

# Notes of the History of Uckfield Bowls Club

By: Peter Cameron-Waller, Club President

## The Formation of the Club

It is worthy of mention at the outset that the site of the bowls green was originally the walled kitchen garden belonging to Grants Hill House, a substantial building set in its own extensive grounds and previously owned by Ian and Susan Maxwell-Scott. They in turn were friends of the infamous Lord Lucan and it was the last place that he was known to be alive prior to his disappearance following the murder of his children's nanny. Over the years there have been extensive investigations of the area as a result of speculation that his remains might be present.

The property eventually came into the ownership of Wealden District Council through a blight order.

On 8th June 1982 Mr Mike Strutt, Principal Architect of Wealden District Council, attended a meeting of the Recreation and Environment Committee of Uckfield Town Council to gauge what support there might be for the creation of a bowls green as a joint project between the two Councils. Cllr John Haffenden was the Chair of that committee which was also attended by the then Mayor, Cllr Sam Pollington. Mr Strutt explained that the new sheltered housing at Grants Hill House was nearing completion and that there was an area of land surplus to requirements which would accommodate a bowls green.

The proposal by Wealden District Council was to enter into an agreement between the two Councils whereby a synthetic green was constructed at a cost of £42,000 which would qualify for a £21,000 grant from the Sports Council, Wealden D.C. would contribute £10,000 leaving Uckfield T. C. to make up the balance of £11,000.

The outcome of that meeting was that Uckfield T. C. would inform Wealden D.C. that they were interested in a lease of the land for a three rink full size synthetic green.

Several months later a letter from Wealden D C dated 24th August 1982 and signed by the District Surveyor stated that all arrangements were in hand and that it was expected that the green construction would be completed and it would be ready for play the following summer. That was not to be the case, but maybe that was fortunate as the plan was to change substantially.

On 6th December 1982 a further letter from the District Surveyor stated that no grant would be available from the Sports Council at that time and that the contribution from the District Council would not be increased, so that if the project was to continue then Uckfield Town Council must finance the shortfall. However, the new estimate of the total cost was £34,000. The town council voted to continue with the project.

There was no member of the Town Council with any knowledge of bowls or bowls greens so any decisions that were made were done so on the advice of others, and that advice often conflicted. Over the months the Council was persuaded that grass would be preferable over an artificial surface, and that it should consist of four rinks rather than three.

A set of draft rules were acquired and largely adopted with the exception that they stated that play should be restricted to the hours between dawn and dusk. That part was amended as it was felt that commencement of play at 4.00am in mid-summer would not be appreciated by neighbours; or the club members.



The Methodist Church Hall, Framfield Road

During the summer of 1984 the grass surface was laid but not ready for play. It was time to call a public meeting and encourage the formation of a bowls club, and there had already been some interest shown by local bowlers. That meeting took place in the Methodist Church Hall in Framfield Road, which at the time of writing is being converted into residential accommodation. Attendees at that meeting were invited to fill in forms with their contact details if they were interested in joining. It was a very productive exercise as Fred King, who up until then had been chairman of Maresfield Bowls Club, was elected to that post in the new club and his

wife, Pat, took on the roll of secretary. Pam Salmon was elected treasurer, and a resident of the newly built sheltered housing at Grants Hill house, Wally Rust, volunteered himself as greenkeeper. Wally Rust also did the new club a great service by proposing the local rector, Canon Bill Peters, as president.

Bill Peters carried out that role with his usual warmth and enthusiasm right up to his death in 2012. Bill had been an active sportsman in his youth and had played both cricket and football at County level but would not be persuaded to play bowls, claiming that he was too busy which indeed he was. He would, however, often stroll round in the evening from the adjacent rectory that was his home and would usually ask members how their game was going. If they replied 'Not very well' he would invariably cast his eyes heavenwards and say 'I'll have a word'. Whether he was not as good as his word, or if his influence with the Almighty was not as great as he thought, we will never know but nobody's game ever improved as a result.

Prior to the second world war there had been a local bowls club which had been in existence since the latter part the nineteenth century. A building and some land had been donated to the town by local benefactor, R.J.Streatfield, on 3rd January 1887, which was originally named the Uckfield Institute. It was situated adjacent to Bridge Cottage in the High Street. The activities of the Institute included a chess club and service as a theatre and soup kitchen as well as the bowls club. The organisation eventually became known as the Uckfield Club, which is still thriving today but was rehoused in a new, bigger and superior building to the west of the original site as a result of an agreement with a property developer in 1985.

