

“

Steve Dolman



”

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Derbyshire Cricketers in Conversation

**“IN
THEIR
OWN
WORDS”**

**Derbyshire Cricketers
in Conversation**

Steve Dolman



Contents

Foreword	9
Introduction	11
Author's note	16
Walter Goodyear (1938–1982).	17
Edwin Smith (1951–1971)	38
Harold Rhodes (1953–1969).	54
Keith Mohan (1957–1958).	70
Peter Eyre (1959–1972).	80
Brian Jackson (1963–1968).	89
Bob Taylor MBE (1963–1984).	98
Peter Gibbs (1966–1972)	109
Tony Borrington (1971–1980).	122
Alan Hill (1972– 1986)	134
Colin Tunnicliffe (1973–1983).	151
Geoff Miller OBE (1973–1990)	163
John Wright OBE (1977–1988)	175
Devon Malcolm (1984–1997)	188
Kevin Dean (1996–2008)	201
Graeme Welch (2001–2006)	210
James Pipe (2006–2009)	221
Wayne Madsen (2009–present)	232
Chris Grant (2010–present)	243
Epilogue	254

Introduction

I FIRST watched Derbyshire County Cricket Club in 1968. It was 26 August, the last day of a three-day game against Yorkshire and one that saw the county battling to save the match in the final session. It was not to be the last time I saw such a struggle, but in the years that followed I became hooked on the game of cricket and the fortunes of 'my' county.

On balance, the intervening period has seen more bad times than good, yet my interest and support has never waned. Moving from our home in Ripley across the border into Nottinghamshire changed nothing, nor did a subsequent spell in Manchester for further education. Making my life in Scotland caused logistical issues, but I retained both the accent and my love of the county of my birth.

Six years ago, I started the Peakfan Blog on Derbyshire cricket and in the intervening time have made contact with former players and conducted occasional interviews on their lives and careers. What I found interesting was that those chats unearthed many stories that had never previously appeared in written form. The response from blog followers was very positive and it set me thinking that an oral history of the county's post-war years might have some merit.

Occasionally a worthy tome on a journeyman professional will emerge in cricket literature, but by and large, books are on the biggest names, those whose careers have occupied the columns of newspapers and, in this modern era, the many social media channels. Such names, after all, will sell.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

The journeyman professional rarely gets the chance to tell his tales, unless at an occasional cricket dinner or cricket society meeting. The relish with which those early participants recounted their stories convinced me that there was something worthwhile in a bigger project and it started to gain momentum.

Having a background in oral history from a previous career, I was well aware of the importance of gathering these memories, or risk losing them forever. Those involved were patient, understanding and engaging, as they recalled people and events of up to 70 years before.

The interview with the doyen of groundsmen, Walter Goodyear, turned out to be the first he had ever given, at the age of 98. I asked for an hour of his time, sat with him in his home for four and ended up having regular chats by telephone as he remembered other stories he thought may be of interest. They were, every last one of them – though some of the more scurrilous have had to be omitted for fairly obvious reasons. He may well be the last man with first-hand recall of the legendary – some might say infamous – Bill Bestwick, who in his final years walked his dog around the boundary at Derby, passing comment on the action to all and sundry as he did so. The thought that with one man I was linked to 19th-century cricket has stayed with me.

What became increasingly evident was that the older generation, almost without exception, were delighted to chat, while players from more recent decades were in some cases more reluctant. There are scars that still run deep and I had to respect that.

As word spread about my project, bigger names agreed to be interviewed. So many, in fact, that I had to introduce unexpected selection criteria. Those who made the final cut are the ones who had been involved in the biggest stories, or whose lives and careers I felt of the greater interest to the reader and to posterity. Some had post-cricket careers that enhanced their claim for inclusion. I was, in short, looking for new stories and a different angle to those that I already knew. To a man, the participants in this book delivered handsomely, but I apologise unreservedly to those for whom there was simply no room.

I ended up with a good cross-section of players from each decade of the post-war era and my gratitude to each is duly recorded. To

INTRODUCTION

sit talking cricket, with people who I have spent much of my life watching from afar, has been a dream come true and none of them left me disappointed with the interaction. As things turned out, five of them were playing in that first game I saw at Chesterfield, something that dawned on me as the book progressed and which emphasises the effect that first experience had on a small, bespectacled and star-struck schoolboy.

The finished product is book-ended by two men who have made major off-field contributions, whose involvement added value to the project and made it more about the club and not just the cricket.

Each subject, in turn, has seen their finished interview and approved it. Sometimes things look different on the printed page than when spoken and I wanted to ensure that they were happy with the final version and had the option to edit, correct or omit. They rarely did, which in itself was gratifying. Some of the comments are surprising and very honest, but they were each happy to have them recorded.

I would like to thank club captain Wayne Madsen, a man who swapped Durban for Derbyshire and so clearly loves his adopted home, for kindly agreeing to write a foreword. The club is very close to his heart and that comes through very clearly in the words that he has written. He is both an outstanding cricketer and man and it has been a pleasure to get to know and become friends with him, his delightful wife Kyla and his extended family over recent seasons.

