

The History behind the move to South Canterbury Road

We combed the minutes of General Management Committee meetings from the early 1990s in order to understand the thinking behind the Club's move from Oxford Road/Nunnery Road to the present Club grounds in South Canterbury Road.

In **April 1994** Canterbury City Council (CCC) indicated that they were interested in disposing part of their property Ridlands Farm, close to the Kent & Canterbury Hospital. Our Club appointed an individual to monitor the position.

In **September 1994** CCC indicated that they might be open to purchasing the Club's existing ground.

In **February 1995** the Club, having reviewed three potential sites to move to, decided on Ridlands Farm as the desired target.

In **March 1995** we appointed a firm of lawyers to act for us in relation to these issues.

In **July 1995** CCC rejected proposals for Ridlands to be developed for housing.

In **October 1995** the Club offered to purchase 3 acres at Ridlands to provide two greens and an indoor bowls facility.

In **January 1996** a full Council meeting of CCC agreed to the sale of land at Ridlands Farm, subject to independent valuation.

At the end of 1996 the General Management Committee appointed a Development Committee which was chaired by Dick Mortley and Dick remained in that position until the transition to South Canterbury Road was complete.

We asked Dick for his own personal memories of the next momentous 5 years.



Dick in action early with the small task at hand

Thanks to Ian Burton for all the photos which accompany Dick's words.

“The small team of members consisted primarily of Ian Burton, Joy Burton, Mike Talbot and Alan Cornfoot, together with co-options as necessary.

1997 was a very busy year at our old ground as it was the Centenary of Canterbury Bowling Club, and during the season, we enjoyed numerous visitors to the club, including the Chelsea Pensioners and the National President of Bowls England.



The old green

We agreed to acquire a total of 3 1/2 acres of what was an overgrown potato field. It came with a stipulation that we would provide access to the land beyond our Club from South Canterbury Road.



The potato field

Financing became an issue and we applied to the National Lottery for funding but we were turned down. CCC later, came up with an interest free loan.

We then had to see what we might get for our current site in Oxford Road. It was suggested we contact land developers, which we did, and within a short time we had a good offer from a building firm from Sevenoaks. The whole scheme was then presented to the members at a special meeting and it was agreed to proceed.

We contacted a local builder and obtained a contract and price for building the new clubhouse. After many meetings, we were able to save many thousands by suggesting alternative and cheaper ways of proceeding.

While that was going on we had applied for planning permission and that involved extensive discussions with our future neighbours. Eventually we were granted permission to start building in 1999, but without planning permission for an indoor bowls rink.

The first thing was to get the entrance and access sorted out to meet the Council's requirements.



Entrance from South Canterbury Road

Then levelling work on the site for the two greens commenced. The spoil that was dug out was then used to create the banks that surround the greens. As well as making these a feature it saved a considerable sum.

A drainage system for both greens was put in.



On top was laid 600 tons of gravel to be followed by 9 inches of topsoil. This, we were so informed, required to be flattened out by human feet.



Members had been doing the bulk of the managing to date, but now we needed much more member power and we made an unusual request. So for every day for many days we observed a line of members standing close together, shuffling sideways and gently stamping the soil on the greens with their flat shoes.

This provided great entertainment for the builders on site and the numerous visitors that popped in. But the members took great pride in their achievement and seemed to enjoy it.

This was the recommended way of the green builders of getting the right pressure on the soil. They then finished off with spirit levels.

The green preparation was some 3 to 4 months behind schedule due to horrendously wet weather and the surrounds were eventually finished and the actual turf was laid for the first green in June 2001 and the second in July/August.



Due to the hold-up with the green, the builders started the clubhouse earlier than scheduled and by the time the greens were finished, the clubhouse structure was almost complete.



2001 was a defining year when the greens were completed and the clubhouse required fitting out. A large number of members came forward to offer help in whatever way they could with the objective of being ready for opening in April 2002. Those that could not do the work were generous in providing funding for furniture and fittings for the club.

We had come to the end of the season at Oxford Road in September and the time came to make an inventory of what we wished to take to the new club. This was done and a small army of volunteers collected what was wanted and transported them to the club.



This took place over October/November and it was surprising what we did take up. The move was helped by not taking the seating as thanks to the kindness of volunteers new tables and chairs that are used today were purchased.

Large items such as, the summer house, the flag mast and the snooker tables were transferred across. Alan Taylor, a very well-liked member of the club, had agreed temporarily to look after these tables at his home. The removal company came to collect them and tragically Alan collapsed and died after opening the door.

The summer house had been refurbished in 1997 as part of our Centenary and the team members who did the work had the forethought to put wheels on it. This proved handy when they brought it to the new club and rebuilt it where it now sits.



Another important aspect was the design and construction of attractive areas of gardens all around our site. Volunteers took various parts of the gardens under their wing and did an amazingly good job. They planted 140 bushes on the south side of the green and what was 140 twigs is now an 8-foot to 10-foot hedge shielding the greens. The banks, either side of the summer house, received some 300 plants from a local nursery and are still there today. A rose garden appeared together with banks round the car park.

When the volunteer gardeners were finished, it was a great credit to all those who created the gardens, and indeed those who look after them to this day.

The other big item was a shed for the green equipment which, at that time, was created from a large shipping container, donated by a local company. (This lasted until 2007, when a new greenkeeper's shed was added as part of the club house).

The clubhouse was handed over by the builders on the 23rd of November 2001. Fitting out the bar, the kitchen and the changing rooms was a priority. At the time of the handover, we'd already started to transform the interior fittings, including the bar and kitchen.



This allowed us to have the AGM in the club and the fitting of the carpet had been completed the day before (it was duly christened by a club member who kicked a pint of beer over it). It was at the AGM that the members finally accepted ownership of the club.

After the AGM there remained much to do before Opening Day and members once more came to the fore.

The Opening Day on 11 May 2002 was attended by both the Ladies and the Men's National Presidents.

I'd like to think that current members might agree that previous members did a pretty good job through almost all volunteering to play a part in the successful transition."

Dick