The bowls original club had been disbanded at the outbreak of the second world war when the land was cultivated as a result of the 'Dig for Victory' campaign.

Deputy Town Mayor, Roy Fuller, had noticed that an attractive silver cup associated with that club was listed in the catalogue of an upcoming auction and sought permission to bid for it on behalf of the council with a view to presenting it to the new club. The Council approved his request and granted him a budget. He, in turn, acquired the cup. The cup is large and is engraved with a bowling scene and the dates 1901 and 1902. The cup would eventually become known as the Mayor's Cup.



The Mayor's Cup

Following the public meeting at the Methodist Church Hall, the officers of the new club appointed at that meeting ran a poster campaign to invite anyone who was interested to a further meeting at the hall at Holy Cross Church. That exercise produced in excess of twenty more people who were interested, including a number of experienced bowlers. Then began a series of fund-raising exercises in order that the new club could start out with a reasonable working capital. The main source of income was jumble sales, which were held at the then Town Hall which is currently the Public Library. That is a fund-raising activity that, in this 'throwaway' society, happens less often these days.

### The Early Years

In July 1985 the green was ready for play and, despite the fact that the formalities of the lease had yet to be completed, the club swung into action. The arrangement was to be that Wealden District Council would lease the green to Uckfield Town Council who in turn would sublet it to Uckfield Bowls Club under licence.

A committee was formed which operated under the rules which had earlier been drawn up by the Town Council. Subscriptions were set at £25.00 per annum with a joining fee of £10.

Experienced bowlers coached the novices and a number of friendly matches took place, mostly arranged through existing contacts of Fred King. Wally Rust had done an excellent job in tending the green and it was quite immaculate, however he was never very happy to have people playing bowls on it. It was sometimes said that he only had to see a cloud in the distance and he would close it.

Lady members of a sewing group attached to Holy Cross Church made a very fine club flag as a joint exercise and presented it to the Bowls Club. It was gratefully received, and a flagpole was quickly erected to accommodate it.

Towards the end of August 1985 an official opening of the green took place and the person who carried out that function was the Town Mayor at the time, Cllr. Roy Foster. Speeches were also delivered by Ken Tomlinson, Wealden District Council Director of Technical Services, and a keen bowler himself;



Mayor's Cup Presentation

George Saunders, Chair of the Town Council Leisure and Environment Committee; and, of course, Fred King. During that procedure the Mayor presented the Mayors Cup and Fred King received it on behalf of the club.



**Mayor Roy Foster**

After the formalities the Mayor was invited to bowl a couple of woods. He did so and the second one landed very close to the jack, much to his and everyone else's amazement, however he would not be persuaded to join.

The next photograph is included for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is of the aforementioned green keeper, Wally Rust, receiving a gift from Fred King in acknowledgment of his good work. Secondly, the man in the background is Ken Tomlinson of Wealden District Council who had been very helpful to us in many ways. Thirdly, the roof line

visible in the picture represents the entire frontage of the clubhouse at the time. Lastly, Wally is wearing the kit that was expected at the time for men at all afternoon matches; i.e. white shirt and trousers, club tie and blazer with the club badge.

Ladies wore similar outfits but with white skirts and both trousers and skirts were substituted with greys, then as now, for evening matches. Blazers were abandoned before the start of play and invariably gentlemen were invited to remove their ties at the outset. (At that time ties remained in place for the duration of County matches). All of that would change dramatically in the coming years.



Presentation to Wally Rust by Fred King



Blazer Badge

It seems appropriate to mention at this point that there were two jobs performed by players prior to the outset of each match which do not happen anymore.

One was to insert coat stands into sockets behind the end of each rink on the east side of the green to accommodate those discarded blazers and also wet weather gear between showers.

The other was to stretch strings across the green to delineate the boundary of each rink.

Also, every playing member would bring two sandwiches and two cakes to form the afternoon tea.

## The First Clubhouse Extension

All too soon that first part season was over and many new bowlers were disappointed by the fact that their newfound activity was suspended for the long winter ahead, but not so Fred King.

