



ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS CROQUET CLUB

Newsletter - April 2006

From The Chairman

Excited? Well perhaps not yet but something is stirring. As the mower comes out at home and the outside furniture cleaning beckons, can croquet be far behind? It is time to oil the mallet, pay the subscription, book the odd tournament and begin the surreptitious practice I know some of you indulge in.

When can we begin in earnest? The bowling green in Calverley Grounds is ours for the season and will be our home for the early weeks. It is looking green and inviting and after a little seasonal care will be ready for full play from Easter Sunday, so when it is warm enough, off you go! Colin Mabey (01892 527730) and Frank Gunstone (01892 771194) will share the Wednesday and Sunday afternoon session arrangements this year.

You may see our builder, Jason, working on our new equipment store, paid for by your generous donations and grants from Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and Kent County Council. The store is a separate building (in black and white timber to match its neighbour) abutting the pavilion and will house our collection of mallets, balls and hoops, freeing up space in the pavilion where we are planning what in TV terms would be called a makeover. A side door in the new building will lead into the major equipment store, the new home for the mowers, aerator, strimmer and other items we are buying to make sure the new lawns get the best of care as they settle down. Roger and Mick have worked hard to make sure that what we buy does not compromise on quality but is purchased on very advantageous terms to us.

The lawns themselves are growing nicely and are being coaxed towards playing condition under Roger's watchful eye by our Contractor, Bryan Judges, by our groundsmen and by willing volunteers. The dry conditions may dictate that our irrigation system has, like our home hose pipes, to be kept frustratingly out of use, but it will do the new grass little harm to learn to push its roots deeper for moisture. At least we are assured that the seed we chose is the best equipped for drought survival! Paul is organising a trial planting of a section of the north bank, adjacent to lawn 2, with ground cover plants to try to suppress the weeds and improve the general appearance of the area. Any volunteers to assist in the planting please contact Paul.

So when will we be able to use the new lawns? It all depends... on the weather, on growth and on very careful judgement of when they are ready without risk of longer term damage. We are expecting full use in the latter half of the season, and will let everyone know when it is possible.

So, an important date for your diary. The FORMAL OPENING is planned for the afternoon of Sunday, 16th July. The Mayor will perform the opening in the presence of representatives of our sponsors, the Croquet Association, the South East Croquet Federation, Kent County Council and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, the Gatwick Airport Community Trust and the Lottery Foundation (Awards for All) - who between them will have contributed £26,000 to the total costs of nearly £40,000. The most important guests, our members, have been generous not only in their donations, but in the devotion of their many diverse talents to make possible what for a small club is truly remarkable. The lawns will be available to our members throughout the Saturday and Sunday of the Opening Weekend to mark this achievement together.

So what are you waiting for? Make sure your sub is paid, your donation if you are able to make one, considered, and get yourself down to the bowling green to begin what I am sure will be a truly memorable season.

All we need now is your enthusiasm, and if you can possibly achieve it, some of your friends to join you.

Richard Clark

Secretary's Notes

If you haven't paid your subscription yet there's still time! Please send the form, together with payment, to Mick as soon as possible.

More keys will be cut for the Pavilion by the Bowls Lawn, but there's one on the Notice Board in the Club House. It's very important that we lock the Pavilion (and the Gents toilet) after use, and return the key to the Club House if it's taken from there.

The draw for our internal competitions will take place shortly. Due to the truncated season any blocks will be smaller than usual to ensure they can be completed by October. If you haven't entered and want to do so please phone Mick ASAP.

We will draw up a rota for cleaning the clubhouse as has been done in previous years, but first we have to get it spick and span. We're also hopeful of acquiring some kitchen cupboards which will need dismantling and then putting up. If you are willing to give a hand with DIY, probably in late May, please get in touch with John Hobbs.

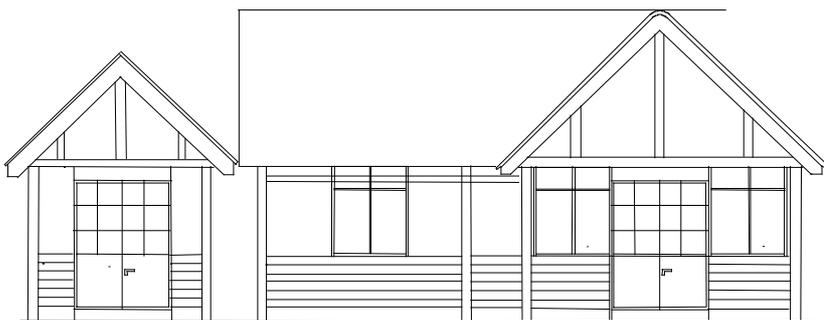
Club Afternoons will still be on Sundays and Wednesdays, but the additional Association-only session has been rescheduled to take more of a coaching focus from 4pm on Thursdays.

