

Secretary's report ~~2020 2021~~ 2022

Good evening, everyone and thank you for attending the annual general meeting of your Club.

I typed the first notes for this report in October 2019, with the intention it would be delivered to the AGM in March 2020. When I look now at what has happened in the intervening period, against what I was intending to talk about, it really makes you take stock of what is important and frankly other things we might consider important at the time are not such a big deal after all.

It would be remiss of me not to remind you of the achievements of the club since we last met. 2019 was not a vintage year for the senior teams but the junior section excelled being:

U13 league champions, U9 league champions, U17 cup winners, U13 cup winners, U13 festival cup winners and finally U9 pairs cup winners

The club's year was brought to a close in November 2019 when the club held a bonfire night for the first time in approximately 20 years. It was a great success, bringing residents of our village and further afield to the club, for what was for many, the first time. Whilst any event of this nature requires a lot of hard work from the Committee and members and lessons were learnt for how such an occasion can be made to run better in future, I personally took great pleasure from what to me seemed like a fantastic opportunity to build on that and bring our club closer to the community we serve. Sadly, events shortly to unfold stymied some of the immediate benefits we might have been able to derive, but it remains my fervent belief, the club must build on everything we have, to make ourselves an integral part of the village and surrounding area and welcome as members as many as wish to embrace what we have to offer. More of this later.

When I started writing this report in October 2019 although your club had come off the back of a hugely triumphant junior season on the pitch, off the pitch the Craven & District Cricket League was undergoing seismic change, with the immediate and without notice resignation of both the League Secretary and League Fixture Secretary. These departures left the League in a state of near crisis, as those two individuals from the same household, almost single handed ran the League, as their own personal fiefdom. Thankfully, a new Secretary and expanded Executive Committee came forward and the League headed for what we thought would be calmer waters. Like all of us the new officials didn't know what was ahead of them as up to this point nobody had heard of SARS-CoV-2, except of course for a group of virologists in a laboratory in Wuhan, China.

So, we entered 2020 in blissful ignorance of what was about to unfold and planning for the upcoming season was in full swing. However, through February and with increasing pace in March it became apparent that the Chinese and then Italian problem was coming our way. Finally with voluntary restrictions on how we should live our lives looking increasingly likely to be replaced with enforced measures, the decision was taken by your Committee that the AGM scheduled for 17 March should be postponed. Three days after the date of the planned AGM the Government requested pubs and clubs to close, and then on 23 March the Prime Minister addressed the nation to inform us we were in 'lockdown', although that word was not actually used.

As we now know, all sport was cancelled and for the first time since 1945, silence fell on cricket fields across the country with no bat on ball heralding the month of April (not to mention the roads being empty of cars). Probably the only bright spot at this time was the glorious weather throughout April

to June enabling us to enjoy our once a day daily exercise. Eventually, as case rates and the pressure on the NHS reduced, the Government and ECB gave the go-ahead to resume cricketing activity, first with outdoor practice, albeit heavily regulated, involving pre-booking of the net facilities, requiring supervision by members of your Committee. At this point I should probably report myself to the relevant authorities for having broken Covid sanctions in having been to the club on many occasions, for 'non-essential' reasons and not for exercise. I really do think recent events in Eastern Europe do make such matters as this and parties, or not parties seem utterly trivial and irrelevant. However, without myself and others having broken those rules, it would not have been possible to get the club ready, initially for practice and ultimately the return of actual cricket. Your Committee was adamant from the earliest indication that there might be a possibility of a return to cricket, that your club would be ready to play whatever programme was made available for seniors and juniors alike.

Tribute must be paid to the organising Committees of both the Craven & District League and the Upper Airedale Junior Cricket Association that both were determined to help those that wanted, to play cricket in a truncated 2020 season. Admittedly, when cricket did start it was cricket in a somewhat different form, with changing rooms and club houses out of bounds, teas not being served, sanitisation breaks, sweat and saliva not being allowed to be applied to the ball etc. At this point a signpost for 2023, there is a change to the Laws from 1 October this year, which will make the application of saliva an offence under Law 41.3 'Changing the Condition of the Ball', so everyone may as well continue as you have in 2020 and 21 and avoid this unhealthy practice.

When the season got underway your club's First team under the new Captaincy of Rob Hollingsworth entered the Covid League and were deserved winners Group B that included reigning champions Crossflatts, Bingley Congs and Barrowford. Our Second and Third teams competed well and were able to put teams out each week. This was not the same for other clubs, who struggled to get numbers out, or in the case of some clubs chose not to play 'Covid' cricket.