Special thanks also go to Peter Gibbs, then secretary of the club's former players' association, as well as to Harold Rhodes, who was willing to answer questions and provide important background on his era. Tony Borrington has also been of invaluable assistance and I am indebted to him for his interest and support. It was he who told me never to underestimate the interest an old cricketer had in discussing his career. Both sage and propitious words, as it turned out.

I would also like to thank Edwin Smith, the subject of my first book, both for contacts and for his friendship. I have learned much from him about county cricket in the first quarter-century after the war. Car trips, where he pointed out former haunts and player homes, as well as time spent at the County Ground, where he showed me

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

the location of old landmarks, were priceless. So too were his endless collection of stories, a number of which were recalled too late for his biography, but thankfully in time to appear here.

The result is a series of interviews that cover Derbyshire County Cricket Club's history from 1945 to 2015. Truth be told, thanks to the astonishing recall of Walter Goodyear, it goes back to the side that won the County Championship in 1936, but the majority of the book covers the post-war era.

It reveals the truth about stories that made the news over that period, recounted by those who were closest to those stories, or made them. Some will surprise, others will make you laugh and hopefully all of them will be of interest. My interest in how players 'arrive' in the county game and in certain individuals in the club's history resulted in some replication, but the ends, I think, justify the means.

The hardest part was editing down hours of chat to a workable size, but I hope my final selection gives a flavour of life on the county cricket circuit over the post-war years. I have tried, in the writing, to capture the way that those involved speak, so local vernacular creeps in on occasion.

I would like to thank the *Derby Telegraph*, in association with the Cricket Derbyshire Heritage Project, for the photographs, which are used with permission. Special thanks go to Mark Eklid and Colston Crawford at the newspaper for their assistance in gathering them together. Thanks also to Chris Airey and Neil Bates at Derbyshire County Cricket Club, whose assistance throughout has been invaluable and appreciated.

Special thanks also go to Paul and Jane Camillin at Pitch Publishing for their advice and support.

They quickly got back to me when I approached them with my idea for the book and I hope that the finished product repays their faith.

Finally, thanks to Martin Edwards, an outstanding writer and good friend, for his encouragement of my writing, on my blog and elsewhere, over recent years. Also to Martin and David Booth of Office Care, whose sponsorship of my blog and its layout over several years has helped to take it to a new level.

INTRODUCTION

To everyone whose stories are recounted in the book – thank you for the memories. It was my very great pleasure to meet you all, just as it has been to watch you over all those summers.

Walter Goodyear (1938–1982)

WALTER GOODYEAR was the groundsman's groundsman, a man who had forgotten more about his art than most ever know. From 1932, when he started work at Queens Park, Chesterfield, to 1982, when he retired, he prepared wickets specifically, as you will read, for Derbyshire's rich array of seam bowlers.

They weren't so much Derbyshire wickets as 'Walter wickets'. He knew what the club wanted and prepared them impeccably. Anyone winning the toss would fancy a bowl, the extra grass offering early help to any seam bowler worthy of the name and willing to bend his back. For much of his time the county did very well, because the conveyor belt of quick bowling talent kept producing the goods... Copson, the Popes, Gladwin, Jackson, Rhodes, Jackson again, Ward, Hendrick...the list went on. Yet you could get runs on them too, because when the 'green' went off it, the wickets were simply good for cricket.

Walter Goodyear is 99 now but still as sharp as a tack. Old age doesn't come alone, as the saying goes, but he is philosophical about his lot, despite losing both his wife and son to accidents that perhaps could and should have been prevented. He is refreshingly honest and funny – wonderful company, in short. How he got to that age without any interview requests remains a mystery, because his recollections are like gold dust to the oral historian.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Before I met him, I managed to speak to Steve Birks, now groundsman at Trent Bridge and one of the most respected in the game. He got a start as a groundsman under Walter Goodyear, spending 12 months with him at the County Ground from 1981 to 1982.

‘He was the biggest single influence on my career, without a doubt,’ Steve said. ‘He was quite a fearsome character and a lot of people were frankly terrified of him. But he took me under his wing and I remember he would tell me to fetch my flask and we’d go out on the square and have our lunch, or a tea break. If you listened to him, you couldn’t help but learn, because he knew it all.’

Steve joined the ground staff from a Youth Training Scheme, making such an impression as to being the one from that scheme that Walter still remembers with a great deal of fondness.

Did he have any particular memories?

‘I loved the guy to bits and he remains one of the greatest characters I have met in the game. The play that Peter Gibbs did a few years back, *Arthur’s Hallowed Ground*, was Walter to the life. It was brilliantly done and captured him as he really was. The man is a legend in our circles and anything I have achieved in the game of cricket owes a great deal to Walter Goodyear.’

He is the last man standing. No one else survives from pre-war Derbyshire cricket and if they did, it is unlikely that their memory would be as acute as his. A groundsman at both Chesterfield and Derby in his time, he is also a decorated war hero, fighting at Anzio and in the north African desert. He is one of the last of the legendary Desert Rats and it was a very great honour to meet him.