When the land was a kitchen garden our clubhouse had served as a potting shed. It was probably quite a grand example of its type in that capacity but as a clubhouse it was woefully inadequate, measuring something less than five metres square, and Fred was determined to do something about that. Our friend, Ken Tomlinson, helped him to obtain the necessary permissions from the District Council and he began work to double the size of the building.



Clubhouse

He achieved that by removing the rear wall and increasing the floor space in that direction to a point very close to the boundary. In doing so he doubled the size of the building. He carried out that work almost entirely alone, only asking for assistance from half a dozen or so able members to lift into place the steel beam that replaced the supporting wall. He completed that project well in time for the start of the 1986 season.



Covered way

The extended clubhouse, although still not spacious did provide room to accommodate both the home and away teams for refreshments after an evening match.

There was also a quite extensive covered walkway, on the north side of the green and close to the clubhouse, with space for forty people to sit for afternoon tea. That facility, which was quite unique to this club, was enjoyed by members and visitors alike.

## The First Full Playing Season

The summer of 1986 was the first full season and, in many ways, set a pattern for the club activities. A sure sign of its future success was the number of new members that joined us at the outset and the number of matches on the fixture list. In fact by the end of that season consideration was already being given to limiting the membership as it was above eighty and nearly everybody wanted to play in matches.

It was also the year when two more trophies were donated so the list at the time was as follows:

- The Mayors Cup. Donated by Uckfield Town Council and awarded to the winner of a mixed singles handicap. First winner: F King

- The Ralph Cup. Donated by Bill and May Ralph and awarded to the winners of a drawn mixed pairs competition. First winners: D Burfield and J Salmon
- The Fred King Cup. Donated by Fred King and awarded to the winners of a drawn mixed triples competition. First winners: F King, J Stanley and M Chown.



The Alma Arms

At the end of that season the first ever annual dinner and presentation night was held at The Alma Arms function room in Framfield Road and 97 people sat down to eat which was the absolute capacity of that room. The Town Mayor, Cllr Roy Foster, was guest of honour and presented the Mayors Cup to Fred King. That tradition was interrupted by the fact that one of the members became Town Mayor two years later but thereafter the invitation was issued but never accepted, to the point where the invitation ceased to be issued.

### Affiliation to Sussex County Bowls

If there were any criticism of Fred King's chairmanship it would have to be that he was quite autocratic in his approach, which generally worked quite well as he was the most knowledgeable member; but there was one exception. He was very much opposed to affiliation to the Sussex County Bowls Association, and we can only guess that he did not want to see any elitism creeping in. As a result, at the end of that season three married couples joined Crowborough Wolfe and one further member joined Buxted, although his wife continued as a member of Uckfield Bowls Club. All of them were talented players. Fortunately, that action resulted in the club becoming affiliated and after an absence of one season all, apart from one couple, who had emigrated in the meantime, returned.



At that time the county organisation was known as the Sussex County Bowling Association and was only available to men. The ladies organisation was entirely separate and known as the Sussex County Women's Bowling Association. If the ladies wanted to be affiliated then the fee would apply to each lady in the club and at that point there was not sufficient interest to warrant it. Uckfield Bowls Club ladies eventually affiliated in 2010.



There is now just one organisation for men and ladies which is known as Sussex County Bowls.

The club has enjoyed considerable success as a result of those affiliations, with the ladies reaching the zone final of the national Top Club competition during their first season. Two of our male members have emerged as champions of the mens county unbadged singles competition. Mel Woodhams (left) was successful in 2008 and Roger Gorrings (right) in 2010.



Several our members have earned their County badges, either by representing that organisation on the requisite number of occasions at league matches or by reaching the latter stages of County competitions, or a combination of the two. Even more have had the opportunity to play in County Friendlies.

By 2022 club members had enjoyed their most successful County Bowls season to date. In the Top Club competitions, the ladies reached the area quarter finals and the men the area semi-finals, and the mens double fours teams reached the County quarter finals. Furthermore, Phil Soper reached the area final of the four wood singles and he and Andy Clews reached the County quarter finals of the mens pairs.

