

Secretary's report 2014

Mr President, members,

After the washouts of 2012, the weather significantly improved in 2013, although sadly performances on the field were of a disappointing nature. However, the highlights principally came from a young Australian, Steve Seymour, who like his Prahau club teammate Chris Rogers had no problem in scoring centuries, six in all, five in consecutive Rutland League matches, in a phenomenal period during the summer.

To quickly update you of the team statistics for 2013 the first team, despite being top of the league on May 18 finished a tame seventh in the Cambridgeshire Premier League. On Sundays they narrowly avoided relegation slumping to eighth in Rutland League Division 1. The 2nd XI trailed eighth of 10 in CCA Senior 1, the 3rd XI 16th and the 4th XI finished 15th, both in enlarged sections, while the Sunday 2nd XI reached the Ernie Wool Cup final and came third in the Fenland Trophy. Not our finest hour and both the 3rd XI and 4th XI were relegated.

There were, along with the record breaking Steve Seymour, notable performances from some players, which I will recognise in the report. Too often teams were under strength, due to injuries sustained by key players, a small first team squad and a general lack of commitment. Individual team morale remained high thanks to the dedication shown by all the club captains, who each faced very testing times, especially at the weekly selection meetings.

Now as a club there is little we can do about injuries, but we must raise the level of commitment from the playing pool if we are to improve on the field. Measures are in progress on this important matter with a better more structured selection and coaching process being proposed with the full backing of the Committee. We need to ensure any promising young player at this club is given the best opportunity to improve, whilst expecting the player will also have the desire to play at the highest level possible. It won't be a quick fix as the Fixture Secretary has said but needs to be embraced if we are to move forward as a cricket club.

On the positive side Club Captain Chris Ringham was back after his injury last June to lead the Saturday side and with the re signing of Steve as the club's overseas player the skipper was confident of a top three finish. Although early season they topped the Tucker League, the batting particularly showed cracks, we lost nine wickets chasing 65 to win against Godmanchester in May. Eventually, a

terrible run of eight defeats in the last nine matches, principally due to some inconsistent batting, resulted in the dismal final position.

The highlight on a Saturday was undoubtedly the 37-run win against eventual champions Wisbech at Harecroft Road, a match which featured a maiden Cambs League half century from Rob Moden and five wickets from the bowling spearhead Steve Seymour.

Batting wise, a large proportion of the runs came from the regular opening team of Steve and ever the busy David Hodson with 506 and 449 runs respectively. David's explosive hitting included a memorable 92 against NCI and helped him win the Most Improved player of the Year Trophy donated by Nick Lowe.

Steve led the attack and took a commendable 59 victims, while skipper Chris and young Tyler Phillips gave excellent support taking 27 and 26 wickets respectively. The best individual bowling display came from Callum Young with 7-41 in the home game against Wisbech, which helped him become the Young player of the Year (Chris Littler Shield). The young medium pacer took 16 Cambs League wickets at a tidy average of 12, along with 12 wickets for the Saturday 2nd XI.

Wicket keeper John Gilson snaffled 21 catches and five stumping on a Saturday and decided at the end of the season to stand down as the Saturday 1st XI Vice Captain after seven years in the post. He also undertook most of the Cambs League captaincy the previous year when Chris was out injured. The last remaining link with a different first team era, John's excellent wicket keeping helped the club win the title in both 2005 and 2007.

Tyler also scored 266 runs which included his maiden half century in a Tucker League match against Nassington. Tyler is expected to play on both days this year, which will be a massive boost to the Sunday side. Andrew Wright, who played a very useful role in the win against Wisbech, also struck his first ever Cambs League fifty in August against St Ives.

Sunday's in the Rutland league were very challenging for skipper Stuart Mills, leading a very young side in the top division and they did well to stay afloat, finishing one place above the relegation spots.

Steve's exploits produced a total of 912 runs, the most for any team in the Rutland league at an average of 57, which included his staggering century blitz – a feat unlikely ever to be matched.