In the course of our first chat, I found out that his best friend during the war was my late uncle, my Dad’s brother Bill. It was an extraordinary and unexpected coincidence, but then Walter Goodyear is, by any standards, an extraordinary man.

| **Walter, can you tell me about your early life?**

I was born at Chesterfield on 1 February 1917 and brought up in Southwell at a doctor’s house. My Mum was a char lady and we were there until I was five, when I moved to Hasland, near Chesterfield,

WALTER GOODYEAR (1938–1982)

with my Mum. My Dad was a farmer, then went on the railway. I had a sister but she died when she was young from peritonitis.

My father was very bad-tempered – you might even say vicious – and my three brothers and I got some rough treatment at times. I got the brunt of his anger and I was picked on, to be honest.

You took a job as assistant at Chesterfield cricket ground at Queens Park in 1932 when you were just 16. How did that come about?

Well, I went on the park at 14, then went to the pit for a while, as so many did. I was then asked to go back to Chesterfield, specifically to help out on the cricket ground. I worked with Fred Pope, who was, of course, the father of our bowlers, George and Alf.

There was plenty of work on at that time. There was a first and second team, a Wednesday side and a Thursday police team. All those wickets needed preparation but they were marvellous years. I should never have left, if I'm honest, as I enjoyed it much more than Derby. I was employed by the Chesterfield corporation and not by the cricket club.

I was 'King Dick' there. A friend of mine called me recently and told me that he had been listening to a piece on the local radio. Someone had said that I was the most important person in Chesterfield in 1938! I used to wind the market hall clock, the parish church clock, help out councillors and do various bits of charity work.

When I moved to Derby, I had to go into digs and if I am honest, I never settled there as much as at Chesterfield. I still love Queens Park.

It was a golden era for Derbyshire cricket. Were you a fan at that time?

I was never a cricket fan. It was just a job and when you're out of work you do anything to get money coming in. That's what I was happy to do, until the day that I retired.

Was there much difference in pitch and ground preparation between Derby and Chesterfield?

I had a hand roller at Chesterfield and a motor roller at Derby! The one at Chesterfield was 15cwt. Two of us had to push it, though I did

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

it alone sometimes when there was no one else about. It used to pull your guts out, but it certainly kept you fit.

At Derby there was much more than cricket. There was Derby Amateurs football club, five hockey teams, the National Westminster Bank with different teams – it was a constant battle to keep the ground in a decent condition. All the teams wanted to play as late as they could to prolong their season. I was forever replacing divots and trying to keep the ground half decent for the cricketers, who needed the best surface, of course.

| So how long was your working day?

I would often leave for the ground at 5am, then go home for lunch around one. Then I would work until perhaps 10pm in the summer. I was a workaholic, but it kept the money coming in for my wife and son. That's the way I looked at it.

| How did the move to Derby in 1938, when you took over as head groundsman, come about?

Harry Fletcher, the groundsman at Derby, died and Stan Worthington, our all-rounder, lodged with him. On Stan's recommendation I was offered the job outright, no interview or anything. I only saw it as a short-term thing though. I should have gone back home to Chesterfield after the war and I regret not doing that, as I've said.

It was a racecourse then as well. Mr Smedley was the racecourse manager. He gave me decent money for working on it, but he also gave me a paddock ticket for the course, as a thank you for what I had done. Now, I wasn't interested in horse racing at all, but a friend of mine was commissionaire at the Regal Cinema at Chesterfield and he moved to do the same job at the one in Derby. I told him to give the paddock ticket to the cinema manager, so he could come to the racing whenever he wanted. In return, I got complimentary tickets for the cinema whenever I wanted!

The cinema was in East Street, halfway up on the left-hand side. The Derby Building Society is there now. I also got to go to the theatre, and to the Hippodrome for free too. Old Walter did all right out of that and I had to wheel and deal throughout my days.

Were there many differences between the two squares and the way they played?

Chesterfield was much easier to manage. The thatch was better – you had to rake cricket grounds to get the turf to the texture you wanted – and of course the surrounds were much nicer. The drainage at Derby was dreadful and the water went down a seven-inch pipe that stopped at the pavilion. Whenever it rained, it used to back up and flood, but there was never any money to sort it.

A few years ago they wanted to excavate the square at Derby and they dug down around ten inches to do so. Once they had it dug out, they went for lunch and came back an hour later. It was full of water! There's a very high water table there and that was always an issue until they spent some money on the drainage.

I could take you to Derby now and show you where there's a well on the ground. It dates from the time before the Grandstand Hotel, when there was a farmhouse there. The well belonged to the farm. It is covered with large slabs of concrete, so nobody's likely to fall down it in a hurry!

Author note: On a visit to the ground last summer, I asked current groundsman Neil Godrich about this. He showed me where the well is, not too far inside the boundary in front of the Gateway Centre. If we're ever a fielder short, that's the first place to look.

By all accounts it wasn't a very nice ground at that time?