### **Local Leagues**

Uckfield Bowls Club joined both the Horam League and the Mid Sussex League within a year or two of formation, the latter at Division 5 level, but teams were chosen on the basis of whose turn it was rather than on ability. There was plenty of scope for everybody getting their fair share of matches by accommodating those who were not selected in friendly matches.



The Mid Sussex League eventually proved so popular that an 'overflow' league was introduced by the same body and named the John Spriggs League which this club joined in Division 3.

After the unwritten policy changed and teams were picked on ability, and also the overall standard improved, Uckfield Bowls Club went from strength to strength. That success reached new heights in the year 2014 when the club were first division champions in both the Mid Sussex League and the John Spriggs League in addition to winning the Horam League yet again.

### **Tenure of the green**

On the expiration of the original twenty one year lease in 2006 there were a number of significant changes to the agreement. The club had earlier approached the District Council requesting a twenty five year lease but that was not to be. In fact when the lease ended there was no immediate replacement and the only response that was forthcoming was that the Council had not had time to deal with it. Two years later the club was offered a four year lease as a result of which the club referred the matter to the Ombudsman, who ruled in favour of the Council, so there was little choice but to accept.

Simultaneously the Town Council ceased to be part of the agreement and the lease was directly with the club.

When that lease came to an end a further four-year lease followed together with a directive that the club should find an alternative site within that time. A sub committee was formed to that end and it was found that the only council owned site available was at Ridgewood recreation ground. Extensive discussions took place with the Ridgewood Pavilion management committee and considerable progress was made until the project eventually failed through objections from local

residents. Having demonstrated that every effort had been made by the club a further seven-year lease was granted.

### **The Death of Fred King**

Our founder chairman, Fred King, passed away on 5th June 1994, perhaps as he may have wished as he did so on the bowls green at the outset of a match against Crawley Town. Having carried out the introductions he walked to the far end of rink two to take up his position of skip where he collapsed. There were immediate attempts at resuscitation, but sadly all in vain. His wife, Pat, was present at the time.

Fred had been the life and soul, and the driving force of the club from the outset and was to be sadly missed.

### **Dave Brooks**

At the beginning of 2002 Dave Brooks moved to Uckfield and joined the club, having moved from Barcombe where he had spent his entire life, and had bowled for that local club for very many years. Dave's experience and knowledge of the game and of bowls club administration, and his connections at every level, made him a valuable asset. He also served on the County selection committee.

It was not long before he brought his influence to bear with regard to fund raising, firstly by seeking sponsorship from local companies and displaying advertising banners at the green in return.

He also suggested and introduced the 49 Club, a weekly draw based on the bonus ball drawn in the National Lottery, which eventually became the 59 Club when the number of balls was increased.

He also suggested that the Fred King Memorial Cup, which until then had been awarded to the winners of an all-day internal competition, should become the trophy for an annual invitation triples event which would be a major fund raiser. His suggestion was adopted and the event has proved very successful over the years. The feedback from it often includes the words 'The best one on the circuit'.

Sadly, Dave passed away on the 18<sup>th</sup> March 2017 and his ashes were encapsulated and interred in the green surrounds. He will be remembered fondly by many.

### **Foreign Bowls Holidays**

For a number of successive years members of the club travelled abroad for bowls holidays. Visits were made to Cyprus, Portugal, Minorca, Spain and Tunisia, and to some of those destinations on more than one occasion. Numbers on those excursions varied between four and sixteen but were very much enjoyed by all concerned. It is worthy of note that the numbers involved in the Tunisian trip tumbled to four because it was six weeks after a revolution.

On the first occasion in Cyprus, we were fortunate to enjoy the company of Carol Ashby, who at the time was reigning ladies singles indoor bowls world champion and holding that title for the fourth time. She was involved with the holiday company on a promotional basis and spent four days with us. She was not only a very talented bowler but also extremely good company.



Cyprus-The first destination



Andy Clews looking very proud after his appointment as international captain



Bowling in Portugal



Bowling in Portugal



A Pre-match Photograph



Enjoying the Algarve

## **Additional Club Trophies**

**1986** The Anniversary Cup was presented to the club by members John and Jane Stanley. It was to be awarded to the married pairs competition winners.

**1992** The President's Shield was presented to the club by the president, Canon Bill Peters. It was to be competed for in an internal, all-day event of either pairs or triples.

