

## **Interview with CHRIS HUGHES -Grounds and Workshop Manager**

Duncan: Please tell me a little bit about yourself. You said you were born in Barking?

Chris: I lived in Barking until I was about six years old and then my family moved to Stoneleigh which is near Epsom and spent probably 40 years in that area. It's a lovely area. I went to school there, middle school and secondary school also in Epsom. When I first moved there, I joined the Cubs and moved on to the Sea Scouts which I quite enjoyed. Then it was a choice between football or Sea Scouts, but I stuck with the Sea Scouts at Thames Ditton. I left school before I was 16.

Duncan: Tell me about the Sea Scouts. Were you a patrol leader?

Chris: I was eventually yes. I enjoyed the whole experience. We had all different types of boats from canoes, double canoes, kayaks, Enterprise and Mirror dinghies. Great fun. It was very enjoyable. I learnt a lot.

Duncan: Do you think that shaped your character?

Chris: I think it helped, definitely. I'm a practical person and I think being in that environment helps you because you have to fend for yourself. Obviously, you get trained and taught certain things, but you adapt and try and make things better. You perhaps see a better way of doing something and you can adapt it and try and pass it on to people.

Duncan: That's really interesting. Making things better and introducing improvements. Is that something that you would take on every day working here?

Chris: Definitely. For me, it's always if you can do something better. I just try and focus on that and then try to make a difference. Even though I've been doing this type of job for a long time now, it doesn't mean to say there's only one way of doing things, so you look at the whole picture and at the circumstances and decide whether you can actually change anything to make it better, quicker, more efficient.

Duncan: What exactly is your job now?

Chris: I'm the Grounds and Workshop Manager at the moment.

Duncan: At the moment?

Chris: Yes, well prior to this I was a Head groundsman. Currently my title is Grounds and Workshop Manager. I say at the moment because you never know what the future holds.

Duncan: You were the Head groundsman – so is that a promotion?

Chris: Yes.

Duncan: Congratulations and when did that happen?

Chris: Thank you. Approximately four months ago.

Duncan: OK, so the word manager implies that you've got a leadership role here, but you've always had that, I thought.

Chris: For a number of years – yes.

Duncan: Now it's been formalised?

Chris: As a Head groundsman I was a manager, but in this recent role change, I'm also a manager and a technician I basically look after the mechanic and the workshop with the machinery plus caring for the Club's grounds. So, there's quite a lot to do for one person.

Duncan: Do you find yourself doing more and more management and less and less leadership? Management being the management of resources, of things, and leadership being the management of people.

Chris: I think in a certain aspect, yes. Even though I still have to lead the whole team, including the new Head groundsman. I'm trying to let him step into the role and develop more to manage himself and to lead his team himself.

Duncan: And who is he?

Chris: Simon Bailey. He's doing very well. He used to work on the golf course, and he moved across. He enjoys the change. It's very similar in some ways. You know different types of grasses and things, but it's quite comparable, so he's a good guy to have on board.

Duncan: And why do you think you're a good leader?

Chris: I think partly my experience. What I've seen over the years, what works and what doesn't work.

Duncan: And have you got any special tips and techniques?

Chris: Never assume anything, I would say. It's probably caught most people out over the years, but I think it's important. Don't assume that someone knows something. Treat them like they don't know everything – then assist them when needed. Not being disrespectful but, it's the best way to set an example and maintain standards.

Duncan: So quite a lot of your job is training people.

Chris: Certainly – on the job!

Duncan: What is a typical day?

Chris: It's a 10-hour day for me.

Duncan: OK, and out of that how many hours would you be active yourself doing something and how much time would you be on administration and managing resources and leading people?

Chris: 50/50 split – doing and leading.

Duncan: Do you like that split?

Chris: Some of the admin is not that much fun, but it has to be done and you need to be responsible to make sure it's carried out. I do enjoy the hands-on stuff and the workshop element. Repairing things, whether it's mowers or other machines. I'm also qualified to weld so that helps.