Ooh no. It was depressing to look at. It was always cold, even in the summer. Other teams didn't like that and ours weren't that keen either! Especially the batsmen, who always knew when they came to Derby that they would get a green wicket with plenty of grass left on it.

They didn't have a choice though. They got MY wicket and for a long time I prepared them for Les Jackson. People used to turn up for matches and ask me how it would play. My answer was usually the same, 'If we win the toss we'll put the buggers in and Les will have three or four wickets before lunch.'

He usually did, you know. If he didn't, I was for it!

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

It never turned much at Derby. Chesterfield did, but only later in the summer did it ever turn much at Derby. Mind you, Tommy Mitchell could spin it there. He could spin it on anything.

| How many staff did you have there?

Staff? You must be joking! There was a bloke named Joe Thomson who helped me when he could, but everything else was down to Walter. Whether it was moving or relaying the square, I had to do it all myself. I had 32 acres to maintain, all of it on my own for most of the time.

I subsequently helped Joe Thomson by getting him to Chesterfield to work on the ground at Clay Cross and put some money in his pocket. There were the ground staff boys, but with a few exceptions their hearts weren't in it and they were in too big a hurry to get home to be that much use.

Later on I got some help but it was youngsters off the dole – they weren't interested, with the exception of one. That was Steve Birks, who has gone on to become a very well-regarded groundsman at Trent Bridge, of course. He was a good lad, willing to listen and to graft.

| Were there opportunities for you to move?

I could have gone to Lord's in 1977. Donald Carr asked me if I would be interested in moving down there, but I told him that I was too old by that stage – I was 60.

I said he should go to Nottingham and get Jim Fairbrother, which he did. Jim was a very good groundsman.

| Did you ever get asked to prepare specific kinds of wickets by the captains? Did that change as time went on?

My wickets were always green tops for the Derbyshire seamers. Walter Robins came with Middlesex in 1947 and took me out to have a look at the wicket, which was green, as always. He told me it looked damp and had too much grass. I told him it didn't.

He wasn't at all happy and said that if he won the toss he was going to get it cut. I told him, 'You bloody well won't, it's my wicket.'

So he went off to see our club secretary, Will Taylor, who gave me his backing and then he came back out, saying, 'Okay you win, Walter... so what's going to happen?'

I told him they would lose two wickets for 20 but probably make 300. I also told him to leave out his spinner, the long-serving Jim Sims, in favour of a young seamer, Norman Hever. He subsequently went to Glamorgan where he played in their championship-winning side of 1948 and never forgot that I got him picked for that game! Norman later became groundsman at Northamptonshire and we got to know each other very well.

Robins, being the strong character that he was, kept Sims in the side too and he took seven wickets in the match!

Did any Derbyshire captains ask you to go out to the wicket with them?

Some did, earlier on in particular, but a few captains later on thought that they knew it all and didn't need any help from me.

Who were the best Derbyshire captains of your experience?

Captain G.R. Jackson in the 1930s was the best by a mile. He was a gentleman and a really good captain, something he'd done in the army, of course. He called a spade a spade and you knew where you stood with him. Arthur Richardson was very good too, while post-war, Donald Carr and Guy Willatt were both excellent men to work with.

You had other involvement in the club too, I understand?

Oh, I got involved in no end of stuff. Players used to lodge with me and the wife. Harold Rhodes, Reg Carter, John Kelly, Arnold Hamer – they all stayed with us in our back bedroom at times.

I got a reputation around the club as a 'Mr Fixit'. In 1952, when they were visiting Derby, I got Fred Perry and Dan Maskell to do a tennis exhibition at the ground. They were doing some work for the council and I crossed a palm or two to get them over to the County Ground. I never did get paid for that, nor for a lot of other things over the years.

There were some real characters in the side of the 1930s. I'd like to mention some names to you. Arthur Richardson?

He was an absolute gentleman. You know, when the Australians came to Derby with Bradman in 1948, we had the biggest crowd in the club's history. There were 17,000 there on the first day and close to five figures on the others – and the club forgot to pay me!

I went to Arthur Richardson, who was on the club committee at the time and he wrote me a cheque for £20 and told me to take it to my bank. I didn't have a bank account, so he gave me the cash himself. It shows you the way the club was run around that time.

Will Taylor?

He did a lifetime of work with the club but he guarded the finances as if they were his own, which I suppose they were to some extent. We had to submit our expenses to him each month and the first time I was asked for these, I spoke to my wife, to see what I should ask for.

She said that I'd had to pay for different things, including the papers being delivered to the ground, so we worked out a figure of £5. Then the next time, I doubled it to ten. I quickly worked out that he didn't like to be seen as 'tight' when other people were with him, so I made a point of going for my expenses when someone else was there.

I eventually got him up to nearly £20. You did what you had to do, because the money I was paid was barely enough to get by on.

There's a story I have heard – maybe apocryphal – regarding you and Mr Taylor.

[Laughs] That one! Oh, it was true. Mr Taylor did a lot of good for Derbyshire cricket as secretary for over 50 years, but he and I didn't see eye to eye all the time. He had an office that was at the top of the old stand at Derby and one day – it was a match day – he came out of it and shouted across to where I was working on the ground.