Peterborough twice, Nassington, Finedon, Bourne and Stamford were all party to the incredible run. Along with his performances on a Saturday, Steve captured both the George Granger tankard (Saturday 1st XI player of the Year) and the Michael Wallis Trophy (Sunday 1st XI Player of the Year).

Steve has been a wonderful overseas player for March as he first joined us in 2008, when he scored a total of 913 runs and took 61 wickets. He then had his holiday trip in 2012 where he dramatically took two hat-tricks and scored a century in only four matches. He will always deserve a special welcome at The Avenue and he summed up his feelings below.

"March is a special club to me, in 2008 they gave me the opportunity to spend six months on the other side of the world and play some cricket. The way I was looked after and made to feel a part of the club and the town was amazing. I wasn't happy with my own performance in that first year and wanted to come back and prove myself as a player and help the club be successful.

"While getting to play cricket all the year round is pretty good life to lead it's the friendships that I made while in March which makes coming back and playing here so enjoyable.

"For me the most enjoyable part on the field this season was the win away at Wisbech. What that day showed was that despite not having the natural talent of the opposition, if you have everyone pushing hard together in the same direction you can get the result."

The other chief run scorers on a Sunday were vice-captain, Ben Pyle and opener David Hodson with 309 and 286 runs respectively, while youngsters Nathan Oliver and Toby Nulty both notched maiden first team half centuries.

The skipper led the bowling ranks with 24 wickets, while he received support from university student Josh Jackman with 17 wickets. Stuart is shortly to hand over the reins to Ben Pyle and David Hodson after nearly three seasons battling to select a competitive side, travelling around Leicestershire and Northamptonshire. Regularly on match days with his young side finding car drivers has been challenging, although he has still managed to keep the club in the top division. Thank you Stuart for your devotion to the role.

The Saturday 2nd XI were back in the safe hands of former skipper John Wallis after a short absence from the role, although after finishing third in 2012 last season proved a real struggle.

Their leading run scorer was Rob Tombs, who totalled 304 runs at an impressive average of 50. However, because of injury he only batted on six occasions, though his innings against Horseheath will be long remembered. On a June afternoon he smashed an astounding 185, which included 21 boundaries, nine of which were maximums and added 215 for the third wicket with David Haslegrave. Ben Pyle also scored an unbeaten 152 versus St Giles but still finished on the losing side!

John himself scored two league fifties in his 259 run aggregate, David Haslegrave 262 runs, while team all-rounder Stuart Mills scored 230 runs and grabbed 25 wickets to capture the Saturday 2nd XI Player of the Year award (The Pat Ringham Trophy). County over 50s slow bowler Richard Green again proved his reliability taking 20 wickets.

Both the 3rd XI and 4th XIs featured in enlarged divisions due to another CCA reorganisation, but struggled due to the affects of first and second team availabilities.

The 3rd XI led by medium paced bowler, or should we say all-rounder Matt Hubbard, won five matches, lost 11 and had one match cancelled in Junior League 2 North.

Jamie Stimpson topped their run charts and averages with 170 at 28, which also included the highest individual score of 83 against Leverington. Young Adam Conyard also struck a crucial match winning 77 not out against Granta 3rds.

Once again the 3rd XI strength lay with their bowling where James Shepherd and Matt Hubbard both took 22 wickets each. Both of them also scored over 100 runs down the order with their own distinctive batting blends. Matt's efforts helped him become the 3rd XI Player of the Year (The Mel Pooley Shield), James's best day came against Haddenham, where he grabbed 6-21 and also scored a powerful match winning 34.

The 3rd XI will next season feature in Junior Division 3N and we wish their new skipper to be David Haslegrave all the best in his and the team's new challenge. But we mustn't forget the hard work done by previous captain Matt Hubbard over the past four years. I am sure Matt will miss his Monday chats with Bill!

