground to play on and a club in which to spend an evening. Thus was the life-giving house to house collection made, the response being very heartening with more than £50 raised. with this we decided to have a Sale of Work in the following February and soon various plans were going ahead, whist drives, jumble sales but one of the main projects was the making of rugs for which a great quantity of materials was purchased. All through the cold winter months we worked at least two nights per week and quite often no one had lit the boiler fire and I feel certain that hardly one of us escaped at least a small dose of Flu' during that period. Anyway the pleasing feature was that a new interest seemed to have been awakened in the village.

I well remember Dr. Gellatly (our president) giving me a further cheque to help swell the fund and Mrs. Gellatly promising to defray all expenses for the fruit and flower stall and to personally take charge on the big day. However this finally dawned and after a tiring but historic occasion we were able to declare a profit of close on £240 -a reward for Some really hard work by the committee and friends of the club. There were some very happy men that night .and I remember Arnold Cox was more than a little overcome at the tremendous success of the venture. Already we could see the club getting a new look and with some very discriminate purchasing of batting pads flapping or 2 odd gloves but as I say nothing was spent only after careful consideration. We now had some very keen and staunch supporters and a formidable quartet I readily bring to mind was composed of Thomas Radcliffe (a vice-president) Hereward Vine, George Sykes (our current president) and Cyril Broadbent.

These were ever-presents and one could immediately read the state or the game by a glance at their faces -either jubilant or very depressed. I remember on one occasion our motor-mower broke down which necessitated some part being sent away for repair. As there was a Sykes Cup match to be played on

the Saturday it was decided to write to our neighbours at Meltham Mills to see if they would loan us theirs just for a few hours. In this reply they said they were willing to do this but their own man must manipulate it. This for some unknown reason was like waving a red flag in front of a bull and Thomas said "Tell 'em we don't want their so-and-so machine I'll cut it myself with my 8" arden mower before agree to that - do they think we've nubbdy that can 'mank' a machine". It should be remembered that although generally there was good feeling between members of our 2 clubs there were a few individuals who didn't think it had been a successful Saturday unless their team had won and 'the enemy' lost. Whitsuntide was always eagerly looked forward to and if the weather was suitable both matches were played to packed houses.

First team matches have been played with the pitch parallel to Mean Lane -we played Linthwaite one match when it was discovered that play was only possible on this 'stretch'. The famous Yorkshire cricketer Percy Holmes came to coach for just one evening to Meltham and to this my thoughts returned recently when I read of him attaining his 80th birthday.

We had a good tennis membership to one time after the hard courts had been made (where now stands the car park) and a few who appeared to be the hub of all the activities were Mrs. P. Matthews and daughters, Mr. & Mrs. James Preston, Alan Taylor, Philip Lodge etc. When they held their open tournaments it was always a nice spectacle to see so many players engaged in combat and I'm sure many a boundary has been let go through, casting a momentary glance at some attractive competitor. Bert Byram was also a very good official of the club and played for a number of years with both the first and second teams. He was also league representative and I was glad to hear that he still writes to Alec Lodge maintaining his keen interest in our local league. I remember him once 'rigging' Percy Sharples (Paddock pro) whom he obviously knew well -after Arthur Taylor (who worked with Bert) had scored 146 runs against them in a Sykes Cup match. I suppose however there weren't many cricketers around at that time that hadn't at some period been baffled by Percy's tempting slows. One cannot let this period or new life in the club pass without paying due thanks and appreciation to the directors, staff and many employees of the adjoining brickworks. We used to approach them to do us all kind of repair jobs -building up walls - assistance with the drains etc. and they helped us considerably over a long number of years. When in more recent years they've been allowed to play their evening league matches on the ground I'm certain it has been only small repayment for the assistance the firm has given over many, many years. It used to be said that when we were unable to separate a couple of visiting batsmen the 12th man would come to our aid -this was thick black smoke from the brickworks chimney. I remember one particular game against Slaithwaite being held up for 3 or 4 minutes until the wickets at the other end were visible.