'Goodyear!' He bellowed it and everyone heard, including me.

Now, keep in mind that I had fought in the war and didn't much like people talking down to me any more, especially when there was a

ground full of people. I just turned round to the pavilion and shouted back at him.

‘Bollocks.’

I walked on and he shouted again. This time it was, ‘Walter!’

So I turned around and shouted back ‘Yes, Mr Taylor?’

He never called me by my surname again.

■ Denis Smith?

Denis and I got on brilliantly. We got on well when he was a player, but when he became coach we had a lot of fun. He always had his pipe on the go – you rarely saw him without it – and we never had a cross word. I also knew where he was from the plume of smoke from that pipe!

I remember one time he broke my finger by accident and I’d to go to the hospital to get it splinted. The next day I dropped something when I was trying to protect my injured finger and it landed on his foot and broke his toe! We had some laughs about that, I can tell you.

He was a grand bloke. Not many people know that he coached Derek Randall, the Nottinghamshire batsman. His Mum used to bring him down to the County Ground for evening sessions with Denis.

He liked four nets for practice. Two had more grass for the seamers, while two were shaved for the spin bowlers. He liked players to work hard in the nets, there was no room for slacking and he soon told anyone who did.

I missed Denis when he retired.

■ Stan Worthington?

He was a lovely man and I saw him a lot. Before the war, he asked me to go to Clipstone and take over as groundsman at the football ground there, where his Dad was a manager. I didn’t fancy leaving home and so turned him down, but there were no hard feelings.

After the war, when Stan came out of the army, one of the first things he did was to come down to the ground and help me strip down the motorised roller. He was an electrician and a first-class mechanic and we got it cleaned up so it ran beautifully. It saved Will Taylor a lot of money for a new one, so he was pleased with that!

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

He was coach at Lancashire for ten years and he coached in India for a while. I asked him not to go there because of his health and he was a bag of bones when he got back home.

When he was at Lancashire, he turned up for a game one day in his car with three of their committee men and the gate man wouldn't let them in – the county coach! I told the gate man, bluntly, not to be so silly – or words to that effect – and told Stan where to park. He'd played for us all those years and wasn't even recognised. Unbelievable!

| The gate men were often pretty strict, I remember that.

Because most of them didn't use their brains. The best was Percy Fendall, who worked for years on the Nottingham Road gate. One time he gave me a shout and said there were Derby County footballers wanted to get in and wanted to know what to do. I went over and there were 20-odd of them!

I was a regular at the Baseball Ground and knew them all, but there was a bloke from Spondon with them who I knew wasn't. He'd also nicked my new shovel when I was working at Quarndon one time, so I made sure that he paid and the rest got in for nowt.

| Les Townsend?

Les was a terrific cricketer and was good to watch, but he kept himself to himself. He didn't mix that much with other people.

| Harry Elliott?

He was a top bloke and a marvellous wicketkeeper. He didn't miss much and he was a good coach too. He was another who called a spade a spade and didn't miss anyone who messed him about, but I liked him.

He was older than Derbyshire ever knew, you know. When he signed for the county after the First World War he told them he was born in 1895, when in fact it was 1891. He reckoned they'd not have given him a chance at that age, but he went on to play up to the Second World War. They made him coach in 1947 and he came back and played a few games that year, at the age of 56, as it turned out.

WALTER GOODYEAR (1938–1982)

You know, nobody knew about his real age until a reunion of the championship-winning side in 1967? He kept it quiet all those years.

■ **George and Alf Pope?**

They were from Brimington, near Chesterfield. Their Dad, as I've said, was a groundsman and all the brothers played the game. They even had a net in the back garden when they were growing up!

Alf was a lovely fella. I lodged with him for a few years when I first came to Derby and we got on very well. He was good company and his house on Nottingham Road was really handy for the cricket ground.

When George was ruled out for most of the championship summer in 1936, Arthur Richardson told Alf that it would mean he had to do a lot more bowling as stock bowler. Alf's reply was the kind that Les Jackson would have later made, 'I like bowling, skipper.'

George was harder, very competitive. He used to play quick bowlers like Brian Close did in later years. If they bounced him, he used to take it on the chest and glare down the wicket at them, as if to say, 'Is that the best you've got?'

With the ball he was very aggressive and he always had something to say. He mellowed as time went on, but he always enjoyed bowling on my green tops. Being a middle-order player, he often got in when the early colour had gone and he scored a lot of runs too, whereas Alf was basically a bowler pure and simple, who clumped it occasionally.

Their brother Harold was a decent cricketer too, but never got established as a county bowler with his leg spin.

■ **Tommy Mitchell?**

Tommy was perhaps the most colourful character of them all. He could be very abrupt with some people and I don't think he had much time for me, because I prepared wickets for seam bowlers rather than him. I was a young lad at the time and he didn't think I knew better than him, an older, experienced professional. Maybe he was right. But he was a fine bowler and probably turned it more on an unhelpful wicket than any of his contemporaries. An odd one might go astray, but when he got it right, he was lethal.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

He was quite a joker but wasn't so keen when the joke was played on him. He was also very aware of his value and turned down a return to the county after the war because he could make more money at the pit. Will Taylor offered to make the money up for him, but Tommy said it was a matter of principle and went into the leagues to get extra money.