Duncan: How interesting, can you do aluminium welding?

Chris: I can. Wouldn't say I'm the best at it.

Duncan: What qualifications have you got?

Chris: City and Guilds, golf course and sports turf management.

Duncan: When did you get those??

Chris: That was a long time ago, in the 90s. I've done some other courses in between, but those were the biggest ones really. Most of my stuff is, I've learned through experience. The welding was out of necessity. Stuff broke and needed mending.

Duncan: So are you now supervising and managing. Would you really prefer to get your hands dirty?

Chris: I like the balance in my job.

Duncan: So that appeals to your practical nature?

Chris: Yeah, definitely. One example, this week I went to regrind a mower. We have the kit here to do that, which is great because it's very expensive. It was a hand machine, which is a very small machine, the blade is approximately 20 inches wide. So you can get the whole machine onto the workbench and then you take a few little bits off, prepare it for grinding. But before you get to that stage you have to check certain things like the bearings. On this particular machine there's two-cylinder bearings and they were both gone, shot. Additionally, there are two other groomer bearings to check and one of those was also shot! That then makes a job twice as long because you've got to repair the bearings before you can actually get the grinding done.

Duncan: And somebody without your experience might just have gone ahead and done the grinding and then discovered that it makes no difference because the bearings weren't working.

Chris: Exactly, it would have been inaccurate.

Duncan: So you save time, you save money and you made improvements. That's very characteristic of you I would say.

Chris: Agreed. It's nice to fix things and improve things really.

Duncan: Tell me when you're not working, what are your interests? You've got a motorbike haven't you?

Chris: I've got a motorbike, yes, 1250 Suzuki bandit. Yeah, it's lovely. I've always had a motorbike since I was 16. As a kid, that was my main focus. I wanted to get a job to earn enough money to buy a motorbike, and that's what I did.

Duncan: Were you ever tempted to join the police and become a motorcycal policeman?

Chris: I did think of it, but I eventually joined the Territorial Army (TA) instead. When I left the Bank of England Sports Club, I wanted a new challenge as well as a new job. So, I joined the Royal Engineer TA Regiment in London. I loved it – wished I had done it earlier. In fact, I thought of joining the Royal Navy at one time but did not pursue that – as I had already secured a job.

Duncan: And do you think your career choice has been successful?

Chris: Definitely because I enjoy working outside and I've always enjoyed that and it's all been about what you can give to the job. Whatever sports surface you're looking after is how you can present that and make it the best you can.

Duncan: I understand you are a keen motorcyclist? Any incidents?

Chris: Just one that I can recall ... here I am – underage, not insured and I get into a tangle with an unmarked police car. One way or another that gets written off and I get hauled in and given a 6-month ban. The Magistrate was very severe with me – I've never forgotten it. But I learnt my lesson. Now I am the safest driver on the road!

Duncan: It was some time ago – I think you can be forgiven for that now!

Chris: Yeah, so you know you live and learn, I guess.

Duncan: What do I hear about you winning a motorbike?

Chris: In April 2022 I bought 10 £2 tickets in the raffle for The National Motorbike Museum. And won the top prize of a BSA 500 Gold Star Bike! It has been completely restored and is an absolute beauty. I just love it – my pride and joy!

Duncan: Tell me about your family.

Chris: Family is not such a good thing in a way. My dad suffered with depression quite a lot when I was younger and went through lots and lots of different jobs. He died of cancer in 2007. So, he had quite a struggle which put a lot of pressure on my mum. I had two brothers. I was a middle brother, but my younger brother died of suicide when he was 25 and my older brother walked in front of a train when he just turned 50. Cause of death misadventure.



Duncan: Will you please not do anything like that?

Chris: No, I don't believe my older brother did it on purpose, like my younger brother did so ...