The 2020 season came to an end. Gatherings of large numbers were still not permitted so the usual end of season prize giving could not take place amid rising case numbers once again in December and January 2021. As with 2020 your club was unable to hold its AGM in 2021. The season got underway on time, albeit with restrictions still in place but certainly the semblance of a normal cricket season returned. Your club was again successful, winning the Wynn and Cowling cups and the Manorlands Plate and the U18s won their league. In mentioning the Manorlands Plate, the club once again excelled itself in putting on a fantastic day in support of this wonderful local cause and in doing so, raised over £2,000.

The success of our teams was in no small part attributable to the progress of our young players, who having come through the junior age groups, were now making serious contributions to the senior teams. It is not surprising therefore that other clubs taking note of the achievement of the youngsters and the young people themselves looking to play at higher levels have opted for pastures new. Therefore, we send our very best wishes to Lucas Keslinke, Bradley Powell and James Powell and wish them all the best in their burgeoning careers. The club is also likely in 2022 to be without Harry Hollingsworth for much of the season and beyond, because of his recently being accepted into the Royal Air Force. We wish Harry well for the future serving Queen and country.

The one sour note on an otherwise fantastic 2021 season for your club was the abandonment of the Raleigh Hargreaves U15 cup final mid game. This came about because of wholly unacceptable

behaviour from parents of players taking part in the match. I cannot stress enough to everyone that we all have duty to the game of cricket in general and to our club to ensure that how we conduct ourselves on, and off the field of play must always be to the highest standard, in line with the spirit and ethos of cricket. There will be an emphatic response towards any individual found to be culpable in not following the rules of this club, particularly regarding their behaviour before, during and after games of cricket.

As we now look forward to the 2022 season, your club like every other amateur sporting organisation finds itself competing with the changes that continue to take place in Society, that limit the willingness of many to commit large blocks of time to the playing of team sports. Over the years, numerous cricket clubs have ceased to exist, and others have reduced their number of teams from two to one. Bradley Cricket Club, who for many years in the 1980's and 90's were one of the most competitive clubs in the Craven League, confirmed this month they will be reducing to a single team.

Your club intends, despite these challenges and the loss of some talented young players to senior cricket, to put out three senior teams every weekend. We are to some extent a victim of our own success that other clubs who have not invested in junior cricket for as long and with such determination, look to Oakworth as a potential source for the players to make up their senior teams. However, this will not stop us from doing what we believe is right, which is the promotion of cricket for young, old and every age in-between, in a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere.

The ECB have recognised the importance of cricket needing to have a plan and launched their five-year plan called Inspiring Generations. The ECB's stated purpose of their strategy is "We connect communities and improve lives by inspiring people to discover and share their passion for cricket." I believe that the ECB have got this spot on.

Sadly, at the same time the ECB has shot itself in the foot by prostrating itself on the altar of the TV companies and removed from most of the population the opportunity to watch the England Men's team play international cricket. The ECB must guarantee that a percentage of Test, ODI and T20 international cricket is made available to free to view TV. If children, who are the future of our sport have no access to watch cricket on television, we will lose them forever to the game we love.

To counter the challenges forced on cricket by the failures of the ECB we as a club need to continue the great work, we are doing by getting ever closer to the community that supports us and which we serve. We need to be out there letting everyone know about our club and what we can offer, whether it is playing, or attracting new social members.

I referenced at the beginning the bonfire night held in 2019, which to me showed just how much latent support there is for this club in the village and surrounding area. Therefore, we need as a club to reach out in every way that we can to draw on that support. We need to arrange more events and become a focal point for the area. However, we also need our members, all of our members to look at the part they play and ask themselves, can you do more. In most cases, the answer is yes. So don't wait for a tap on the shoulder from a Committee member, asking if you can do a job, put your hand up and ask, or suggest what you might like to do to help. I am sure we have members, who have experience, knowledge, skills and background of which we have no knowledge, but which could be hugely helpful to the club as it navigates its way through the 2020's and beyond.

This is your club, and it is up to you in this room and beyond to take responsibility for ensuring that the club can grow and prosper. It is our duty to ensure that the next generation and the generations after are left a legacy of which they can be proud having come through adversity, stronger and healthier than before.

As we now turn once again to the reason, we as a club exist, which is to play cricket, let us not forget for one second the individuals and businesses that have supported this club over many years. I would urge you all now more than ever before to take notice of who it is that supports this club and both yourselves and all those that you know to give your custom to these people and businesses.

Back to tonight. We have reached where we are today despite the challenges of the pandemic in a strong position, able to plan by growing and taking the club forward to the next level. I would like to pay particular thanks to our Treasurer Paul Carter for overseeing the finances of the club through this period. I must also thank Michael and our hard-working Committee for their efforts in ensuring your club is in the excellent place it is today. However, we always welcome new volunteers to come forward, to help shape the club in the coming years, so please speak to Michael or myself if you think you can help in anyway at all.

I close by wishing you all health, prosperity, happiness for you and your families and together for another exciting and fulfilling season of cricket at Oakworth Cricket Club.

Michael Davison, Secretary

March 2022