One area of definite improvement for the 3rd XI was the chance to play on grass wickets at Doddington Cricket Club, which I am sure, will benefit the team and particularly young players in the future.

The 4th XI won four lost 10 and had two games cancelled in a difficult campaign. Simply getting a team to play each week is a strenuous task, one which skipper Bill Hilliard, as ever embraced along with his entertaining repartee with Matt on a Monday night!

Two of Bill's sons Lewis (82) and Jordan (50) figured in an outstanding 141 run opening stand in the 10 wicket win against St Ives 3rds. Fourteen-year-old Sam Clarke, (who was included in the county under 14 development squad) narrowly missed out on his maiden weekend half-century scoring 49 against Doddington, but their Player of the Year award went to Josh Watson, who hit an outstanding 87 against Bluntisham in late July.

Skipper Bill Hilliard will probably not miss the weekly challenge to get 11 players after eight years as a fourth team official, the last three as leader although he deserves recognition for his dedication during that time.

The Sunday 2nd XI suffered through a lack of cricket, for example in the summer sunshine of July they only played one match and only played 12 games in total. However, under the leadership of Stephen Wallis they managed to come third in the Fenland Trophy and reach the final of the Ernie Wool Trophy where they lost to local rivals Chatteris by 47 runs.

Whilst the makeup of the team was younger than 2013 due to several unexpected youngsters playing for the Rutland League side a core of junior's alongside Stephen, Gary Nicholls and Matt Hubbard made some impressive performances with an eye to the future. Notably 15-year-old Adam Conyard won their Player of the Year trophy (The Les Mills Trophy) scoring 182 runs, taking nine wickets in addition to some athletic fielding displays. Fifteen-year-old opening bowler Josh Fox also continues to improve, taking 11 wickets in tandem with 126 runs in the Sunday side and 110 runs for the 3rd XI. Fellow opening bowler Sam Mason bagged the most wickets with 17.

Stephen headed the overall batting aggregate with 232 runs with fellow opener, Jake Beart striking 186 runs, while vice-captain Gary Nicholls, who announced his retirement at the end of the season to concentrate on umpiring, made some match-winning scores and totalled 169 runs at an average of 56.

Stephen is set to hand over the captaincy to young Jacob Gray for the new season after seven years in the role, which saw two triumphs in the Fenland Trophy and two cup final victories. However, the most important breakthrough has come from the wealth of young talent who have passed through the team during that time.

Jacob is an improving young player and I know we would all like to wish him every success and support in his new position.

Another farewell on a Sunday was Elmdon cricket club who played their last match against the club in June. The fixture was first arranged by the late Tony Evans when he was Fixture Secretary and I had the pleasure to play in the first fixture back in July 1978 and this year's finale. To celebrate the day Pat Ringham, who also played that original game at Elmdon arranged an extended tea break for many ex-players from both sides, which was a fitting way to conclude the excellent relationship. Pat has now played for the club for 50 years and alongside all his off the field activities for the club is an amazing achievement. Thank you Pat.

The club again fielded sides at Under 11, 13 and 15 for boys and the girls competed in the Cambs and Hunts women's league.

Their respective players of the year were as follows;

Boys

Under 11

Batsman – Geoff Kirby
Bowler – Daniel Bradshaw
Manager's award – Megan Tombs
Finished 5th of 6

Under 13

Batsman – Will Curtis
Bowler – Isaac Saywell
Manager's award – Doug Furlong
Finished 4th of 5

Under 15

Batsman – Adam Conyard
Bowler – Luke Green
Manager's award – Scott Wicks
Finished 2nd of 5

Girls

Finished 4th of 6

Emily Hill, Emily King and Chanel Ogden all played for the county under 17 side, while Fran Plitsch earned the call up for both the under 15s and under 17s. The Avenue also played host to two girls' county matches for the under 15 and under 17 levels.