**1994** Following the sudden death of Fred King the family donated the Fred King Memorial Cup which was also competed for in an all-day internal competition from then until 2002, when it became the invitation triples trophy.

**1995** The Ernie Hollick Cup. Ernie Hollick and his wife, Betty, were founder members and the cup was presented by his family when he passed away. It is normally awarded to the winners of a pairs competition, which is only open to members who have not won a trophy in recent years.

**1997** The John Ashby Cup was donated by the member of that name with the intention that it should be awarded to the winners of a one day internal competition for those over sixty years of age.

**2001** The Les Barnes Cup. Les Barnes was a very popular member of the club who passed away suddenly and unexpectedly while on holiday in Portugal. His family presented the cup in his memory and it was decided that it should be awarded to the member who enjoyed the greatest overall success across all the internal competitions. Because Les would invariably have a four pack of Stella Artois lager available at the end of the rink when he was playing a pack of that beer has traditionally been presented to the winner along with the cup.

**2001** The Cameron-Waller Friendship Cup. When the committee were discussing how to award the Les Barnes Cup another suggestion had been that it should be the trophy for a club night competition. As it was thought there was considerable merit to that idea this cup was donated by the member whose name it bears.

**2010** The Ray Stanley Cup. Following the sad passing of Ray, an active and popular member who had served as Club Captain for a number of years, a cup was presented by his family. It is competed for in a one-day internal competition known as Captain's Day.

**2011** The Dave Brooks Cup. Dave presented this cup to the club to be awarded annually to the most improved player, to be decided by a ballot of the entire membership.

**2012** The Doris Allen Trophy. Following the passing of this lady, who is mentioned under the 'Fan Club' item, a cup was donated which is competed for in an Australian pairs competition.

## **Uckfield Bowls Club Fan Club**

For very many years three residents of Grants Hill House, namely Ev Kentish, Vera Frost and Doris Allen were our greatest fans. Weather permitting, they would turn up for every home match and

support us from a bench on the west side. Furthermore, they would bring raffle prizes, join us for tea, and on occasions even help with the washing up. That continued until they were all in their nineties and they are all sadly missed.

### **The Fred King Memorial Cup.**

As mentioned elsewhere in these historical notes, the Fred King Memorial Cup became the trophy for an annual invitation mixed triples event which was launched under the leadership of Dave Brooks and it remained under his guidance for many years. The first such event was held in July 2003. To avoid clashing with events held by other local clubs it was originally held on Father's Day, but that eventually became too difficult when it came to members choosing to support it or be with their families. It also had some impact on the availability of contesting teams, and it was eventually changed to a date a fortnight earlier.

The tournament has only once been abandoned due to bad weather, and on that occasion it was at the end of a mornings play. Most players were persuaded to remain for lunch and although everyone was offered a refund nobody took advantage of that offer.



Carol Ashby at Fred King Day

Following our meeting Carol Ashby in Cyprus she very kindly agreed to present the prizes at the 2005 event. Not only did she do that but she arrived at the outset of play and remained with us for the entire day and was her usual good company throughout.

### **The Automatic Watering System**

In 2005 the club made a successful bid for a national lottery grant to fund the installation of an automatic watering system, which was eventually commissioned the following year. That made a huge difference, both by achieving a far more consistent application of water and by relieving the green keeping team of an onerous task.

Prior to that watering had been carried out using a system of interconnected perforated metal pipework on wheels which watered a rink at a time and required moving once an hour for complete coverage. Barcombe Bowls Club became the proud owners of that equipment when it was replaced.

Even earlier than that the club used a device that resembled a miniature army tank. It was propelled by water pressure, moved on a pair of tracks, and carried a sprinkler on top. A charged garden hose was attached to the rear of the contraption. The downside of the operation was that it required constant monitoring because otherwise the weight of hose that it was pulling would

become too much for it, it would grind to a halt, make that area particularly soggy, and the tracks would carry on turning as it tried to bury itself. Not good for the playing surface.