It seemed that our committee could also spot talent as we pride ourselves in seeing a future in a very young Dalton player, Alec Coxon who after scoring 89 runs and taking 3 or 4 wickets against us was signed on for 12/6p per week. Alec was an outstanding cricketer then but was inclined to bowl a little

on the short side -anyway it was the start of a great career. As you all know Alec not only played for Yorkshire but was selected to represent his country. The club was definitely picking up and in some years the profit was small we always managed to finish on the right side. We were also showing great improvement on the field and James Arthur Beaumont the old Broad Oak player was engaged as coach for a couple of seasons culminating in our winning the Hinchliffe Cup in 1938. Our batting averages improved considerably and it was grand to see Meltham at long last getting amongst the trophies. James Arthur, a close friend of our popular professional F.Q. Woodhead was held in very high esteem by everyone who knew him and it was well known what joy it gave him to see his 'star' pupil Arthur Taylor play some of the most attractive innings ever seen on our ground. Unfortunately the war clouds were gathering Hitler was on the march.

The year 1939 brought a strange cricket season and for obvious reasons could not, be enjoyed to the full. Just as a point of interest let me give you the officials for that year. President: Dr.Gellatly, Vice-presidents: C. Firth, W. Mozley, T.B.Radcliffe, Secretary: Douglas Haigh, Treasurer: Hildred Pogson, Committee: A. Wood, J.A.Dyson, E. Armstrong, C. Broadbent, E. Bastow, W. Baxter, C.Bailey, H. Downs, J.A.Pickles, C. Kaye, H.L.Vine, G. Sykes, E.B.Dawson, Joe Brook, L. Taylor, P. Stevens and J. Waterhouse. League representative: T.B.Radcliffe.

In my opinion the 30's. were the turning point in the fortunes of our club and the deficit had been wiped out, many improvements had been carried out and there was a balance in the bank of £130. Then came the war and many players and other members were called into the forces. However cricket was to be kept alive in the district and though many thousands of miles away from Meltham I looked forward to receiving my Examiner with the previous Saturday's cricket scores. It seemed a long time before we again resumed in 1946 attempting to pick up the threads of keen competitive cricket after having played on all kinds of wickets in every corner of the globe. It was grand to see so many of the old familiar faces still there and now joined by many from Meltham Mills the neighbouring club having to wind up when United Thread Mills Ltd. were taken over by David Brown Tractors Ltd. I hope I can be excused for paying tribute to the 'Millers'. Their ground had a lovely turf and the club had a high reputation for putting on excellent teas. Many outstanding names played for them but I can only list those I remember personally. There was the great Albert Johnson, Tom Oldham, David Barker (John's father) John Lunt, Bill Sykes, J.R.Wood to mention but a few. They had always an attractive side and had their share of success, they beat Slaithwaite in the 1933 Sykes Cup Final. We had some great tussles with them and not entirely devoid of incident. Anyway after a couple of seasons, one in which we narrowly lost against Slaithwaite at Paddock in the Sykes Cup semi-final, things took a decided change for the better.

We had engaged George Bottomley from Lightcliffe as professional for the 1948 season and we soon realised we had signed a fine cricketer. He was a great all-rounder and rarely failed with both bat and ball and his entire approach to the game endeared him to all our members. "It was many

members view that the team which won the Sykes Cup Final in 1948 was the strongest, best balanced team that had ever represented Meltham. Bottomley stayed till the end of the 1950 season, his third and whilst he was with us we were always in striking distance of the championship but never just managed to pull it off. One old cricketer used to say, George has only one fault he can't bowl the tail-enders out like Herbert Haigh could in his hey-day, he used to scatter their wickets like ninepins. A few of the recognised first eleven players decided now for one reason or another to hang up their boots but there were plenty of good 'colts' to step in as can be seen from more recent cricket history.

We were starting now on a new era for the club and the next 16 years was to bring every possible honour to the club (with the exception of the Schweppes trophy) and we were to see a wonderful transformation in the club pavilion and premises. However I must leave the recording of these years to someone who has been closer to the various activities than I have. Let me say again before I put my pen away that I wonder if our palatial club rooms would only have been a dream but for the hard work put in by a group of members in those difficult early thirties under the guidance of my close friend throughout these years - the late Mr. Arnold Cox.