Duncan: Well, that's a series of nightmare incidents. Oh dear, so there was a lot of responsibility on you. And what about your own family now?

Chris: Yeah, I've got two children from a previous relationship. The oldest was 21 in December and his younger brother is just 15. Both are doing very well.

Duncan: OK, so that's very positive for the future. Excellent. And what's your wife called?

Chris: Edita.

Duncan: Edita? where is she from?

Chris: Lithuania.

Duncan: Are you married to Edita?

Chris: No, we're engaged.

Duncan: And have you been to Lithuania?

Chris: A few times.

Duncan: What do you think of it?

Chris: It's a bit of an eye opener. It's either quite poor or very rich. There are two extremes, really. I think there's a lot of mafia-type action but on the whole it's OK. It's a nice country. The people are generally lovely. A lot of the houses from the outside look very poor, but when you go inside, they're not as bad, most of them are gated and have dogs, which I guess it's the way it has to be. You can't really leave anything around.

Duncan: How interesting. Well, I hope you are very happy with Edita.

Chris: Thank you.

Duncan: How old are you now?

Chris: 56

Duncan: So in your 56 years, who have you learned to admire?

Chris: That's a difficult one really for me because I wouldn't say anyone in particular stands out. I just look at lots of different people and try and take a little bit from each really. Since the interview I have decided

to add my Ex Karate teacher, Hanshi Steve Arneil a true legend with an aura. He devoted his life to karate and discipline, and well worth a google!

Duncan: So let's rephrase the question, what characteristics of people do you really admire or have you learned to admire?

Chris: I think honesty and trust and someone who is committed to what they believe really. I think they're very important. Someone that gets on with people, someone that's open.

Duncan: Sounds like you're describing yourself.

Chris: I think I have learnt a lot from people like that.

Duncan: OK, so in the whole of your 56 years, what would you say were memorable experiences?

Chris: Memorable! I did have another bike incident – me and a mate were riding our bikes in a field – I took on a big jump – not a good idea – the bike upended me, and I was lucky to come out of it alive.

Duncan: And you still drive a big steaming motorbike now, so will you please not replicate that and don't do that again! Edita wouldn't at all be pleased, nor would your boys!

Chris: No, definitely not no. Lesson learnt!

Duncan: How did you get the job at Roehampton Club?

Chris: I used to work over the road at the Bank of England sports Club, which was my first job from school and I was there for 18 years. I made my way from apprentice to Senior groundsman, but things for me were getting a bit stagnant. It was basically one of those jobs that the longer you were there, the higher possibility of getting promoted and I didn't quite see that as being fair. So I just got bored. Not for me. I saw the Head Groundsman job advertised here and went for it.

Duncan: Fantastic. What year was that?

Chris: That was in 2000.

Duncan: Well, here we are now. You've just been promoted. And what does the future hold?

Chris: I think there's a lot to do in the workshop to turn things around a little bit in the sense of we've got one mechanic, and he does a lot on his own. That's a bit too much really for one person. There's a lot of admin stuff that needs to be recorded for health and safety and other things. Also, parts and service hours and everything. The machines need to be serviced at a certain time to validate the warranty, so just keep on top of that is a big task. I need to reorganise the workshop and deciding the best positions for everything. Some things are fine, but there's a few things I think could work better. Storage is difficult – even in the big a building we have. I don't mean to sound hard done by it because it's lovely to have this facility, but machinery and equipment are generally getting bigger, and the demands on quality also add to this it's just the way it is unfortunately. So it's about making the best of what we have and investing in whatever equipment we need to make things quicker and better and safer.

Duncan: So within this job there's plenty of scope for your practical nature, plenty of scope for making improvements, plenty of scope for leading motivating people. And plenty of scope for you to be satisfied with your job.

Chris: Yeah, definitely.

Duncan: I hope you stay around for a long time and support the Club as you've been doing for the last 22 years. Thank you.

Chris: Thank you very much, thank you.

