

Keith Hudson

If you pass Bridgeholme and see a single figure working on the ground, it will almost certainly be club Chairman, Keith Hudson. Brought up two doors away from the ground, Keith moved even nearer by buying the house next door from another cricket nut, local umpire Reuben Smith.

Evenings, weekends and sometimes in the dark, Keith has done more to ensure that cricket at Bridgeholme survives and flourishes over the last twenty years than anyone else.

Keith was just 21 when he and Peter Brennand took over as groundsmen in 1985. The club was at a low ebb. Clubs from all walks of life suffer from internal politics which occasionally lead to major rifts and at the end of 1984 Bridgeholme lost several key players. After two decades of steady progress, both team and ground were in decline and the club was compelled to resign from the Halifax League. They returned to the Halifax Association's third division, back where they were in 1964.

Through determination and perseverance the club progressed through the divisions and re-built, returning to the Halifax League in 2001. Keith's tireless efforts were crucial to this revival and continue to sustain the club.

During the season Keith's weekly workload is that of a full-time groundsman. On Sunday he sweeps the used wicket from Saturday and repairs it by re-seeding the ends and levelling them off. He then begins work on the pitch for the following week, brushing up the grass, cutting and rolling it for half an hour. The rolling is repeated every evening and the pitch receives two further cuts, one midweek and one on Friday, when it is also marked out. Saturday morning is kept in reserve in case of bad weather, but the pitch always receives a final roll and the square is trimmed, the stripes enhancing the ground's aesthetic appeal.

Often, Keith is working on the ground whilst his team mates are knocking up and he sometimes opens the batting on a pitch he was rolling only ten minutes earlier. Occasionally this lack of mental and physical preparation contributes to an early dismissal, but it can't happen too often as he has accumulated around 500 runs per season on a pretty regular basis since the early 1990s.

After the game, socialising with the opposition is often followed by committee and selection meetings, then it's back to Sunday morning and the cycle starts again.

These weekly routines are only part of the groundsman's annual pattern. In September Keith scarifies and re-seeds. The scarifying machine is usually hired, although Walsden Cricket Club have kindly lent their machine recently. He applies a top-dressing of fifty 25 kg bags of Mendip Loam, eight each to the five pitches on the square and eight to the under 18s track. It's back-breaking work and takes a full weekend to complete. After that, seeds are scattered liberally.

During the winter the outfield is cut roughly once a month and the surrounds take priority. At weekends Keith and co-groundsman Peter Brennand are usually found working on their latest project, which could be anything from repairing a sightscreen to cleaning out the guttering. At the time of writing, October 2004, the current project is to build an artificial practice strip just off the outfield at the Hebden Bridge end.

The arrival of spring and grass growth sees attention return to the playing area. The outfield is cut twice weekly in the run-up to the season and the square receives much t.l.c. through brushing, cutting and rolling.

As Bridgeholme's Chairman and league representative, Keith also has many administrative duties, including chairing committee and selection meetings and overseeing correspondence. It concerns Keith that the club is run by just a handful of loyal members and confesses it would be healthier to have the load spread more widely. Lacking the depth of support enjoyed by larger clubs, Bridgeholme would be vulnerable if their hardy band of grafters were unable to carry on. But they are also unimpeded by the bureaucratic safeguards of larger organisations and make and implement decisions quickly and efficiently.

Keith's ability to make sound, fair judgements and decisions was recognised in 2002 when he was asked to join the executive of the Halifax League and he has served on this body alongside his duties at Bridgeholme for the past two years.

Next time you are driving through Eastwood, have a glance over the wall at Bridgeholme's tidy, beautifully kept and developing ground. Even stop and have a walk around. It is a special place, made so through voluntary work by people who care, and none more so than Keith Hudson.