



## ‘I only came for a Summer job’ 40 years later and he is still here

On 16 May 2020, Gary Hall, a member of Aldenham Parish Council (APC), open spaces team celebrated a unique anniversary. He had been employed by APC for forty years. In this interview he reflects on his time working for the council, including all the changes, funny moments and other memories.

In 1980, Gary, after having had a couple of other jobs came for an interview for a job on the Groundstaff team for APC. I thought I would only be there for the summer and then move elsewhere, he says. He was interviewed for the job by Peter Bowen, the first of five Clerks he has worked under, and started in May 1980. His first wage was £56 per week (I don't get much more now, he says with a smile).

### The Groundstaff Team

When he joined the team, he was one of only three people, with a Head Groundsman (who took very long lunch breaks, and one of Gary's job was to pick him up from where he had lunch and take him home) and one other part time person.

At the time, the Groundstaff only looked after Phillimore Rec, including the Children's Play Area (then split into two parts, including the famous castles) the main field, Bowls Club and two tennis courts situated where the Multi Use Games Area is now. Radlett Gardens, Tykeside, Aldenham Green & Letchmore Heath were contracted out. KGV Playing Fields were looked after by farmers, with Salters Field used for growing hay. It wasn't until the mid-1990's that the then Clerk, P Truppinn started to bring the maintenance of these areas 'in-house'. Interestingly the team is still only four people.

The Head Groundsman lived in a house in Elm Walk owned by APC, next door to Phillimore



Rec (so no excuse to be late, although Gary remembers often having to wake up the occupant). In fact, the gate at the end of the garden which was used as a shortcut into Phillimore Rec is still there.

### Accommodation and equipment

The Groundstaff's first 'home' was the Bowls Pavilion, which the council allowed the Bowls Club to use at the weekend for their teas and to change. The football team also changed in this pavilion. They also had a small 6x4 shed for the equipment.

The Groundstaff moved out of there in the 1990's when a new pavilion was built on the main field of Phillimore Rec. The Head Groundsman had an office, with staff in the corridor outside. The



## Aldenhams Parish Council Newsletter



building also had the football changing rooms and public toilets. The staff mainly used the other shed which was where the depot is now. When it was nearly going home time, they would hide in there rather than go to the pavilion, as the Head Groundsman would always find them something to do.

In the early days, all the equipment the Groundstaff had was an agricultural size tractor with a cutting unit, and a mower for the Bowls Green surround (not the actual Green). The main field at Phillimore Rec took one and a half days to cut with a push along mower. Gary recalls asking once for a strimmer. He arranged for a demonstration attended by many councillors and other Groundstaff. This request was rejected by the Council as being 'too dangerous'.

Gary tells me that the move into the purpose-built depot in 2011 was one of his best moments. They finally had a warm and dry place to work, and all the equipment was in one place.

### Health & Safety

One of the biggest changes that Gary has seen has been the council attitude to Health & Safety. This probably dates from when C Lloyd became the Clerk in November 2001. Before then, Gary recalls moving a concrete shed from the old council offices to the Bowls Club, full of asbestos. Also, he remembers leaning off the back of a moving trailer to pick up stones, glass and metal, which had been 'dumped' on Salters Field, when the Rugby Club first pitch was being constructed.

He also recalls being sent into the house owned by APC to clear it out after a Head Groundsman retired and moved out. It took four people one week to tear up the carpets and burn them in the garden where the occupant had kept chickens and ducks. No masks or even gloves were provided.

He also recalls tipping over a trailer, a tractor and various knocks, and dents in council equipment. He is known affectionately as calamity Gary.

### Gary's career

Having just come for a summer job, the Clerk at the time encouraged Gary to go to college (paid for by APC) to study for a horticultural qualification. This was followed by one year obtaining a management diploma. The Clerk thought that Gary could be the next Head Groundsman as the current one was retiring. By the time that event happened, the Clerk had been replaced and the new clerk, D Evans, advertised the Head Groundsman's role. Gary applied, but was not appointed. Gary thought about leaving the council at this point and moving elsewhere, but decided to stay. Later, under P Truppin, Gary was made 'Asst Head of Groundstaff'. He felt this was an honorary title as there was no pay increase and eventually this title disappeared.

Gary has had some health problems, which the council has supported him through, and he is very grateful for this. He now works twenty hours per week, and he says he enjoys coming to work for the comradery that there is in the team, and the support they now get from the council. Finally, he says that this has also been the biggest change for him, now the councillors, office staff and open spaces team all work together with a clear vision of what they are hoping to achieve.

It was great to have nearly two hours in Gary's company as he recalled his time at APC. I then asked, So when do you plan to retire, you have surely earned it? He just smiles.

Peter Evans (Parish Council Manager) in conversation with Aldenhams Parish Council's longest serving staff member, Gary Hall.