There's a lot of stories about Tommy and not all of them are printable. There was one time when at the end of a county season, he was offered a short-term engagement to go as professional to Blackpool for a few games, where he was a great success.

Sometime that October, his wife contacted Will Taylor to ask when Tom's engagement there was going to finish. Mr Taylor didn't know what to say, as the season had finished several weeks earlier!

■ **Bill Copson?**

He was a very good bowler, but Bill didn't have much to do with me. I was a young groundsman and he had played for England.

Later in life we got on better, when he became a first-class umpire, but in his playing days our paths rarely crossed.

■ **Who were the characters of that side?**

[Laughs] Oh, they all were. There's some stories that you couldn't possibly print I'm afraid. There was one player who was released by Mr Taylor because of a supposed dalliance with the daughter of a senior club official. Nothing happened, they only dated, but Mr Taylor disapproved and the player had to go. He was even taken off team pictures of the period.

It has never been mentioned before, but everyone knew what had happened and it was a waste, because the bloke could play and might have been a fine cricketer for us.

There was another too, who wasn't the most sociable. When he got a car he had the back seats taken out of it so he didn't get asked to give lifts!

But Denis Smith and Stan Worthington were my favourites. We were firm friends for the rest of their days. As groundsman, you don't really get all that close to many people, but they were wonderful men.

Funnily enough, my wife knew all the wives very well because she cleaned the ladies' toilets at the ground. We were invited to social events, but that was generally the only time that I had close dealings with the players, with a few exceptions.

| In 1939 war broke out. What did that mean for you?

I was in the army for six full years, from 1940 to 1946. I was N/T Sergeant in the 14 Sherwood Foresters and served in north Africa as part of the Desert Rats, as well as fighting at Anzio, among many others.

It was terrible and I lost a lot of friends. I made a lot too though and we worked together, helped each other and somehow I got through it. Six long years. A lot of good people didn't get through it.

| What happened to the ground in wartime?

I'll tell you. I was in Stan Worthington's house at Mickleover when war was declared on the Sunday at 12 o'clock, with Alf Pope, as it happened. When I got to the ground on the Monday morning, Will Taylor asked me to go to his office and said I was no longer required. I was effectively chopped off at the knees and they made a chap named Jackie Mays in charge of the ground. They could get him to do the job cheaper, you see.

I did all I could do and went and got a job with the parks department under Mr Wells at Alvaston Park Lake, until I was conscripted in 1940.

| And what happened after the war – how did you come back?

I came back on a month's leave in August 1946. At the camp I was at, there were five other cricket groundsmen and they were all brought home in the June of that year, to return to their former duties.

There was a match on at Derby in the August, a three-day game against Gloucestershire and I was asked to go and see Will Taylor. I asked him why he hadn't applied to have me brought home in the June with the others and he was very evasive.

He asked me what I thought of the wicket and I told him that the game wouldn't last three days as it was sub-standard. The condition of that wicket, the square and the ground as a whole was shocking. I was right, it finished inside two days!

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

I was asked to come back and I had to choose between the cricket club and an opportunity at the parks department on a similar wage. I opted for the cricket club, but to be honest I wondered many times over the years whether I made the right decision.

The late 1940s saw a fresh crop of players emerge, spearheaded by the legendary Les Jackson and Cliff Gladwin. Can you tell me about them?

Cliff was from Doe Lea, near Chesterfield, and travelled through to games or to the ground with his very good friend, Eric Marsh. He was a lovely man Cliff, but he could get annoyed if people dropped catches off him and woe betide them if they misfielded.

He was a very fine and accurate bowler, but after he retired from playing he went to Lilleshall to get his cricket coaching badge. He failed and it finished his interest in cricket, especially when people who weren't in the same league as a player managed to pass.

He took to growing chrysanthemums and won a lot of prizes in doing so, while he also ran a sports shop in Chesterfield for a few years.

The last time that I saw him, he came to me with an engine for a Qualcast lawnmower and asked if I had any contacts at the company, who might help to get it repaired.

I knew the managing director there very well and he took one look at it and chucked it in a skip! Then he gave me a brand new one to give to Cliff.

He passed away soon afterwards, far too early, really.

Les came along for his trial at the County Ground and Harry Elliott asked him to bowl against the skipper, Eddie Gothard. He'd already made it known to people that he didn't rate Les at all and played a few balls fairly easily – and Eddie wasn't a great bat.

Now, Harry Elliott rated Les and told him he wasn't bowling quick enough. So Les started to bend his back, rattled Eddie's stumps a few times and bruised him a few times more. That was really the start of it all for him.

When he first started he used to have to get up at 5.30am and get a bus to Chesterfield from Whitwell. Then he'd get a train to Derby

WALTER GOODYEAR (1938–1982)

and then another bus to the ground. He'd have his breakfast in the end room of the pavilion and did this until he had enough money to afford a car.

