

## Profile of Val Kirkby

By Mark Edmonds

According to the online reference website *Wikipedia*, a Tea Lady is “a woman in an office or working environment, whose sole job is to provide beverages and/or light snacks when these are wanted.” However, according to Val Kirkby of Mirfield Cricket Club near Huddersfield, the job is a whole lot more than just making the tea. We originally asked her how her job works on its own, and as part of the cricket club. As it turns out though, the role Val and her team plays also have a major impact on the running of the club and its survival.



For example, the day for Val begins long before the usual two o'clock start. “On a typical Saturday for instance, I’m down the club for one o’clock, and I’d of already been shopping in Mirfield, to collect the tea cakes, the meat for the sandwiches, and all of the other things we need.” She continues to describe how beforehand she’s “getting organised, sorting out the kitchen, preparing the lunches for the change of innings and what not.”

With her time in the clubhouse spent up until around six o'clock, Val jokes how afterwards she "might even get to see a little bit of cricket!" If a cup match is also taking place on the same weekend, then Val and her team will be in on both Saturday and Sunday, something she relishes. "We're making all of the sandwiches, and what little bit of profit we make is then put back into the club, so really, the more games we play, the more money the club can invest."

Mirfield Cricket Club is a very close-knit club with many of its staff working on a purely voluntary basis. Situated on the Huddersfield Road, Mirfield Cricket Club is not the only club that play in the town; the Mirfield Parish Cavaliers also play, albeit on Wellhouse Lane. It is the voluntary side of the club which holds Mirfield CC together. Val herself has been involved with the club for over 35 years, never being paid a day that she has been there.

As for the job of Tea Lady itself, Val doesn't feel as though she's really doing work. "Because we've been involved with our husbands, or our sons playing cricket, we just started doing it because we were already there". However, it is not all good news for the club. "Unfortunately, the next generation are dwindling fast" she says. "We don't seem to have as many volunteers; people aren't really prepared to do anything for nothing."

So how does a Tea Lady get involved with the club? It would appear to be via a family connection. "I suppose at first we would be drawn into it because our husband or son is playing there", explains Val. "They [the club] would be saying, "will you help us out by doing teas?" almost cajoling you in to it." From

there though, it seems as though Mirfield holds a certain power over its volunteers. "You go along and do it, you don't really want to do it, but you'd go and do it, and then you end up getting heavily involved with the club." "Cricket plays a big part in my life now" Val admits, "we've all been drawn into it one way or another, and now we want to work for the benefit of the club."

With the number of volunteers dropping, the playing and backroom staffs at the club are becoming increasingly closer. Because of the drop in the amount of help that is received, workloads are increasing and that is putting continued pressure on the club as it struggles from season to season. Whilst formerly playing in the Bradford Cricket League, Mirfield have had to move first to the Central Yorkshire League and now onto the Huddersfield League, purely due to the costs of running the cricket club.

"The Bradford League is a lot more professional, and we played in that league for quite a while but it's raising the money, and there's only so much money you can raise." Val is adamant that if the club hadn't of moved to a different league, the consequences would have been dire. "If we hadn't of come back to play in this league, we would have folded. No doubt about it, we would have folded." It is not only Val and her team that are volunteers, the players are as well. "We can't afford to pay players to play; we couldn't have survived in the Bradford League if we did."

Although her main duty is of Tea Lady, Val is not restricted to just that. Due to the lack of staff, she also helps with the behind the scenes running of the club.

“I’m heavily involved with helping out the juniors” she states, “and all of the other girls like doing a lot of the other work in between. They help with the transporting because they’ve all got sons, and some of them have sons as well playing in the junior teams. So it’s not all just doing teas, although that is our main function.”

Asked why she helps with the juniors, Val has a simple answer. “We’ve got the club’s interests at heart, and that’s what it’s all about, keeping the club running.” It is this mentality that helps keep Mirfield Cricket Club alive. The almost family atmosphere that envelopes the club is there for all to see. Val isn’t just a Tea Lady, she’s a vital working cog in the local cricket side. This becomes evident as she gleefully states “we’re very proud of Mirfield Cricket Club!”