

KEEPING THE CLUB MOVING FORWARD

Interview with Ian Watkinson, Shepley CC Webmaster

When did your club website go online? We went live in 2002. We had realised that the only way to get the club moving forward (or even stay in existence!) was to increase our fundraising and get the village involved. To do that, we needed publicity, and a website seemed a cost-effective way of doing just that. The spin-off was a vehicle for reporting on the on-field activities across the five teams.



How many people help with the website apart from you? Sadly, no-one! It's a solitary job, but very enjoyable.

What are your main day-to-day tasks as webmaster? It varies with the time of year. In and around the cricket season it's a matter of making sure the information on the site, such as scores, averages, forthcoming fixtures etc are accurate and up-to-date. In the season itself it really is a daily task with up to 130 games played by various Shepley teams. Once the season is over, the focus switches back to

publicising events like the hugely successful Village Bonfire held at the club and the music gigs held on the last Friday of every month.

Which features of the site are most popular with club members or general browsers? It's interesting to look at the statistics for the site. Amazingly, we get visitors from all over the world dropping in; I would have expected Australia, India etc to be well represented, with cricket-lovers and ex-players in abundance, but outside the UK the biggest numbers of visitors come from the United States. We have people from such well-known cricketing countries as Poland, Ghana and Thailand online, while one individual in a small town in rural China drops by most weeks. It shows the strength of the Shepley CC brand! The most popular pages are inevitably fixtures and results, scorecards, league tables and averages, particularly during the season. Throughout the year the music pages get lots of hits, while the bonfire page has ridiculously high traffic around November. But, I'm delighted to say, the heritage photographs and history sections get a very good rating week after week.

How might your website develop in the future? I would like to do more coverage of the junior sections, but time is always a problem (volunteers welcome!). It is also probably due for a facelift, which might get done this year.

In your opinion, what is special and unique about your club in general? Like anyone so closely involved in a club, I believe it's a special place. We don't have the resources of some of the bigger clubs, no major sponsors or sugar daddy, so life is always a struggle. To maintain our place in the top section for so long speaks volumes for the hard work everyone puts in. But Shepley's a real part of village life. We host major events like the Village Bonfire and the Shepley Spring Festival; between them they will bring 12,000 visitors into Marsh Lane this year, which is tremendous. It's a very friendly and sociable club and there's nothing much nicer than a beer or two with friends in the 'Wine Bar' on a summer's evening.

What do you like most about your ground? You have to start with the views; in almost any direction there are glorious panoramic views over countryside. In practical terms it's the space; we have over five-and-a-half acres at Marsh Lane, meaning a large playing area and ample room for lots of other things, not least

parking. We also have a range of buildings, more so than most. Unfortunately a couple of them are getting old now and need replacing, so a lot of fundraising is needed over the next few years. Finally, the square. We have the best groundsman in the league in Ray Horrocks and the square and outfield are a great credit to him. It's a great place to watch and play cricket.

What does the future hold for your club? If everything goes according to plan, we will continue to move forward on the field and begin to challenge for honours again. The junior section will continue to thrive and produce fine young players for the first team, as Tom Denton, Danny Glover, Sam Haigh and others have come through in recent years. Off the field we will build a new clubhouse providing bar and tea-room facilities in a flexible space that can be used for lots of village events, and which will provide a good income stream to the club. This is essential for the long-term future and will give us the best facilities in the league. The alternative view is that the very small number of active volunteers at the club fall under the same bus; if that happened I would fear for the club's future. Like most clubs, we desperately need more pairs of hands.

What is your club famous for when it comes to the cricket teas you put on? Any culinary specialities? If the tea ladies have any secret ingredients they haven't shared them with me! I think the real secret to their popularity is that they are real, traditional cricket teas, freshly made on the premises with good quality produce. And, of course, served in man-sized portions!

Favourite away ground you like visiting? Obviously, my favourite ground is Old Trafford (the proper one, not that upstart football place!) Locally it would probably be Lascelles Hall. I spent some time there as a young man and always feel the history of the place.

What has changed most about local cricket during your lifetime? I think so much has changed, much of it reflecting the changes in the professional game. I started watching club and county cricket in the mid-1950s. Someone transported from then to today's Huddersfield League would be mightily impressed by the athleticism of the fielding, but very disappointed at times by the level of dissent and

contention. The biggest single change, however, is in the relationship between the clubs and young cricketers. At that time the schools were generally where boys learned the game. I was playing on proper cricket grounds with my school from the age of eight, and had two school games per week through the summer term. Today there's relatively little cricket played in schools and the clubs have had to step into the breach. But, overall, the game's the same. It's competitive, skilled and enjoyable, often played in lovely settings and enjoyed with good friends. We need to make sure we pass it on in good health to those who will be watching in 50 years' time.