

'THE WEATHER IS SO IMPORTANT'

Interview with Mick Holroyde, Warley CC Groundsman

When did you become club groundsman? I became the cutter of the outfield in about 1982ish. I cannot remember how I was inveigled into it, but I enjoyed making the ground look nice and for me that meant that the grass was short. I volunteered to become the joint groundsman a few years later. Roy Crossley and Pip Wilkinson used to do it between them. Roy, unfortunately, became unwell and had to relinquish his role. I actually volunteered to do it with Pip. Then one Saturday lunchtime I rang Pip and he told me that he wasn't going to be able to do it anymore and so I was landed with the job all by myself. I think that I have had sole responsibility for the last 17-18 years, but if anybody disagrees, I wouldn't argue. One year just melts into another!



What does it involve on a day-to-day basis? Gosh, what doesn't it involve nowadays? The cricket year starts about mid to late March when we have a few days at the club. The main job is rolling the wicket in every possible direction for about 6-8 hours. Whilst someone is doing that, I will be starting the stripping of the outfield whilst others do important jobs like painting benches, cleaning the tea hut, whitewashing the two walls etc. I always feel better when all these major jobs have been done because I can then get on with the job of making sure the square is fit to play cricket on. After that few days, I will put a worm killer on followed by lawn sand and then a light scarifying. I will also put a bit of seed down on the bare patches (however, there are very few bare patches this season; last year's seed seems to have taken well!). Then, I will arrange for the square and wicket mower to be sharpened so that when the grass starts growing properly, it can be cut properly in nice stripes. When the season gets going it is basically a case of going to the ground every day to keep an eye

on things. Cut when needed, roll at the right time, and basic renovation of wicket ends i.e. get as many holes into the scarred area and then seed it, water and then cover with small germination sheets. I also start scarifying wickets out about 10 days before they are needed. Then the wicket is cut, rolled, cut, rolled, scarified, cut, rolled etc etc. Basically being a good groundsman is doing the right thing at the right time. The weather is so important and that is why last year was so very difficult for all us groundsmen. However good you think you might be, things will always go wrong and that is when you need to have good groundsman friends to assist you. That is why I am such good friends with Dave Fletcher at Elland. He is an absolute diamond and of great help to me for advice and practical assistance.

How many people help you? We are very lucky to have a few "assistants" helping on the ground. The chairman, Neil Lambert, just turns up at the ground, cleans all the dressing rooms, showers and toilets. He then rolls the square for as long as I task him to do so and then he takes all the rubbish away. We couldn't survive without him. Dave Atkinson is another trouper. He is always ringing me up volunteering to do jobs. He just turns up, puts his IPOD on and gets on with anything that you want him to do. There are others who do so much around the ground. Howard Cooper, Dave Bleasby and myself turn up on a Saturday or Sunday morning, put the white line around the ground, put the flags out and generally tidy the ground up. Andy Oates is always willing to assist with the practical jobs around the ground, like pruning trees, mending fences etc. Ian 'Ted' Shaw assists when he is in town. He works as a cricket coach in Cumbria and so is not around as often as I'd like him to be because he is a top man. There are others, but these are the main men. However, just because someone does not do things on the ground does not mean that they are totally useless. Bob Keyword, for example. If anybody wants a hole digging in their square, just ask Bob to bowl a few overs from one end. His right foot must be honed from shovel steel because the damage is unbelievable. His left foot is as bad!

What duties do you have as groundsman in the winter? My duties in the winter are pretty mundane. As the last few weeks of the season come round, I scarify the whole square so that there is very little thatch and moss. I then spike and slit it to smithereens. After the last match, I will get Fletch to oversee it and then Neil and others assist me to top dress the square. We then drag the whole square and put germination sheets on the ends to start with. I then make sure that the square is watered as much as it needs to be. I cut the square after about 6-7 weeks with a rotary mower, and then at two-weekly intervals until it has stopped growing, which last year was late November, early December. I also spiked the square four times after the season finished in order to break the surface and get loads of air, water and fertiliser to the roots. Hopefully, this will mean that our wickets will be harder and faster and will last longer. I then have a rest from about December onwards.

