

MR MAYOR, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

Just twelve months ago to the day, gathered as we are now, the Club at a special meeting took the decision to commit itself to go ahead with a project to improve our lawns, put in automatic watering, extend our lease and raise the necessary money. We are here today to celebrate our success and to thank our many partners.

Just seven months ago, at our AGM we went further and committed ourselves to a phase 2 to the project, to purchase the necessary equipment to maintain the new lawns to a high standard, and to erect a building to house it all. Again, we are here to mark the successful completion of that work too.

What a year it has been!

So why did we do it all? The Great Storm of two decades ago made nomads of us, forcing us to leave Frant, our original home, taking us temporarily to Hawkenbury before we were able to take a 5 year lease of this superb site and with funds entirely donated by members to build this lovely pavilion.

We put down roots in our new home, extended our lease to 10 years, and dedicated ourselves to try to improve the former tennis court lawns on which we played. But they were never flat and in drought conditions showed off their former post holes and markings. The meandering course of the ball lent a new frustration to our game which depends so much on accuracy, so much so that other clubs were no longer too polite to notice and our tournament entries dwindled as the victims of the whims of the wayward balls vowed not to return.

So, relaying the lawns became a priority.

How did we set about it? A small group from the Committee set about researching what had been done elsewhere and what was the best advice available. We were encouraged by Michael Hague and owe much to those in other clubs whose brains we picked, and of course our own Chris Sturdy too.

The best decision we made was to appoint Roger Morris as Project Manager, and before long we had estimates, a rigorous tendering process and the good fortune to have as our contractor Bryan Judges who with his son Matt stripped the turf off, terramated and cultivated it before laser levelling (to an unbelievable tolerance of less than 1" over the whole area.) Rainbird, through Roger Saunders did a superb job in laying the irrigations system which helped us through the tricky germination period and will stand us in good stead if droughts like this year's are to become a regular feature.

Phase 2 proved more challenging when we had to terminate our contract and finish the job ourselves. There are tales to be told of the band of sexagenarian and septuagenarian volunteers who roofed, erected, fitted out and finished the equipment store, a fitting companion to the pavilion. The saga (and the saganauts proved it was the right word to use) showed that the club has many giants - but among those giants were two Titans, Roger Morris and John Hobbs without whom the work could never have been undertaken. The "shed" stands as a fitting tribute to them and all those who mucked in so effectively.

And ... the lawn equipment is there for you to see with new benches to the front of the pavilion, new ball trolleys and new awnings to offer the first ever shade on the site.

So how did we afford it all? We had built up a small lawn improvement fund. This was given a boost when our Secretary led us into seeking CASC status, which enables us to reclaim tax on donations, thus proving Gordon Brown to be a more effective supporter of croquet than the Deputy Prime Minister - who brought us added attention but no added cash.

But the real boost came from the quite magnificent support we received to our bids for grant aid. Kent County Council, represented today by Cllr Scholes gave us £8,000 from its Sports Development Fund and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council assisted both phases to a total of £5,750. The Lottery Commission - Awards for All recognised our contribution to the Community with a grant of £5,000, while the local charity, the Gatwick Airport Trust which disburses money levied on aircraft operators who breach to noise guidelines, to benefit the community in areas under the flight path gave us a welcome boost of £750.

The Governing Body of our own sport, The Croquet Association from its Development Funds gave us a hugely important £6,000, whilst the South East Federation gave us £500. We say thank you to these and welcome Bernard Neal, the President of the CA, Richard Hilditch the Secretary/Treasurer of our Region and Michael Hague, its Development and Coaching Officer. Spurred on by this backing, our own members really came up trumps and by their donations ensured that we could complete the projects with no debt. For a small club of under 50 members this was a very creditable achievement, rewarded by a new sense of unity and commitment born out of a common purpose achieved by widely based participation in the work and in its funding.

The weather helped us at the start, by providing the right climate for the ground works and seeding and germination. But this summer has been dry and the maturing of the finer grasses a little delayed by the lack of rain. Nevertheless, the lawns are level, greening up and consolidating well. We shall have to be content with carefully managed use this season if we are to ensure the standard of lawn to which we aspire in the future.

So here we are Mr Mayor, distinguished guests proud of our achievement, a growing club, opening its facilities to new groups of participants and looking out to the local community. As Tunbridge Wells enters its 4<sup>th</sup> Centenary, we are proud to bring to one of its major parks a public attraction in keeping with its surroundings and a sporting facility which will be the envy of many other clubs, rather than the butt of their humour. It has been quite a year!