I must pay a tribute to the wonderful work of the Ladies Committee who give up their Saturdays to make teas for the players and supporters. Our club has always seemed blessed with a hard-working band of ladies and I'm sure visitors speak very highly of the quality of the food and also the atmosphere to be seen every Saturday in summer on all our cricket grounds and I'm sure they don't get the thanks they deserve. So to all of you and in particular to those who help at our own village club we say a very big thank you for the magnificent job you've done over many, many years.

A game's not done whether lost or won 'Twill be played again with others, past the setting of the sun".

The list of Professionals who have served Meltham during these years is as follows:

GEORGE GOULDER
'BILL' ELLIS
CHRIS ETHERIDGE
JIM HEAP
LAWRENCE DYSON
FRED W. GARSIDE
ALEC COXON
F. Q. VYOODHEAD
GEOFF CARTER
TIM HELLIWELL
F. Q. WOODHEAD
GILBERT TURNER
GEORGE BOTTOMLEY

When I first saw Meltham play, John Arthur Dyson had retired but I often heard that he was an excellent all-rounder and served a number of years in the league as pro. He was in later life a committee man and very familiar figure around the club. The team around 1922 would probably be from -Willie Mozley, Willie Quarmbly, Bill Ellis, Irvin Briggs, Willie Mellor, Tom Hirst, Harry Hirst, Willis Armstrong, Jack Hirst, 'Bill' Holden, Arthur 'Wilkinson', R.F. Woodhead, N. Coldwell, Arthur Haigh and Frank Garside. One well remembered game took place around the middle or later twenties against Slaithwaite at Meltham. At this time there was no compulsory declaration and the side batting first could bat as long as ever they could stay at the wicket. Slaithwaite had a very good side with E. Hutchinson as professional and when they won the toss they asked Meltham to bat.

Tom Hirst said, "What on a wicket like this, well we shan't declare". Meltham scored 256 for 6 and left their opponents with 1 hours batting during which time they scored over 100 for 1 wicket. The outstanding team however was Friamere from O'er the top. What an array of stars they had - A.E.Whitehead, J.A.Meal, Harry Morris, Arthur Milnes, Walt Rhodes, Percy Sharples (pro), Hudson (the wicketkeeper), Bradburys and Winterbottoms. They were always immaculately dressed on the field and were a great attraction when visiting Meltham. Friamere itself was an awkward place to get to in those days and for years the annual outing was arranged for this day by waggonette. They won many honours when members of Huddersfield league though it was whispered that when the mills at which the players worked were advertising for an employee it would read as follows:- 'Wanted – Boiler Firer – Must be left handed slow bowler'. As I look back I think the two most accomplished cricketers we've turned have been Herbert Haigh and Arnold Cox.

Herbert was professional for a number of clubs and it was noticeable that success seemed to follow him around. He was the cavalier type of batsman and scored a number of centuries in double-quick time but it was as a bowler that he was most reared. With his jaunty run up and broad smile it was a very common sight to see wickets fly out of the ground and when in later years he kept 'The Swan' there was ample proof of his excellent ability with a very large collection of mounted balls. As a matter of interest Herbert also had trials with Huddersfield Town. Arnold was a quieter type of cricketer -also being a quick scorer but with more classic shots from the book. When the wicket was suitable for Arnold he was almost unplayable and could bowl the perfect off-spinner and when playing for Meltham Mills as professional against Thongsbridge he took all ten wickets for eighteen runs. The merits of Herbert and Arnold have often been compared but the confidence that radiated from Herbert was mainly instrumental in him achieving the greater success.