The Development of the junior players is a result of the dedication of all the coaches, who helped with winter and summer nets. The full list of coaches being; Stuart Mills,, Pat Ringham, Callum Young, Jenny Lambert, Emma Alterton, Toby Nulty, Tara Nulty, John Wallis, Bill Crumly, Bill Adamson, Josh Jackman, Jake Beart, Steve Seymour, Paul Oldroyd, Nathan Foad and Andrew Wright.

Stuart Mills headed up a busy team which once again staged an immensely successful and enjoyable three day festival, in spite of the weather interruptions on day two. The event in late July/early August was again attended by over 100 youngsters. Stuart received support from Bill Adamson, Helen Foad, Sam Hare, Les Mills, Steve Seymour, Lesley Knaves and Tony Knaves.

We must also thank last year's festival sponsors Fenland District Council, Fenland Youth District Council, Fenmarc, Fruit Bowl, plus FDC Staff Verity Allen and Sam Darlow.

Festival Awards

Bob Terry Trophy - Codi Wedge
Greg Ward Trophy - Georgia Clark
Cliff Pearce Trophy - Phoenix Nightingale
HMP Whitemoor Trophy - Alicia Green

As a club we are extremely lucky to have the opportunity to be involved with the "Chance to Shine" national cricket initiative for schools and we have recently been advised that we will be part of the scheme again in 2014.

News from The Avenue continued to flow via the club website (www.marchtowncricket.com) in the journalistic hands of Fixture Secretary Pat Ringham, while Facebook was introduced to keep members updated on more of the instant news at The Avenue. Wi-Fi was also installed for the benefit of the members.

The Ground Committee under the new chairmanship of Gary Nicholls faced a feathered challenge in 2013 as crows attacked the outfield and we shortly hit the national headlines. The latter meant the cancellation of our one-day Minor Counties match against Cumberland. Eventually the outfield recovered and the ground

returned to normal, though under the guidance of Mel Pooley we remain very vigilant to the threat from the crows.

Gary headed a main team of Mel Pooley, Barry Short, Brian Wright and John West, who all worked diligently to keep the ground tidy and the wickets sound, while Bill Ransom helped with spraying duties during the season.

Mel was recognised by Living Sport in the autumn where he was a runner up in the services to sport category. While at the end of September he attended the OSCA's (Outstanding Service to Cricket Awards) at Lord's along with young player and under 11s coach Toby Nulty. Toby had been nominated in the young volunteer category while the old graduate, for a lifetime achievement award. Although they were both unsuccessful they did get caught on camera with the new MCC President Mike Gatting.

The club did have the honour of staging a three-day county match in August against Bedfordshire and the home county completed an easy victory and we look forward to the Eastern Division winners returning this year. In fact 2014 will witness the 75th anniversary of the first county match at The Avenue held on 4 & 5 August 1939 against Suffolk just before the outbreak of World War 2.

The club also hosted some senior age group county matches with both the over 50s and 60s playing matches at The Avenue. Richard Green scored his first half-century for Cambs over 50s, when he produced a gutsy innings of 60 here against Bedfordshire.

In the over 60s Glen Hulley and Dennis Furnell made their Cambs/Hunts Over 60s 2nd XI debuts and hopefully both of them should be in the side when the county host Yorkshire at March in the national 2nd XI league.

The prestige senior county performances came from within the county over 60s where player/manager Pat Ringham scored 63 during a 154-run third wicket stand with club coach Nick Andrews (99 not out) at The Avenue as the county beat Wiltshire by seven wickets to reach the final of the National League's Knockout Bowl. They then defeated Northumberland in the final after a tied game - having lost fewer wickets with Pat scoring a crucial 35.

The Fixture Secretary now intends to retire from work in May and help run all three county veterans' sides and has indicated that he has hung up his CCA club boots on Saturdays in favour of watching the first team and following his other hobby of photography, though I am sure we will still see him playing some games at The Avenue.