He made his debut for Derbyshire at Abbeydale Park in Sheffield against Kent in 1947 – that was one of our grounds then. He turned up with his boots and cricket clothes in a carrier bag. He didn't do anything special but he took a wicket.

The following year it all started for Les and he became the leader of the attack for the next 15 years. He was a lovely man and I never had a cross word with him.

You know, one day he came off at the end of play and took off a cricket boot, then tossed it to me. It was full of blood.

'I'd a nail come through the sole this morning Wal...can you get it sorted for me?'

He'd bowled nearly all day, with a nail sticking in his foot! Can you imagine them doing that today?

I borrowed someone's bicycle and took it to a cobbler on East Street.

He was just closing up, but when I told him I'd got Les Jackson's boot for repair, he opened up again and sorted it, so I could take it back to him for the next day's play.

It wasn't just about sorting the ground, for Walter.

The era of uncovered wickets must have been challenging for groundsmen?

Ooh, yes! We used to cover an area 4ft 6in in front of the popping crease and the rest was left open to the elements. The umpires had to decide when play was possible and the bowlers were always more keen to get on with it than the batsmen!

There was a touring side playing at Chesterfield and the rest came to Derby to practice in the nets. They were fine in the morning, but Jack Ikin from Lancashire, who was doing some coaching, asked me to leave the covers off when they went for their lunch, even though the rain was threatening.

Well, it duly came down for about an hour and when they went back out the wickets were 'sticky'. They didn't like it at all.

Who were the stand-outs, apart from Cliff and Les, in that team?

Arnold Hamer was a fantastic batsman. I loved watching him bat and he lodged with my wife and I on occasions. I was with him when he got released and he was really upset. He cried and I could understand why. He deserved better after what he'd done for the county, although he was getting on a bit by that time.

John Kelly was another nice bat. He was a quiet lad, but a good team man. I remember him getting into a row with Denis Smith one time, just for giving a woman a lift in his car! There was nothing going on, but Denis reckoned he shouldn't have been doing it, that it wasn't professional.

Did the batsmen say much to you about the seam-friendly pitches of the period?

They used to say, 'Leave the grass on it for Les, Wal.' They just wanted to win and realised that the more was in it for bowlers, the better chance we had. After the first hour the green had gone and if you could bat, you could score runs.

Albert Lightfoot of Northamptonshire was a character and I remember him telling me that I should put some holes in the wicket at the end of the day, so they could have a game of snooker! That's how good it was.

Mind you, I caught him that night, about eight o'clock it was. They were round having a drink at the Grandstand Hotel and Albert came on to the ground. I caught him peeing on the wicket...he wanted a bit of life in it for their bowlers!

We were good mates, Albert and me, so I didn't report it.

Players used to drink together then, of course, and sometimes the journalists joined them. I remember giving John Arlott a lift to the station after his last visit to the County Ground. They'd presented him with a bottle of whiskey and he was pleased with that.

Did you retain involvement in other grounds?

No, I had enough to do at Derby. They all had a groundsman and if he asked for advice, he got it. All I had to do was make sure the stands

were taken around the grounds and I had to put them up and take them down again.

I had all the pieces lettered and numbered and I could put four up in about an hour, but if others did it, they took a lot longer. Sometimes these stands were rented out to places and I remember taking them to Repton School on occasion and setting them up there.

If we played at Buxton I got a couple of ground staff lads to go with me. We used to get Brooks Removals from Derby to take them up and we'd go with them in the van.

| How did your budget change over the years?

I didn't really have one! I used to buy marl, which was quite expensive, and fertiliser. There was a farmer on the committee for a long time, Bob Green, and he used to send me bags of fertiliser as he knew I didn't have much money to buy what I needed.

I remember one time a committee man came and told me that I'd spent hardly any money on the ground. I told him straight, 'That's because there is no money.' I used to scrounge whatever I needed.

People would come and drop me a lorry of top soil and I'd give them a drink.

That's how I operated and how I kept going as long. It was the same with lorries of tarmac for the road into the ground – give them a drink and they'd see you right.

One time I 'borrowed' a flock of sheep from a local farmer. It was ahead of a visit from a civil servant, who wanted to see we justified getting agricultural diesel, which we got free. Once he had seen the sheep and signed to say we could get it, the sheep went back! I knew all the dodges.

I saved the club a fortune over the years and hardly anyone appreciated or understood what I did and how I did it.

| Hardly anyone?

Except for Eddie Gothard. He was a gentleman. He used to hold lavish parties at his home, Mickleover House, and my wife and I were always first on the guest list. Denis Smith, too. We were regulars because Eddie acknowledged what both of us did for the club. Mind you,

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

he had a dog named Jim and you'd to watch, because he'd bite your backside if you turned your back on him!

One time Denis and I went out there and Eddie had a blockage in his toilet – he had a septic tank in the garden. Denis and I had to find out where it was blocked, following the pipe. We were tapping away, tapping away – and then this thing burst! We were covered in you know what...we mended the pipe, got it all sorted for him. He was a gentleman, Mr Gothard, and made sure we were rewarded appropriately for it.