As can be seen from the detail about *Croquet in the Park* (below) we're planning to play three of our home Association League matches during that week and as many as possible of the away matches in the first half of the season. John Hobbs and Derek Heath will be in touch with you if you're interested in playing in these - when we know who we're playing.

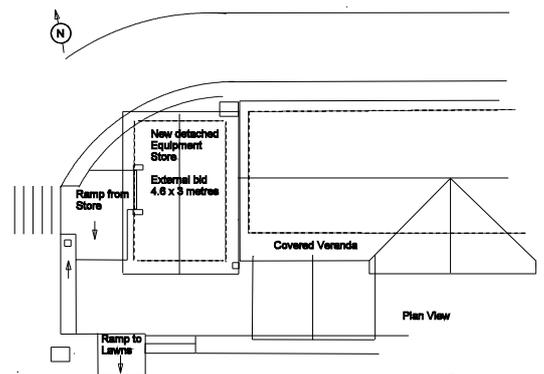
In addition to the three Open Tournaments running as part of the *Croquet in the Park* week we're running our traditional Open Handicap Tournament (23/24 September). Please send in your applications for these to Mick as soon as possible (more details and the entry form are on our website and in the Club House).

Equipment Store

In recent years our mower has been stored in a metal container behind the groundsmen hut down by the bowling green. This has proved unsatisfactory as the mower has to be driven up the park paths in order to reach the lawns. Our aim is to be self-sufficient, having the majority of equipment we require being stored on site with easy access to the lawns. Late last year we designed the maximum size of building that could easily be installed in the area to the west of the pavilion. This resulted in a building 4.6 x 3 metres divided into 2/3rd machinery store and 1/3rd croquet equipment. A key element was that the building should be detached from the Pavilion but had similar exterior appearance. We applied for planning permission which was granted in December.



Part South Elevation



After obtaining 3 tenders we selected the one that came closest to our budget and the contractor is currently constructing the building with completion by the end of April. We also sought advice from the Police on security and incorporated many of their recommendations in the final design. The drawing below shows the principle features of the store.

Alarms

Some of you who've been up to the Club House this year may have noticed that some external alarms have been fitted by Roger, as a result of recommendations from the Police. They're not fully working yet, but when they are some instructions on their use will be made available. So don't be alarmed if they go off when you arrive – they stop after a few seconds!



Ball Trolleys

Our old ball trolleys have given good service but are now getting a bit rickety so Roger set about designing new ones. We looked at several designs in current use by other clubs and took the best features from each to come up with our preferred design. Each trolley contains all the equipment required for both primary and secondary play on one lawn including a device to extract stubborn hoops from the lawn.

They have larger, wider, wheels normally used in golf trolleys that will not damage our new fine lawns. The balls are stored vertically in 4" plastic tubes and each other item has a specific location. The first trolley is now complete and the others are being assembled by Roger and Richard. We hope the trolleys prove to be easy to manoeuvre down our new concrete ramp in front of the equipment store.

Golf Croquet Coaching and Handicaps

There is a new book on Golf Croquet Tactics, published by Michael Hague, in which he gives lots of good advice and illustrates this with loads of examples. John Hobbs plans to work through these examples in order to make you aware of opportunities when they arise. Michael also gives many examples of when to take bisques. You can buy the book for yourself, but John will leave his copy at the club, and also run short sessions on some of the examples of tactics and bisque taking. There should be room in front of the bowls pavilion for a bit of coaching.

Your handicap is a figure that should change over time as you either steadily win or steadily lose. The objective is that if you play a handicap game with bisques you should have a 50% chance of winning, regardless of who you play. The ideal is to record singles against correctly handicapped players from other clubs, next is to play singles in the club competitions and record all results, third best is to record 'serious' games of singles that you play, with bisques if needed, against other members of the club. John will put a notice up in the Club House about how best to record this mix of games and also Association handicapping.

Marketing and PR

We're definitely repeating our two Exhibition Days at Ightham Mote, courtesy of the National Trust, on 4th June and 23rd July and will be visiting Chartwell sometime, date still to be arranged.

