



Annual General Meeting 2006

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Two years ago, you paid me the honour of electing me as your Club Chairman. I took the role on, on the understanding it would be for two years only, and that we should try to achieve some change for the Club. My two years are now up and it is time to reflect on what we have together achieved, and to celebrate our successes.

The old adages describe Committees as collections of people who individually can achieve little but who together can ensure nothing is done - or people who consider Minutes and pass hours. Your Committee has not been like that at all. It has been more like a running working party, constantly to be found where the action is and proving that actions really do speak louder than words if you want something to succeed. I am very much indebted to each and every one of them.

This stewardship Report seeks to set out the most significant things the Club has achieved. My old University motto was simply Thank God for All - and you may wish to echo it as this litany of events unfolds.

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Firstly our site. We enjoy a prime central location in Tunbridge Wells. Three years ago we had no secure lease at all. We now enjoy 10 years' tenure and will by January have a new 21 year lease. We shall have been released from our liability for fencing and will by next month have a new parkland style vertical railing fence to replace the chain link on the North and East boundaries. We now have an extension to our site in the shape of Diamond's meadow, a joy to behold but a blighter to mow!

And of course we have been very fortunate to have the Bowling Green available this year free of rental while our lawns got established. The Council has agreed to grant us an annual licence to continue our use into the future.

Do you remember the frustration of playing on our lawns? We now have three full size flat lawns with turf which is rapidly establishing and should, as we planned, give us a playing surface befitting a Club which sees itself offering Open Tournaments as well as offering the best to its members. And in a period when our summers appear to be getting hotter and drier, we now have a sophisticated irrigation system to give us control. Roger Morris has devoted many, many hours of time and a high level of skill to researching, specifying, negotiating and overseeing all of this work as our Project Manager and we are very deeply indebted to him.

Our old lawns were maintained with an old Atco machine, housed in a metal box behind the groundsmen's shed 200 yards down hill from the Club from whence it had to be trundled uphill to be put to work. That was the sum total of our Grounds Maintenance resource. So Phase 2 of our project was born. We now have purchased a superb Allen mower which has all the specifications to provide a manicured lawn, and to complement it two other major items, a Sisis slitter which will aerate the turf and a Sisis Autorake which will remove thatch and groom the grass. We also purchased a rotary mower to cut the surrounding areas, a petrol strimmer to tame the grass on the banks, and through the generosity of one of our members a tipping wheelbarrow to facilitate handling the vast amount of grass clippings we produce. Chris Sturdy's advice, as with the lawn works, was important, but again it was Roger who masterminded these critical purchases.

Given such valuable equipment, we needed to store it safely and readily to hand. I will not re-tell the contractual saga, but suffice it to say we now have a splendid addition to our pavilion which in its two sections houses all the grounds maintenance equipment at the rear and all our playing equipment and new trolleys at the front. Roger's design ensured that even the planners and the Civic Trust felt we had added

to the attraction of the site as well as freeing up space for ourselves in the main pavilion. Any one who passed by when the work was in hand could not fail to be impressed by the competent and on occasions daring way in which our own members put their own hands to the job. Roger and John Hobbs were magnificent, but they would be the first to pay tribute to the many others who sawed, banged and screwed, fetched, carried, steadied ladders, brewed tea, painted and stained. There is a little bit of so many people in the building that it stands as a monument to the almost unbelievable levels of cooperation the project engendered between members.

Spurred on by the manifest achievement, we turned our minds to sprucing up the pavilion itself. By the generosity of members and through the funding for the Tunbridge Wells 400 celebrations we were able to install sun blinds and benches along the full frontage. Miriam's alertness and initiative gave us the chance to replace the limited kitchen furniture with more up to date and extensive units which John Hobbs, with a little help from his friends, installed for us.

So, where did all the money come from? In all we have spent some £42,000 on all of this work and equipment - a very big sum for a club with a membership just in the forties when we began. We have been very fortunate to win grant from several sources. None turned us down and hard, patient work paid off handsomely. Two thirds of the cost was found in this way and we should record our grateful thanks to Kent County Council (£9,000 from two bids), the Croquet Association (£6,000), Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (£5,750 from two bids), Awards for All - Lottery (£5,000), The Gatwick Airport Community Trust (£750) and the S.E. Croquet Federation (£500) ----£27,000 in all. Your donations over and above subscriptions brought in £9,750 and the taxman gave us back a further £2627, a total of £12,395 or nearly 30% of the cost, leaving the monies put by in the past as a ball and lawn fund to absorb the rest.

The Committee and I thank you all for your faith in us and your generosity. To undertake so much and to complete it all debt free is a very positive achievement.

Whilst all this frenzied (at times) activity has dominated the year, there are many pleasing events to record. The Mayor and the President of the Croquet Association, Bernard Neale, attended our successful Lawn Opening in July. We hosted our first Open Golf Tournament, played our part in the 400 celebrations with Croquet in the Park Week, organised a successful Corporate Challenge, went to a sports event at Groombridge Place, kept up our record of appearances at National Trust Houses and even received a Commendation from the Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society for our contribution to the Community and the Park. We hosted sessions for Probus and Headway and put on corporate entertainment for a firm of local solicitors which is likely to be the template for further such ventures. Certainly our first venture into this market was very much appreciated and generated income.

And of course, our bread and butter. The Bowling Green saw Club afternoons thrive in a new setting and our thanks are due to Colin and Frank for their week in, week out support. We are indebted to Derek Heath for his unseen but valued efforts in maintaining our League fixture list and to Colin for arranging Friendlies. Jon Diamond has brought a new edge to our marketing and succeeded where so many have failed in winning over the local Press. The Club website organised by Jon is a tremendous asset to the Club and widely admired both in and outside of the croquet world. The monthly out of season pub lunches Jon has convened have helped to keep us all together. Selwyn has not been afraid to don the garb of the Regency Age in his efforts to support our public face. Our Treasurer, John Timmis, has watched carefully over our funds and done sterling work with Inland Revenue on our behalf. John Hobbs and Roger have hovered wherever tools were needed and do so much quiet work on our buildings. Mick has of course been as indefatigable as ever, garnering in new subs, organising our tournaments, arranging new events, laying out lawns, keeping up with the SE Federation and so much more. No Chairman could have been better supported by a Committee of so many talents and I offer them all my sincere thanks.

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We are, I believe, a Club in good heart. Our membership is at its highest. We have vastly enhanced our facilities. We have a sound financial base. We have a deserved reputation for friendliness. Let us go on in 2007 to develop and enjoy both our play and our fellowship.

Richard Clark

