

From desert to dessert



NOT MANY CHEFS HAVE HAD THE CHANCE TO COOK FOR THE QUEEN AND ROYAL HOUSEHOLD, five-star hotels and 25,000 men in Afghanistan, but Stockpot reporter Melissa Moody had the chance to meet the man who's done it all.

Appointed Delaware North's Head of Culinary for Wembley Stadium in February 2018, Harry Lomas is one of the few people in the country to hold both the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (MBE) and British Empire Medal (BEM) and is a fellow of the Institute of Hospitality.

Working up from the 'backstreets of Burnley in Lancashire' where the cotton mill industry held no interest for him, it was his mother who inspired him to become a chef after he worked with her in Woolworths, where she was the staff cook.

However, with no formal chef qualifications, he chose to join the army at the age of 16, where he then stayed for 34 years.

"I only joined for three years," he recalls. "My mum sent me out for a loaf of bread and I never came back." His passion for good food, and the people he cooks it for, is almost palpable and sometimes, with only a minute per meal on match days at Wembley, his military background shines through.

Getting the food to up to 10,000 Club Wembley members at the right place at the right time is a logistical requirement, which he says his extensive experience in the military prepared him well for. Combining that with his work within the Royal Household and as executive chef at The Grove Hotel in Hertfordshire, his work at the stadium 'is about the quality of just bringing those skills together in that environment'.

It's evident that Lomas draws on his own experiences and roots extensively within his work. He likes, 'fresh food, very simple, and food cooked well'.

"But it's not about what I want, it's about what our guests want and that's a different kettle of fish altogether. The idea is to understand what your guests like and what makes them tick and why they're here." Not only does he organise Club Wembley, which has six tiers of membership covering everything from fine-dining to buffets, he also oversees the catering for general admission as well. With Wembley hosting everything from the Emirates FA Cup Final to concerts by the likes of The Spice Girls, the menu is constantly changing to reflect what is happening front of house

and bringing a new challenge for the catering team at each event.

About 60% of the menu, he says, is a core offering for every event, such as beef burgers. But it's what goes on top of the beef burgers that will change with the event itself.

When designing the menus, Lomas emphasises that he likes to reflect the fan base and researches extensively to support that. For example, when Asian Korean pop group BTS perform, they're looking to include cultural staples such as ramen bowls and kimchi 'just so it plays along.'

"It's fresh and new and works with what they're trying to do on the field. That's what we're trying to do back of house as well."

Lomas cares about the food, and about the people he's cooking it for, and it shows as he reflects on his work during the year he's been at Wembley.

"My job here is really to make sure we're part and parcel of the experience. They paid for the ticket to go and see the show and my job is part of the show, so I will work with them to make sure we give them the best experience to try and enhance the day."

He caters for everyone and has been known to change some of the dishes around on the back of Club Wembley member's recommendations. He doesn't like to use the word veganism because, he says, it puts people into 'tubes', instead using the increasingly-popular term, flexitarian.

"Just because I'm having a salad today doesn't mean to say that I'm a vegan or vegetarian, it's just that I fancy some salad today."

Since he's been at Wembley, the hospitality section has undergone an overhaul, allowing Lomas to introduce new ideas to the stadium. Each of the six areas within Club Wembley has a distinct culinary style, from the five course, five choice menu in One Twenty, to the street food stations within Centre Circle. The latest addition to Club Wembley, Number Nine (named after England's strikers) which will open in time for the new season, offers a new dining experience that will be predominantly station-led. Working around some of London's iconic markets, such as Billingsgate, Borough market and Smithfield's, it will 'showcase the best local produce we can get'.

Already the stadium buys sustainable and Lomas tries to keep the air miles low as possible on its food to help curb some of the environmental impact, so it's expected that Number Nine will build on that. "It's a national stadium, iconic in itself, so what a better place to showcase good food."

But Lomas emphasises that the extraordinary work the catering team at Wembley does, isn't down to just him.

"Wembley is a lot bigger than me, and the idea is I've come on board to work with a team that's already delivering a great experience. So it wasn't coming in to change the world or anything, pretty much I've kept it all sailing."

He says that he brings them along the journey of designing the menu or the service and can give instant feedback as he visits the guests in Club Wembley, teaching the chefs as well as giving them valuable experience in the iconic venue.

The next generation of chefs is something Lomas works very hard to inspire through visiting colleges, mentoring young chefs as well as meeting the groups that come into the stadium.

"If I don't get involved in the next generation of chefs, and I see it as a personal challenge, then there won't be a next generation of chefs."

But he also admits that the catering industry is old fashioned and it needs to change to attract new talent. The days of 'shouting and screaming' in the kitchen are gone, and devices such as mobiles, which he used to think should just be in a locker and away from work, are now used as a hub for information and recipes, something Lomas is happy for his chefs to use for their work.

As he says, being a chef isn't a job, it's more of a passion or a way of life so getting young people excited about the job is key.

Being a chef is one thing, but he finds that for young people, being a chef at Wembley is the icing on top of the cake.

"We need to look at the next generation of people coming in and what it is that makes them tick and we need to be a bit flexible. If we don't change then they aren't going to come in and we have scared them away."



**HARRY LOMAS'S MUM'S STICKY TOFFEE
AND DATE PUDDING**

A favourite when Lomas was a child, he has bought some of the flavour from his Lancashire roots to Wembley where this dessert was served to Club Wembley rooms during an exclusive changing room dinner.

FOR THE PUDDING

- 100g dried prunes
- 100g dried fig
- 250ml black tea
- ½ tsp bicarbonate of soda
- 85g butter
- 175g self-raising flour
- 1tsp mixed spice
- 175g caster sugar
- 2 eggs

FOR THE TOFFEE SAUCE

- 100g light muscovado sugar
- 100g butter
- 142ml whipping cream

METHOD FOR THE PUDDING

- Chop the dates, prunes and figs into small pieces
- Add to the tea and let boil until soft. Add the bicarbonate of soda.
- Beat the butter and caster sugar until creamy
- Add the eggs, flour and mixed spice and mix
- Add the tea, fig and date mixture into the mix and combine
- Pour into a buttered ovenproof dish
- Bake for 30-35 minutes until the top is firm to touch

METHOD FOR THE TOFFEE SAUCE

- Simmer the sugar, butter and cream over a low heat until the sugar has dissolved
- Cook until the sauce is thick and has a toffee colour

Harry Lomas's Mum's sticky toffee and date pudding

Serves 5 portions



TO SERVE

Lomas recommends you serve with homemade ice cream to add a bit of indulgence