

10. Hazards & Disasters



Over the decades, local cricket clubs and cricket grounds have been subject to a wide array of hazards and disasters.

Clubs and grounds are central to their communities in a metaphorical sense, but also sometimes in a literal one too.

This means they are vulnerable to the ills of society, just like a housing estate or the local recreation ground might be.

Often too, they are isolated and exposed in terms of geographical location – and because cricket is exclusively a summer sport some pavilions and clubhouses go a full winter without being used.

Again, this can pose challenges for the clubs in question.

In terms of unwanted social problems, vandalism is pretty high on the list.

At some point, most clubs will probably have had to deal with broken windows in their clubhouse, sightscreens being ripped and turned upside down, or items of ground maintenance equipment being stolen.

Holmfirth and Thongsbridge seem to have suffered particularly from mindless graffiti being scrawled on club buildings.

One Thongsbridge member explains: 'It's a very big problem for us. We've re-painted the front of the tea room and pavilion several times in recent years, and still the local vandals come and ruin our walls.

'Our other bugbear is litter. When I turn up for practice on a Friday night, I have to spend 10 minutes tidying up the field before I do anything else. A lot of kids walk across the ground to and from school; and we think that this is the root problem.

'Others come to play on the field; that's absolutely fine, but they've got to behave when they are on our property.'

It is also amazing how many clubs have fallen victim to fires over the years.

Armitage Bridge (1975), Cumberworth (1994), Staincliffe (2005), Westborough (1991 and 2002) – this is just a selection.

But probably the most famous, or infamous, of all local blazes was that which ripped through the pavilion at Hemplow, Marsden, in 1936. On 19 October 1936, the *Examiner* reported as follows:

'Marsden Cricket and Bowling Club suffered a serious loss when their cricket pavilion and contents were totally destroyed by fire yesterday afternoon.

'The outbreak, the cause of which is not definitely known, was discovered about 1.20pm by a resident in the vicinity, who gave the alarm, and a message was put through from the golf house to the Marsden Fire Brigade, who were quickly in attendance.

'The flames had got a strong hold of the building, which was constructed of wood.'

Local cricket grounds are also vulnerable to the elements.

Cartworth Moor CC, Holmfirth, is the highest club in the area in terms of altitude, and their ground, Gill Lane, is notorious for wind, rain and snow – even in mid-summer!

Other clubs too have survived snowstorms, but mostly during the winter months.

Another major problem is flooding, with grounds situated on valley bottoms particularly vulnerable.

Denby Dale appears to be the 'cricket flood' capital of Kirklees, with major problems at their picturesque headquarters in the early 1980s and late 1990s.

In 1982, their Wakefield Road ground collapsed during a deluge of rain and snow.

Railway sleepers gave way and blocked the natural watercourse – with flooding the end result.

The headline in the *Examiner* was: BUMPER BILL ON PITCH FIT ONLY FOR DUCKS.

Later, in 1998, part of the ground collapsed again into a river culvert.

This time the club had to switch all 1st XI fixtures to away venues so that workmen could repair the damage.

Last, but by no means least, there are midges and moles.

At grounds located close to rivers and streams, midges are a perennial problem.

And it seems that moles are a serious nuisance high up in the Holme Valley.

Both Upperthong and Cartworth Moor have a history here.

At Upperthong's HQ, 51 moles were caught during one recent season.

And at Cartworth Moor, the problem is very similar.

In 1995, 200 molehills were discovered and a specialist molecatcher had to be employed to set traps.

The Ministry of Agriculture also lent their assistance to the Central League club, but in the end only eight moles were captured.

A year later, moles were in the news again, with Holme Valley Parish Council refusing to support Moor with a grant – because of the club's ongoing problem with the animals.

As the *Examiner* put it on 23 August 1995: 'Cartworth Moor Cricket Club had applied for help with the reseeding and levelling of their pitch.

'But at last week's finance committee meeting, councillors decided not to give any money to the club until they were sure a long-running battle with the moles was won.'

At the meeting in question, local councillor Donald Firth was quoted as saying: 'If we give the club a grant, how do we know the moles won't return to destroy the newly-laid pitch?'

Talk about making mountains out of molehills!