I feel I must mention also Horace Kippax who scored a lot of runs at Meltham before going to Meltham Mills, Broad Oak and later the Bradford and Leeds leagues. He opened on occasions with the Yorkshire Colts and we who followed his career regretted that he wasn't able to secure a place in the Senior Eleven. In more recent years just before World War 11 Arthur Taylor had some wonderful innings but he left the district and Meltham Cricket Club was the poorer for his departure. Arthur was a most deceptive player he

would amble to the wicket (sometimes dragging his bat as though he had no interest in the proceedings then gradually getting the upper hand would thrash the bowling slow or fast to every corner or the ground. His 146 against Paddock in a Sykes, Cup game was the highest score I've ever seen by a Meltham first eleven player. Joe Brook, when assisting Meltham, took all 10 wickets for 8 runs against Bradley Mills in 1938 and these remarkable figures still constitute the league record. He was a punishing batsman and has often hit his team out of trouble and has captured the league batting prize. As Joe was also a member of the Huddersfield Rugby League team in the 1920's he has certainly made his contribution to sport. Jack Hirst, captain of the side for many years and in addition to being a good left-hand batsman was the best close to the wicket fieldsman I've ever seen in local cricket. Bill Holden, came to Meltham from the colliery district, was a good club bowler and a real character. Bill won the Sunday Dispatch prize given for Northern cricket leagues when he took 6 wickets for 5 runs at Marsden at the same time making some un-printable remark.

I must mention some of our wonderful supporters. Mr. & Mrs. Arthur Dawson who seemed to be present at every match. Mr. & Mrs. Joe Dyson and in later years Albert Mortimer who had been professional for Huddersfield. Scorers: T.C.Mosley, Willie Broadhead, F. Lunn and 'Bob' Thornton. We have had our 'Stead' brothers on our books - all first teamers and everyone a good player. Once we played at Slaithwaite and Jack and Sidney opened the innings as usual. After one or Jack's cover drives had flashed to the boundary the scorers in error added it to Sid's total on the board Jack walked down the pitch and said "Owd on a minute that might well be top o' th' averages" and he didn't resume till they'd corrected things. When Bert Byran was captaining the 2nd eleven side on one occasion at Friamere, included in the side was Cyril Broadbent who I understood worked for Bert at the 'Johnny Mill'. After play had been in progress a short while Cyril shouts to me "Can ta' clarm walls?" I answered "Yes" "What for?" Cyril's reply was "Byram's putting hissen on".

Many very exciting finishes have taken place at Meltham but there are two matches that stand out in my memory:

1931

In the first round of the Cup we had beaten the great Huddersfield with Arthur Booth, Sidney Denton, Pye-Smith, MacNairy etc. and were drawn at home with Holmfirth for whom our own Herbert Haigh was pro. The visitors won the toss and with 5 of their players scoring 20 or more they made the fine total of 191 which was considered by the big following from Holmfirth to be a lot more than Meltham could muster. Meltham started badly and had 5 wickets down for 55 when Carratt joined Smith who had been batting steadily. These two took the score to 127 when the former player was brilliantly stumped on the legside by: Alwyn Watson off Haigh. Another couple of wickets fell and when Clark the wicket-keeper went in to bat 35 runs were still needed with Smith having now reached his fifty. A single here and there with an occasional boundary brought Meltham nearer and nearer to their opponents total and when only 4 were required to win many of the spectators were on the field as

it was getting late and the light not too good. Then it happened, Smith hit a boundary and was besieged by excited supporters, hoisted shoulder high and carried from the field after a fine knock of 74 not out. He took his collection home in a bucket.

1938

The other occasion was about 1938 in the local Whitsuntide 'derby' against the 'Millers' at Meltham on a perfect day for cricket and before a big crowd. After 1^{1/4} hours play the visitors had been humbled and thanks mainly to our professional F.Q. Woodhead who took 7 wickets their score was only 53. There was an extra long break between the innings but as the Meltham captain put it "We want to sell some tea". Eventually our innings started and we were very quickly struggling but even at 38 for 4 it looked to be virtually over. With every single cheered by the home supporters and every wicket by the visitors the score reached 49 for 7 but Geoff. Carter the 'Millers' pro. polished off the tail and we finished 2 runs short at 51. Carter's bowling that day was some of the most fiery seen on the ground and he well deserved his magnificent return of 9 wickets for 17 runs. We were privileged on a Saturday in the 1930's to play against one who is considered by many to be the greatest all-rounder of all time -Wilfred Rhodes - who although in his 50's turned out with the Kirkheaton side. What memories of our great game this giant of the past must have.