One man who you could never fault for his match day commitment was the Club Person of the Year, Norman Topliss who has made the scorebox his second home, regularly fulfilling the role on both days for the 1st XI and for supporting the various junior sides. Steve Gaskin took on the regular duties for the 2nd XI on both days with all his usual enthusiasm, although without any match saving performances on the field he did score 0 not out versus champions Burwell.

The Social Committee again held a variety of successful events for the members. These included two race nights, an Aussie night, barbecue and Vice President's evening. Tony Cottey was the guest speaker at the annual club dinner in January.

Sunday lunches remain a regular feature in the winter months as do the pool, darts and domino teams who all play regular league matches.

The club continues to support the community by playing host to the local Age Concern group every Tuesday. Helen Foad organised a well attended New Year's Eve event raising £321 for the Help the Heroes charity and £100 for the March Town Christmas light's appeal. Helen also staged a couple of quiz evenings which raised £168 and £210 for Sue Ryder and SWAN UK respectively.

As a sports club we value the support we receive from our many sponsors, club sponsors, Maxey Grounds and Co, those businesses that have sponsored 1st XI Cambs League matches, advertising boards and match balls. The Committee appreciate all the support they receive, as running a sports club is not a cheap business and all the different levels of sponsorship help the club provide the facilities and support we give to all our members.

I must also give special thanks to Catherine Henshaw and John Gilson who undertook landlady and landlord duties throughout the season for our Aussie star and to Fixture Secretary Pat Ringham for providing Steve with transport. Catherine also organised the tea ladies who helped to provide some of the very best teas in the Cambridgeshire area and beyond.

The club continues to be very appreciative of some sturdy regulars, I am advised not to say old in the current climate as I did in last year's report, I am course referring to Bar Chairman Nick Lowe, who continues to maintain an almost a daily presence as part of his role, President Mike Wallis with his regular bar shifts and Norman Alerton, who never stops working for the club. Nick in particular

cleans the pipes once a week, orders the beer, in addition to working behind the bar at least once a week.

Gary Nicholls and Matthew Vail should all be recognised for their regular voluntary bar work.

Alan Day our Treasurer since November 1977 returned to active duty, not that he ever stopped work, but it is a pleasure to see him back after his serious illness.

Active Chairman Les Mills continues to thrive in the lead role, promoting the club wherever possible whilst enthusiastically organising many events off the field, which the club needs in these tough economic climes. His off field work included the significant reaccreditation of our ClubMark status, which is recognised by the ECB and vital to the club. Team Smart, Vice Chairman/Pavilion Manager Graham and wife Linda, both regularly work behind the bar and handle memberships and are another great example to members.

All the members mentioned above give up an enormous amount of their own time in roles which to may go unnoticed but are crucial in the successful running of the club. Without them we would find what we currently have today very difficult to maintain so if any of you out there have some time to give please don't hesitate to come forward and offer your support.

On a sad note two former players Trevor Morley and Norman Saltmarsh passed away during the year. Trevor was without doubt one of the best bowlers to represent the club. Although he joined the club late in his career, the former Minor Counties seamer still managed to take over 100 wickets in one season an incredible feat in club cricket. He later became the groundsman at the club for several years and coached many young players, myself included. As Trevor was also a significant former player at Wisbech a one minute silence was observed before the start of the local derby at Wisbech. Meanwhile Norman will be remembered fondly as a popular club tourist, club vice president, who was one of the guest speakers at the annual dinner in 1994.

This year will see a major change at the top with several experienced playing officials standing down; consequently I would like to wish all the new officials the best of luck for the new season after the disappointments of 2013. I hope their enthusiasm will help inspire more commitment from the playing pool at the club. We cannot afford to drift along and see teams plummet further down

the tables. We are a major club in East Anglia and I am confident with a revised playing structure we can begin the revival process in 2014.

Finally, I must say thank you to the man on my right, my father and President for the past three Years, Michael Wallis, who first played for the club in the 1940s and captained the club between 1964-66. A recent Chairman of the club, who has remained a Committee member, he has been an excellent President during his period of office and continues to promote the club at every opportunity.