Our main efforts this year are focussed on the official Opening Day and our new idea – *Croquet in the Park* week.

With Royal Tunbridge Wells celebrating its 400th anniversary year, through sponsorship from the Borough Council and The Courier, we thought it was appropriate to add to the general celebrations with our own and also use the occasion to publicise ourselves and Croquet in Tunbridge Wells.

One of the main aims of the *Croquet in the Park* week is to allow individuals, small organisations and companies to participate in a fun and social event for Royal Tunbridge Wells 400. We are positively aiming at including those who have no experience of Croquet at all.

- ◆ On Bank Holiday Monday (28th August) there will be a special Open Day; with a series of shorter events, including demonstrations and coaching sessions (free of charge) to the public. Given the historic nature of RTW400 we hope to have a match in historical costume during the afternoon.
- ◆ The main event of the week will be for novice players, for those who have just played it in their back-gardens or not picked up a mallet – our *Corporate Croquet Challenge*. This will take place in the evenings during the *Croquet in the Park* week (6-8pm), from Tuesday 29th August, with a Final being held on Friday 1st September. This fun, but competitive, event is for *any* organisation (company, volunteer, sports etc.) or even a family, to form teams of two players who will play on one of these evenings, plus the Final if they qualify. Multiple entries per organisation are encouraged (perhaps as an internal friendly competition?) There will be a nominal charge of £15 per team. Full instruction will be provided at the start of each evening session and experienced players will provide assistance during the event, but not too much as this is a competitive event! The only equipment that participants will need is a pair of flat-soled shoes. Additional free Coaching Sessions have been scheduled before the Competition Sessions for those who are keen on learning how to play the game (and gain a head start on their competitors). We expect this event to have many participants from the Borough Council, local media and other local companies.
- ◆ Experienced players are welcome to our first one-day Open Golf Croquet event on Sunday 27th August and our two-day Open Advanced Croquet event on Saturday/Sunday 2nd/3rd September.

- ◆ An Open High Bisquers Association Croquet event will take place on Saturday 26th August (Handicap 18+).
- ◆ At other times during the week there will be a programme of inter-club matches.
- ◆ There will be a Club afternoon on Wednesday 30th, but not on Sunday 27th.
- ◆ All three newly relayed lawns will be used, in addition to two smaller ones on the Bowling Lawns, on which there will be Croquet demonstrations, together with commentaries by experienced players (hopefully!).

If you know of anyone who might be interested in learning about Croquet, playing in the *Corporate Challenge* or sponsoring this event please let Mick or Jon know. Full details and the entry forms are on our website and in the Club House.

This event will need lots of help in order to ensure that it is a success, with coaching/helping of novices, catering, managing and just assisting spectators. Please put these dates in your diary and if you can help in any way please let Mick or Jon know.

Social

After our successful programme of pub lunches over the winter (we'll repeat this next winter and definitely going back to the Brown Trout - £4.95 for a Senior Citizen's lunch was fantastic value for money) we're not trying to be as ambitious during this summer, especially given the slightly unusual season that we're having. Our current ideas are to have a Soup and Ploughman's lunch on the Official Opening Day (see above) and something else on our August Bank Holiday Monday during Croquet in the Park week. Perhaps also something in the evening during the Croquet Challenge?

If you have any ideas or want to help in some way please let Jon know.

Website

We know that some of our members can't access our website, which is why this Newsletter is being printed and posted to them. However, this is a time-consuming effort, which is why all updates are made to the website only and only put on the Notice Board at the club house at irregular intervals – sorry... We'll try and phone those of you with no email addresses when there's significant timely information.

Important Diary Dates

Easter Sunday - Season Opening	Aug 26-Sep 3 - Croquet in the Park
May 13/14 - Association Team @ Southwick	Aug 26 - Open High Bisquers Tournament
June 4 – Visit to Ightham Mote	Aug 27 - Open Golf Croquet Tournament
June 17/18 - Golf Teams @ Compton	Aug 28 Bank Holiday - Open Day
July 5 - Ladies Teams @ Southwick	Aug 29-Sep 1 - Corporate Challenge
July 16 - Official Lawn Opening	Sep 2/3 - Open Advanced Tournament
July 23 – Visit to Ightham Mote	Sep 23/24 – Open Handicap Tournament

Finally, don't forget the latest dates, information updates etc. are on the web-site, so if you're asked about Croquet or club details just send them there – <http://www.tunbridgewellscroquet.org.uk>.