Before closing this part of my script I'd like to give the teams who had brought honour to the Club during these years.

1931 (beaten by Broad Oak in the final)

Jack Hirst, Arnold Cox, Charles Brook Hirst, Fred Wade Garside, Arthur Carratt, Fred Smith, Harry Hirst, Wilfred Battye, Robert W. Cadwell, Arthur Kinder and Harry Clark (wicket-keeper)

1938 (Hinchliffe Cup Winners)

Jack Hirst, F.Q.Woodhead, V. Sanderson, H. Stead, Joe Brook, Arthur Taylor, Arthur Carratt and Arnold Cox.

1948 (Sykes Cup Winners)

Ronnie Sykes (captain and wicket-keeper), Jack Stead, Sidney Stead, Norman Stead, F.G.Woodhead, Geo. Bottomley (pro), Hubert Hirst, Arthur Carratt, Peter Brook, Ronnie Fryer and Stanley Moorhouse.

Other highlights.

Bill Ellis once scored 97 out of a total of 113 runs when pro-ing for Meltham at Holmfirth.

Jim Heap (pro) hit 109 runs in 63 minutes against Bradley Mills at Meltham.

George Bottomley (pro) scored 67 not out and took 5 wickets for 16 runs in his first match for Meltham against Almondbury at home.

John Williams ran out 5 of his own team mates in a second team match in 1929.

Jack Stead and brother Sidney scored 199 runs for the opening partnership against Linthwaite at Meltham.

As it is always dangerous to give your opinion of what would constitute the best side from players with whom you've been in opposition over the years I'll just say that the following would take some beating:

1. Jimmy Beaumont
2. Albert Sykes
3. W. S. Hammond
4. Arnold Carter
5. Norman Kaye
6. Lawrence Haigh
7. George Bottomley or Harry Hinchliffe
8. Geo. A. Dawson (wicket-keeper)
9. Geo. Carter
10. Arthur Bastow
11. Arthur Booth

I have purposely left out such Star players as Arnold Hamer, Clifford Walker, Fred Jakeman, Alec Coxon and Harold Beaumont who 'graced' the county grounds of England for so many years (I know that Arthur Booth also did in later years). These were the years of top line pros such as St. Hill, Bastow, Dennis, Harry Hinchliffe., Fred and Frank Berry, Sharples, Arthur Booth etc. These were the years (particularly before the war) when two practice nets were kept fully going on Tuesdays and Thursdays until it was too dark to see - was it better than it is today - I mean the standard of cricket. Without doubt I'd say Yes although admitting there are still the individuals who are top grade but where are the opening bats to compare with old Herbert Haigh, Andrew Taylor, A.E.Whitehead, John A. Meal, Gill and Outram (Rastrick) Albert Sykes, Jimmy Beaumont and Clifford Sykes, Washington and Hirstwood Whitwam and Frank Greenwood, Percy Sykes, A.W.Shaw they all come easily to the mind – ghosts of Yester Year who have thrilled the crowds and broken many a bowlers heart, anyway gentlemen -thanks for the memory.

One or Two True Cricket Stories

I was playing in the second eleven at Meltham and opened the innings against Kirkburton. After scoring a few runs the bowler got one to left and it doubtless hit my hand before being cleanly taken by the wicket-keeper. Instinctively I rubbed up above my elbow (this was the result of an instruction 'Bill' Ellis once gave to a first team player in the nets who shook his hand after being hit with the ball- "Tha'll give thissen 'aht on a Saturday if tha' does that, allus rub well up thi' arm"). Anyway, to the astonishment of all the players the umpire gave me 'not out'. I was at the wicket quite a while after and made a very useful score. After the game I was going down to the gate with one of our team when a voice shouted for US to wait a minute - it was that of the umpire.