## Club Colours

2005 was also memorable in that it was the year that Uckfield Bowls Club members first played in their distinctive blue polo shirts. Reference is made earlier in this article to bowlsweat at that time, but over the years clothing styles had been relaxed to the point where, with very few exceptions, all members wore white polo shirts to all matches. Just two clubs on the Uckfield circuit had adopted coloured tops and in 2005 this club took the bold step of doing the same. At the same time mens tailored shorts and ladies cropped trousers were also deemed acceptable although a very small minority of clubs would not permit them.



The first wearing of club colours at the match against Wealden IBC March 19th 2005

## Trees

There are, or at least have been, a variety of trees within or near the area occupied by the bowls club and unfortunately several of them have proved detrimental to club activities.

### *Leylandii*

From the very start the quality of the playing surface at the east end of the green had been difficult to maintain, and that was attributed to the presence of three large Leylandii trees in our neighbour's garden immediately behind the boundary wall. They cast a shadow on the green until midday and it was assumed took up most of the available water. In December 2006 contractors were employed by the club to dig a trench and insert a heavy plastic membrane to inhibit root growth. We will never know how effective that process was as the offending trees were felled just a few weeks later.

### *Yew*

On the south side of the green branches on an ancient yew tree showed signs of collapse with the possibility of causing injury. Fortunately, Wealden District Council accepted responsibility and took remedial action.

### *Oak*

Also, on the south side of the green, stood a huge oak. The term 'mighty' is often applied to oak trees and that adjective would certainly not have been misplaced in this case. It was estimated to be at least 500 years old and we later learned may possibly have been one of the

largest in the land. Magnificent as it was, it was not conducive to good green keeping and not only because it would demand vast amounts of water. It also shed the bulk of its leaves directly onto the green each autumn, and if they were not regularly cleared the tannin content had a highly detrimental effect on the turf.

In high winds during the early hours of 28th October 2013 the tree came crashing down across the green, causing a great deal of distress to all concerned. What damage had it done to the green and what was going to be the cost of its removal? The answer to the first question was 'very little' as miraculously the weight of the tree was taken up by the surrounding land and the adjacent footpath. The answer to the second question was 'nothing' as Wealden District Council took full responsibility.



The Fallen Oak

Our neighbour on that side was not quite so lucky as his fence was crushed and an outhouse severely damaged but we understand that he was fully compensated in the fullness of time. Logs were well received by some members.

### **The Sheltered Housing**

Early in this history it was explained that the opportunity to install a bowls green had come about through there being an area of land available after construction of sheltered housing on the site. That building was known as Grants Hill House.

By 2017 that building no longer satisfied the current criteria and it was demolished to make way for a new, larger, and grander building with the necessary improved facilities. The new building opened in 2019 and is now known as Grants Hill Court.

The provision of the new building impacted on the bowls club in a number of ways. Firstly, it was built very close to the west end of the green. Also, in the course of rehousing the original tenants and then eventually accommodating new tenants a much lower average age was achieved and consequently a far higher degree of car ownership. That in turn meant that parking was severely limited. Lastly many of the new residents moved in during the Corona pandemic when little or no bowling was taking place so there was little opportunity for us to learn to live together at the outset.

The upside of the operation is that we have gained one new active club member from amongst the residents and others have shown interest.

### **The Coronavirus Pandemic**

The Corona pandemic took hold in this country in the spring of 2020 and bowls, like every other activity, was severely disrupted by the various restrictions that were imposed upon us by the government at the time. Those restrictions ranged between no unnecessary movement outside your home to limitations on the number of people who could legally meet together at one time, and sometimes limited meetings with conditions applied. Included in those conditions was the compulsory wearing of face masks and social distancing.

As a result there was no play in 2020, these conditions also applied in 2021 and the Fred King Memorial Cup did not take place in either year.

## **The New Clubhouse**

As stated earlier the size of the clubhouse had always been inadequate and throughout the years much discussion had taken place on the various ways in which it could be improved. Indeed, at one point planning permission had been sought and granted for a side extension to provide for larger changing rooms and free up space in the original building. That project never took place through lack of funds and the fact that the cost may outweigh the benefits.

In 2016 when reserves had reached the healthier level of £25,000, interest in an extension was renewed and the then Chairman drew up a number of sketch plans for discussion and possible adoption. It was decided to see what further funding was available in the form of grants and to proceed if feasible.

The Club successfully applied for a grant of £15,000 from Bowls England but as it turned out that figure fell far short of what was necessary.