I just wish he hadn't been as old when he made his debut in first-class cricket.

He wasn't a great cricketer at that level, but by crikey he had guts – AND he was one of the few men who could say that he bowled Donald Bradman.

| What was your salary as groundsman?

Not enough! When I came to Derby from Chesterfield, it was on the understanding that I would get £5 a week. I got three. When I came out of the army after the war, they said they were giving me a raise and took me to £4. It was chicken feed, though the club never had any money, of course.

That's why I used to do so many 'foreigners' – extra jobs, or 'homers'. There's not a ground in Derbyshire that I haven't worked on over the years, but I only got told off for going on one.

There's an unwritten rule in cricket that as a groundsman you don't go on someone else's ground without asking permission first. I got told off at Darley Dale for doing that and it was right. You had to wait for an invitation. I'd have given anyone who went to look at mine short shrift, if they'd not asked in advance.

| Who were the players you most remember from the 1960s and 1970s?

Ian Hall was a grand bloke. I knew his father, Ben, who was a school master, very well. His grandfather used to come and give me a hand at Cromford Meadows, where I did a lot of work with Ray Buxton, the father of Derbyshire all-rounder Ian. My wife used to go away

picking blackberries with Mrs Buxton, Ian's mother – we had no end of jam each year!

TV personality Leslie Crowther used to bring a showbiz team to play at Cromford each year. He was a keen cricketer and the games were usually well-attended. It was at one of those that Ray Buxton sadly died of a heart attack. It was a terrible shame. Going to their house was like going home.

Ian Buxton was another lovely man. I was saddened to hear of his death a few years back.

Peter Gibbs wrote a play, *Arthur's Hallowed Ground*, in which the lead character is a groundsman.

That was me. He sat where you are right now and wrote it.

So you saw it then? What did you think?

I liked it. He had me off to a 'T'. Oh aye, it was Walter all right. There were a few things that were added in – I never had a dog, for example, but the things he did...I used to go and hide myself away, keep out of the road when I had the chance. Especially when Will Taylor was looking for me!

Author note: I also spoke to Peter Gibbs, who confirmed that Walter was the inspiration for the piece, but that it was a composite of others he encountered over the years.

When Will Taylor finally retired, Major Douglas Carr took over, brother of Donald. Were relations between the two of you better?

Major Carr had been in the army, just like me. He always treated me with respect and we got on famously.

It was in that period that we started to run advertisements. We never had any at Derby, so I went to Harry Bedford, the manager of the Gaumont Cinema, and asked him to make me a banner of forthcoming cinema attractions.

This would have been in the mid-1960s. I fastened it on to the railings and it was very successful.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Then the club cottoned on to the idea and started charging for advertising boards around the ground.

They did all right out of it, but the cinema couldn't afford it, so stopped. I lost out on a complimentary ticket that I had, but my son used to use that and go with his mates, so I didn't lose too much!

You were groundsman of the year in 1970. It must have been a thrill to get it in the club's centenary year?

I was. I knew nothing about it, until the Lancashire chairman stood up at the end of the centenary dinner and announced that I'd won it. I was sat at my table and felt quite overwhelmed after all those years. I'd to go to Edgbaston to collect the award.

What was the prize?

I got £100 and the trophy for a year. It then got passed on to the winner the following year. My name went up on a board at Lord's too, so it was a nice honour to be recognised in such a way.

Eddie Barlow came along and changed things in the mid-1970s. How did you get on with him?

He was a lovely bloke and a terrific player. I liked him a lot and he told me to keep preparing wickets the way that I always had. By that stage there was a clear divide between players and ground staff, but Eddie was a fine man and did a lot for the club.

Were things as good in that era?

Oh yes. By that stage old Walter normally got his way with things! There were some good lads around at that time. Geoff Miller was one – he came from near where I was born – and so too was Mike Hendrick. He used to like my wickets, because there was plenty in them for him for the first few overs.

Colin Tunncliffe was another who I got on well with. A good bowler and I knew his father very well. In fact I bought a couple of cars off him over the years, when he worked for Kennings, as a car salesman.

| When did you finish with Derbyshire?

[In] 1982. I was 65 and to be honest I was glad to get out. Mind you, I didn't retire. I took on three jobs – groundsman at Belper, at Quarndon and at Stone, in Staffordshire. The money I got from the three balanced the books – I was no worse off than I was at Derby.

| Do you still see any of the old players?

Harold Rhodes and his wife pop over regularly – they're very good to me – and I see Bob Taylor and his wife from time to time. Ian Buxton used to come over, so did Les Jackson, but I have outlived most of them.

| Were you a keen gardener outside of work, with a bowling green for a lawn?

I hated gardening, always have. Too much like work. I kept my garden tidy, but that's all.

| Only Will Taylor has exceeded your time at the club. That must be a source of pride?

Well, I only joined the club in 1938 as my time at Chesterfield didn't really count. It was 44 years, less the war years. So only 38 years.