On reaching us he said "Well played lad, a good innings" to which I replied. "Thank you, but I thought I was out when they appealed for the catch behind the wicket". "Course tha' were out" he said "but what could I do mate wi' thi' Uncle Walt. We also had at Meltham what must be a unique record, certainly the only time I've seen a six headed. It happened in a friendly match between the brickworks and the Club Committee mainly comprised of ex-players. It was a most exciting finish and when the last ball was coming up the batting side, the committee, required 4 to tie and 5 to win. Up came the Brickworks bowler and sent the ball as far to J.R.Wood's offside as possible (without being a wide) and although the batter lashed and connected he was unable to get much power behind it. As a result it looked to be going into the waiting hands of Percy Stevens fielding under the 'rec' wall, but with Percy's judgement being slightly at fault he ran in too far the ball hit him on top of the head and bounded into the 'rec' for a 6. Fortunately Percy was none the worse for his experience and wrote his name indelibly in the records of our club.

For one of the best local stories I must again bring in my cricketing friends from Meltham Mills. It was the usual practice of most of their player's after having an away match to come back and have a few drinks at the Liberal Club. Now on this particular Saturday they had been away at Shepley and I should tell you that on the previous Saturday one of their players who bowled slow donkey drops had taken the last 3 wickets of their opponents for about 10 runs. Seated in the corner of the bar this evening was the father of this lad doubtless waiting to hear if yond o' mine had staged a repeat performance. Anyway 3 or 4 of the players came in including Harry Hirst and Bill Sykes who was captain on that particular day and they ordered drinks standing at the bar and were soon engaged in conversation. "How've ya' goan on Bill?" comes the voice of the lad's proud father. "Drawn" was the reply and the players continued with their drinking. Another couple of minutes passed and then "Did 'Wharton do 'owt?". By this time Bill didn't seem to relish the interruptions but said "2 wickets and four or fahve wi' bat". Of course it had to come and there wasn't long to wait before the expected question was put "Has yond o' mine done 'owt, Bill?" to which the skipper replied "Tha might weel ask if he's done 'owt. He bowled one 'o them damned donkey drops to Arthur Blacker an' he hit it sooa far I'd three bl...throws befoor I gait it back l't field".

Another good story featuring Bill (who was I must ad, one of the best batters in the league) also took place in the Liberal Club on a Friday night. We usually discussed prospects for the following day and I know that Meltham Mills were at home to Honley and ventured to say to Bill "Don't let Harry Webster cod thi' aaht". Bill did a little laugh and said "Tha's nooa need to worry lad all that's been takken care or. I shall thrash little Harry tomorrow unmercifully, mi' Uncle Wilson is going to sit on top o' tip and throw balls back as I hit' em up, they're ten bob apiece that knows". Anyway we were at Almondbury on the Saturday and when someone arrived with the local evening paper I asked how Meltham Mills had gone on and particularly what Bill had done. I was nearly in stitches when one of our lads read out -W. Sykes c. Ricketts b. Webster O.

The opening batters for Meltham in this home match were Hubert Hirst and Ernest Heaton. Now as everyone who saw Hubert in his hey-day will agree he was the fastest runner between two wickets I've ever seen. However, after a useful start the ball was hit down to the field corner near the Brechin Terrace and Hubert sets off, shouting "Come on" again and again and at one stage he was running just behind Ernest. However, Hubert ran past the wicket at the pavilion end satisfied with a 3 but after adjusting one of his pads he turned round just as his partner was walking past and remarked "So you didn't make it, Ernest".

Meltham Juniors were playing away against Lockwood Juniors and had made 50 for 9 in reply to their opponents 127 when in walked another Meltham with the familiar name of Hirst. He was given a guard and the fast bowler responsible for the previous havoc against the Meltham batsmen tore into his run. However, as he neared the bowling crease the batsman backed away, took out a pencil and book from his shirt pocket and proceeded to record the number of a train passing over the viaduct. This operation having been completed he again took his stance only to hear next ball that horrible sound of crashing wickets. (Mr. G. Sykes our president officiated at this match as umpire and it was he who passed on this 'howler').