

Tonbridge Sports Association Report

We have pleasure in presenting our report for the 100 years from 5th May 1920 to 5th May 2020. The Association has been continuously involved with every aspect of sports activity, in and around Tonbridge, and this report highlights our achievements throughout the period.

A meeting was held in Tonbridge Castle, called by the Parks Committee of the Tonbridge Urban District Council, to elect a committee to form a Sports Association to control and manage an unofficial horse racing area, for the benefit of sport in Tonbridge. The members of the committee came from the sports and social sections of companies operating in the Tonbridge area. The initial monthly meetings, which were very well attended, created rules concerning the allocation and the charging for facilities. By agreement with the Council, the grounds could not be used on a Sunday, this not changing until 1935. Also no dogs would be allowed as the Sports Association was to receive income from the grazing of sheep.

By 1923 a grounds man had been employed to maintain what had become the official Racecourse Sportsground. By 1927 the use had extended to Cricket, Tennis, Stoolball, Bowls, Putting, Lacrosse, Football, Rugby, Hockey and Netball. In 1928, under the supervision of Mr Beech, the Racecourse was reported as being one of the best sporting centres in the County. Even though the original 14 acres has been extended to nearly 40 acres, during most of the 1930's we could not accommodate all the applications for use. By May 1946 most of the pre-war clubs had reactivated.

Under the leadership of Jim May we once again prospered and by 1950 there was a waiting list of clubs for use and the following years saw a further increase in the size of the Racecourse. In 1954 the Association extended its remit, at the request of the Council, to manage and control two football pitches, and a changing hut, on land at Woodland Walk. By the late 1950's there were applications from Clubs outside Tonbridge to use our facilities, as well as the Association giving permission for the Racecourse to be used for County events.

In the early part of the 1960's we attended a number of meetings concerning the growth of population in the northern part of the town. The opening of the Goggs changing pavilion, in December 1962, considerably improved facilities on the Racecourse. In addition several clubs were allowed, by the Association, to erect their own pavilions showing the growth and sustainability of the activities taking place.

With such growth the Council decided to develop the Swanmead allotments as a sportsground which came to fruition in September 1965. Our officers helped create the Swanmead Sports Association to oversee the facilities which led to the Athletic Club commencing there in 1966. The administration activities of the Sports Association, working with the Parks Committee of the Urban Council, were now relative to the towns' sportsgrounds and extended to all sports activities.

1969 saw our officers very much involved in restoration following the September 1968 major flood in the town. A number of club pavilions were damaged, some beyond repair, and our officers devoted a considerable number of hours towards regaining the sports activities.

The determination of the Sports Association to protect, and enhance sports activities for the clubs, brought about disagreement with the Council both at the beginning and end of the 1970's. The Lower Castle car park serves the Racecourse and in 1971 the Council suggested a charge for parking should be introduced. The objections, raised by the Association, were successful and the plan was abandoned. The year 1972 saw the opening of facilities at Haysden which were to be administered by the Sports Association. The enhancement of sports activities were continued, at Swanmead, by the creation of a cricket square in 1974 together with plans to extend the building to house a Judo club.

From 1st April 1974 a new local authority – Tonbridge & Malling District Council – was formed and the new authority accepted and maintained the relationship and undertakings, towards the Sports Association, which had been created by the former Council. 1974 was indeed a busy year which saw the completion of an 18-hole golf course at Poult Wood. Our officers worked with the original supporters to form a golf club which allowed the course to flourish to its present position.

In 1976 we agreed to a District Council request to widen our sphere of influence as a Sports Council to include the civil parishes of Hadlow and Hildenborough. The Association was often being called upon for comment on both Regional and County sports matters. Now, having taken on a wider brief, we were also involved with ad-hoc indoor facilities, around the Town, which commenced with Badminton and Squash. Our input into the long term working party created continuous discussion on the provision of indoor facilities as an aspect of the Angel ground redevelopment. Towards the end of the 1970's came the second controversial issue.

The proposal was to redevelop the land occupied by Tonbridge Angels Football Club and to re-site the club on the Racecourse Sportsground. Although it was made clear that the redevelopment proceeds would be used for new sporting facilities, the objections raised by the Association were strong enough for the plan to be abandoned. We were therefore pleased to enter the 1980's being involved in the discussions concerning the acquisition of 49 acres of land at Tonbridge Farm. This created the plans for another sportsground and the relocation of Tonbridge Angels Football Club, allowing the building of a Leisure Centre in the town.