Much more discussion took place and it was eventually decided that it was a 'now or never' situation. It was decided that the project should proceed, at least until a weatherproof shell was achieved, so a sub committee was formed, professional plans drawn up, permission from the landlord agreed, and the planning application approved.

From then on the club is deeply indebted to two of its members in particular. Of course, there were many others who helped to carry the project through to fruition but two were vital to its success.

The first is Doug Thorogood who has his own construction company, and not only had the necessary expertise, but also the contacts, knowledge of suppliers and tradesmen, and was able to call on his own workforce for specific tasks.

The second is Richard Caswell who is a modest man and who probably would not want his name even mentioned here if he was given the choice. He was a recently retired carpenter when he joined the club just before the project got under way and volunteered his services straight away, but apparently never saw himself as being the lead from the outset. He is a meticulous tradesman who sets himself very high standards and, although there were a number of willing volunteers with D I Y skills, very few were capable of matching them. Consequently, he found himself working full time, and often alone, for nearly three years at the end of which time he was suffering considerable arthritic pain in his knee. He underwent a knee replacement operation soon after completion of the build.



Access for heavy plant

From the very start there were difficulties to overcome. The bowling green lay between the site and the nearest access point which created a number of problems. The perimeter path required widening and strengthening to allow access for heavy plant to carry out the groundwork, then the green had to be protected from pipework carrying ready mix concrete from the road to the footings. Significantly, when that process was complete the funds had been reduced by £18,000.



The completed base

From that point onwards the vast majority of the construction work was carpentry and Richard, with a nucleus of support workers, became invaluable. Timber framed sections were constructed and installed to provide for the walls of the building.

When the walls were completed, it was time to raise the preconstructed roof trusses to the required level and to that end the club was fortunate in being able to call on the operators of the tower crane on the adjacent development. That crane was due to be removed two days later.



The first few wall sections

When the roof structure had been completed and tiled, and cladding applied to the exterior of the building, another tradesman, Tony Szyka, gave his time to installing double glazed doors and windows and the building was then both secure and weatherproof.

Then the club was indebted to two other tradesmen who gave their time and expertise at no charge, Andy Corben the electrician and Lea Stanley the plumber.



The walls nearing completion



Roof Trusses lifted by tower crane

Throughout the build there had been substantial income from sponsorship and fundraising and, although at the outset the object had been to proceed as far as funding allowed, completion was then so close that it would have been very disappointing to put the project on hold. As a result there was an appeal to members for interest free loans which attracted four figure sums in the form of both loans and gifts. That final funding meant that the kitchen and bar could be installed, floor covering provided and many other finishing touches.

Of course, many other members, too numerous to mention, gave up their time and contributed to the success of the project.



The completed building

The new clubhouse opening ceremony took place on Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2022 and was undertaken by Mark Broadway, President of Sussex County Bowls, who cut the ribbon watched by very many members of the club.

At the time of writing members have enjoyed all the advantages of the new clubhouse for a full playing season, and several very successful social events have already taken place within its walls during the closed season with others scheduled.

The club can now field a strong team of experienced bowlers and there are a number

of new members, some experienced, some not, who will be ready to bowl competitively at the outset of the 2023 season. There has been some difficulty, however, in getting sufficient availability for all of the club fixtures so it may be time to review the extent of club bowling activities.



Sussex County Bowls President Mark Broadway cutting the ribbon



Members in attendance for the Clubhouse opening ceremony, Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2022

One real headache at this time is the lack of car parking facilities after many of the spaces previously available were lost as a result of the adjacent development. That is a problem that cannot be easily overcome so members have to accept that they may have to go further afield to park their vehicles.

At the outset the land allotted to the bowls club always was part of the then sheltered housing development, and as such has remained under the control of the Housing Department. However, bowls, being a recreational activity, perhaps it would now be better for the responsibility for the land to be passed to the Tourism and Wellbeing department which governs and promotes sporting activities.

It is now over forty years since that first suggestion on the part of Wealden District Council to introduce a bowls green to Uckfield. Within that time many people have gained a great deal of pleasure out of the sport, many friendships have been made, and many successes achieved. It is to be hoped that the club will continue to go from strength to strength in the coming years.

May 2023