How has equipment changed during your career as groundsman? When I started cutting the outfield, we had a Westwood tractor for the outfield which was fantastic at the time, but didn't produce the stripes that I craved, so we bought Ransome mowers and although they are old they do a great job. They trundle on and on and on. We now have a motorised roller which is imperative for good wickets. We also have a tining machine which is also imperative for the preparation of good wickets. The most important machine we have, though, is the motorised scarifier. These are as rare as hen's teeth but save so much work. All clubs seem to appreciate that good equipment is so important now. Most grounds are so well presented nowadays.

What are your earliest memories of local cricket? I was very fortunate in that I became a 2nd XI player at a very young age and a 1st XI player when I was 15. My earliest memories were of the older players getting me drunk after each and every game. In the 1st XI my memories were that I had never seen so many bandages in one place. There was Alex South, Brian Hume, Colin Ratcliffe, Bert Wilcock *et al* all with dodgy joints. It was like the Crimean War before every game. The most shocking memory was of Alex South's jockstrap, which was held together with tape and all sorts of horrible things. It was dreadful watching him get it out of his bag and wafting it around. He was always a bit of an exhibitionist! There was not much sympathy for a very young man in those years (no child protection guidance in those days!) but there was kindness. I remember that we had a double weekend, and I had got filthy on the Saturday. My lifestyle was such that I did not have time to have my trousers washed for the Sunday so I turned up in these filthy whites. Bert Wilcock passed me the keys to his car and told me there was a pair of trousers in the boot of his car. He gave me the trousers and I cherished them for years. He was a great man and is sadly missed. This was in the days before all these manufacturers made fantastic cricket gear. Whites and shirts etc were not so easily come by.

In your opinion, what is special and unique about your club? Our ground is unique in that the outfield does not have a single flat piece of ground. However, it is surrounded by protected trees, it has the manor house at one end of the ground and the local school at the other. It is encircled, so when there is a tight game, it has a special atmosphere which is almost tangible to the players. They can hear all the comments from the spectators. When the sun shines, there cannot be many nicer places to play cricket in the Halifax area.

What do you like most about your ground? The trees. When they are fully out, it means that late spring has arrived and the summer is just around the corner.

What does the future hold for your club? The future is looking good for Warley. We have just received the 'Clubmark' award and we are now aiming for the next rung up. The chairman, Bob Keywood, and Ted Shaw are driving this through. They are fully supported by all the coaches and the committee. We have a good junior section and there are some really exciting young cricketers coming through. I won't mention anyone specifically for fear of embarrassing them and alienating others. Rest assured, there are some good young lads around. It is only a matter of time before we reap the benefits of our first crop of under-11 players playing in the first team. That is the whole aim of our club. We had a really successful team in the 80s when most of the team was homegrown with just a few imports. That will hopefully happen again!

What is your club famous for when it comes to the cricket teas you put on? Any culinary specialities? Sadly, we do not have any great reputation when it comes to teas. We will have though!

Favourite away ground you like visiting? My favourite away ground is Sowerby Bridge. Generally the wickets are good and it is a proper-sized field and I have been reasonably successful there. I also have a soft spot for Triangle because of the atmosphere when games get tight. If that ground was 30 yards bigger in all directions, there would not be a better place to play anywhere in Yorkshire!

What has changed most about local cricket during your lifetime? The wickets are so much better. Those of us who have played for a few years will remember when getting a score of 140+ at our ground (and most others) was easily a winning score. Nowadays, there is no score big enough to guarantee a win. That is down to the much better wickets and the players are so much better coached now. We, in the Halifax League, are now playing proper cricket, albeit on small grounds. In my younger days, there were very few really good players about. Now, most sides have two or three really good players and a few of the top sides have 9 or 10 really good players. It means that there are no stand-out sides now. But there are some really good games to play in or watch. I am struggling with a bit of arthritis in my hands now, so I am now retired from playing but am really looking forward to watching all our teams, hopefully successfully.