

Profile of Ray Horrocks

By Dave Wooding

Being a cricket club groundsman may be one of the loneliest jobs there is, but it is also one of the most important. Shepley then can certainly consider themselves lucky to know that Ray Horrocks is never far away. During his time as groundsman Ray has been responsible for the squares of four different cricket clubs, as well as tending to several bowling greens within the area.

Ray's passion for cricket began at a young age, as he played in youth sides at Kirkburton, until deciding at 16 to be a drummer in a band and later a backing drummer. He claims that bands such as The Beatles and The Rolling Stones inspired him. This, however, was not to last much into his twenties, and, following a football career that lasted until the age of 32, he was back playing cricket again, this time at Scholes. Even then, Ray helped out at the club in any way he could. As his cricket career drew towards a close in his mid-thirties, Ray took up bowling, and he also began to help maintain local greens. When he was made redundant as an engineer, he made the move into full-time groundsmanship by purchasing his own equipment. Since then he has never looked back.



Over the years Ray has been responsible for maintaining the ground at Marsh Lane, but has also helped at neighbouring Shelley, as well as Kirkburton and Cartworth Moor. At one stage, Ray was working on all four in the same season; however, he described this as "too much", and who can blame him given all there is to do at each ground.

Shepley, it would seem, is where he feels at home. With a smile on his face, he will happily explain: "Everyone knows what is right and wrong, they're quick to tell you what to do and what needs to be done, but not so quick to actually do it themselves." Not that Ray minds one bit. "It can be one of the loneliest jobs there is. 90 per cent of the time you're at the ground and there is no-one else there." Certainly then, no-one would dream of accusing Ray of not putting in the hours, as for nearly 15 years he has been Marsh Lane's main carer, and has twice won the Tom Walker Trophy for his efforts. Not that he lets these awards go to his head: "I don't really pay too much attention to them. When I get home they may sit on the side for a bit 'til the missus notices them and says 'What's that doing there?', and then it gets put straight into the attic."

Although his Saturday bowling commitments mean he cannot always get up to Marsh Lane to see an entire match, Ray admits: "There is nothing more rewarding than going up and seeing a nice white wicket." He's not one to blow his own trumpet, however, and he remains quite modest about the good job he has done at Shepley. He does not even like to call himself a proper groundsman. He is just doing his job, but he does acknowledge its importance: "To me the wicket is the most important part of any cricket ground. Why have, say, a good clubhouse if the square is awful. No-one will want to come and play."

Marsh Lane folk will be happy to hear then that, despite his now advancing years, Ray has no plans to retire at the normal age. "I don't see myself retiring when I'm 65. As long as they don't fire me, I'll keep going up there!" Given the job he has done to date, it looks like the unmistakable figure of Ray Horrocks will still be busy working at Marsh Lane long after everyone else has gone home for the day.