By the end of 1984 the Association officers had worked on the creation of football and rugby pitches at Tonbridge Farm, athletic facilities at Tonbridge School, the creation of football, rugby and hockey pitches at Deaconsfield, sports activities at the new Angel Leisure Centre and the water facilities at Hayesden: all this in addition to the administration and management of the existing sportsgrounds. In 1986 we put forward a new basis for the charging of pitches which came to be known as the

“points system”. This also covered various other arrangements such as the security of tenure for our members. This agreement, with the Council, continues to this day. This had been an extremely busy time for the officers of the Association and, as we are all in voluntary posts, continuing our work to the same intensity proved difficult. In 1987 the administration of the letting of facilities reverted to the Council.

1990 saw the re-emergence of the issue of charging in the Lower Castle Car Park to which the Association again objected, but sadly lost. However we are very pleased to record the commencement of regular liaison meetings between the Association and various officers in the Council. This procedure, of meeting every six weeks, has allowed the enhancement and management of all facilities to be very effective. The meetings continue to this day.

We had also moved into the 1990's with the officers working with our member clubs on a schedule of relocation. We had input into the relocation of Tonbridge Bowls Club, the move of Tennis clubs resulting in a remodelling of an area of the Racecourse, numerous meetings concerning a new indoor swimming pool, assisting Tonbridge Canoe Club get its new premises and working on a site for the recently formed Baseball club. At the end of the 1990's our member clubs were subject to the Sports Governing bodies introducing regulations concerning changing accommodation, and with the loss of the Goggs pavilion, we entered into prolonged discussions with the Council on a central changing pavilion for the Racecourse.

Although the start of the winter season, in 2000, saw rain that surpassed all expectations, we had seen the growth of mini-soccer. This proved to be the catalyst for the provision of a central changing pavilion, on the Racecourse. The initiative was taken by Tonbridge Junior Football Club and, backed by Football Association and Borough Council grants, work started in 2002. This was followed in 2004 by a new building for the Rugby Club and upgrading of the Tonbridge School athletics track. However there was still a need for improved facilities and where we could give assistance to the discussions we provided the time.

The mid 2000's saw us spending many hours on the remodelling of rugby and football pitches on the expanded Racecourse Sportsground. A satisfying period of planning, through the Liaison meetings, saw us working with the Council Sports Development Officer on how we could bring a synthetic all weather facility to the town. We pursued the policy of shared use with schools and of the nine facilities studied we agreed Tonbridge School was the way forward with the Borough Council providing the financial support, through a Community Use Agreement, and this was opened in 2009.

We reached a point in our 100 years existence, where we have four sportsgrounds, providing over 60 pitches and other activities, a Country Park providing a number of water activities, an indoor and outdoor swimming pool, a leisure centre, a golf course and partnership agreements with local schools. Our member clubs, which cover over 20 different sports, have an age range of 6 to 86. Our clubs have been successful,

not only locally, but also on a County and National level. The creation of good facilities created good clubs which attracted more and more members and successes evolved. The time had come where we could settle down to the management of our member's sports activities and the occasional improvement.

The Olympics, in 2012, saw our elite sports men and women excel in the events whilst our member clubs, on a weekly basis, create the environment for grassroots activity in every sport. With all the activity our attention turned to Health and Safety and we took part in a number of reviews covering different sports and facilities. In 2013 the management of the indoor facilities passed to the Tonbridge and Malling Leisure Trust in a seamless transition. Almost immediately the Racecourse Sportsground submerged to a depth of over 5ft and our clubs buildings were flooded. Since then the river level has been continually higher giving the clubs much wetter conditions following rain and Deaconsfield rugby activities becoming the subject of a variety of flood prevention plans.

Although drainage was still an ongoing issue the success of the Rugby Club, and the Baseball Club, provided the incentive to improve the facilities of both. In 2017 we also concluded on the long and arduous negotiations on a new Community Use Agreement for the athletics facility at Tonbridge School.

In reviewing our activities it is clear that every sports activity has in some way received, and been helped, by the input of the Tonbridge Sports Association. The time afforded by the Association officers has been considerable. Appreciation should be afforded to Jim May, Bill Collins, Charles Poole, Graham Bentall, Tony Russell and Alf Hams, one can only admire their time and effort. It is also clear that there has been a partnership with Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council in its current form and previous form. The foresight and planning for sporting activities, by the Council, has allowed the Sports Association to work with and support its member clubs. It has been recorded we are one of the oldest and largest Sports Associations in the country and after 100 years our members still continue to enjoy their sport.