

Secretary's Report 2015

Mr President, Members,

2014 will be remembered for a series of farewells. One by club skipper Chris Ringham after a distinguished nine years in the role, secondly by our adopted Aussie Steve Seymour who returned home after an extended highly successful stay and, finally, fingers crossed we have seen the back of our feathered visitors, the crows, who played havoc with the outfield last winter and early spring.

Performance wise the various teams had a mixed season. The 1st XI finished seventh in the Cambs League and were relegated from Rutland League Division 1. However, they did shine in the shorter form of the game where they beat several leading local clubs en route to the final of the 20 overs-a-side Jaidka Cup tournament.

Of the remaining teams the 2nd XI, after a disappointing start, came a promising fourth, likewise the 3rd XI lost their opening five games but recovered to finish fifth, whilst the 4th XI came seventh in their section. Meanwhile, the Sunday 2nd XI managed to win the Fenland Trophy for the second time in the last three seasons

Before I return to my summary of the 1st XI's campaign I would like to give special mention to Chris and Steve, both of whom have made very significant contributions over the past decade.

Chris took over the job as captain back in 2006 succeeding Jody Betts, who had in 2005 guided the club to their first ever Cambs League title. So from the beginning he was in the hot seat following the glories of Jody's reign. But within two years Chris had also led the side to the Cambs league title. Furthermore, he has managed to keep the 1st XI in the top division during his time in office.

I did say in my January 2010 report that "Chris has now been captain since 2006 and we are fortunate as a club that he is continuing in the role for 2010" I think we can as a club confirm we have been.

Throughout his period of office Chris has led from the front with the calm assurance of a player who was in control. During that time he has continued to open the bowling attack, no easy task when after bowling your overs you need to think about field positions and the vagaries, good or bad, of the other members of your team. For the records he has taken over 300 wickets during his term of office. Let's not forget he doubled up as the Sunday 1st XI captain between 2006 and 2010.

The role of club skipper has no doubt become more demanding in this digital age with the press wanting scores and an instant quote after each game to add to their website edition, along with match previews, etc from local and Cambridge press. Chris has always managed to give that measured response even when he may have just finished a fiery local derby encounter. For all this I would like to say thank you on behalf of the club. It looks very much like we will shortly be handing back the captancy to his predecessor, Jody who knows the role well and I hope he can count on our support. It is great to see someone of his experience taking back the reins.

Meanwhile Steve Seymour first played for the club as our resident overseas player in 2008. He only scored 913 runs in that first campaign, the season when he struck his highest score for March, 151 not out against Market Deeping. His opening partner that day, Andrew Mills who was similarly undefeated on 100. He returned for full seasons in 2009, 2013 and last season whilst adding cameo appearances in 2010 and 2012. During that period he has scored over 4,000 runs at an average over 40 with 14 centuries. Of course he wasn't half bad with the ball with over 200 of them including the odd hat-trick.

Known affectionately as 'Skinny' he remained in the UK at the end of the 2013 season to have some winter trials with Notts and played several early season games for their 2nd XI. After he committed in late March to another season in the Fens he was soon in his batting stride scoring an undefeated 117 in the nail-biting one wicket win against Sawston in early May. His eventual tally for 2014 was 616 runs at an average of 41 alongside 30 wickets to retain the Ian Bradshaw Shield as the Saturday 1st XI Player of the Year.

Our other Aussie for the summer was Stephen Shaw, the young batting all-rounder from the Sunshine coast. He struggled early on, but later flourished, totalling 488 Cambs League runs, 457 Rutland League runs and topped up with some friendly runs he broke the 1,000 run barrier. In addition Stephen took 12 wickets in Saturday league matches and 10 for the Rutland League side.

Stephen summed up his spell at March in the following words "time here has been great, the club has been very welcoming and my teammates have been great and have become good mates. Cricket wise the season has been up and down but the experience has been amazing. I'm very thankful for the opportunity March Town Cricket Club has given me to play in England".

Although Skipper Chris Ringham thought he had his strongest squad for at least five years, it didn't work as well as he anticipated. With the two Aussie stars, alongside new signing Chris Budd the former Cambs batsman/wicketkeeper, Chris believed a top three finish was not out of the question. However, performances were patchy and they eventually finished seventh - the same as 2013. As Chris commented when we lost, we lost badly. Unfortunately due a change of job Chris Budd, who had settled in well, did not play after mid-June.

Skipper Chris had a disappointing season with the ball, due in part to niggling injuries taking only 11 Cambs league wickets. Hopefully without the burdens of captaincy, a fully fit, refreshed opening bowler will re emerge this season.

On a more positive note we did complete impressive wins at Foxton (fourth) and Sawston (sixth) which Chris regarded as two of the most professional performances he had witnessed by a March team. Furthermore, all-rounder James Harradine had his best ever season for the club. James scored 330 runs at 27 in addition to 21 wickets at 21 apiece, alongside some sharp catching in the gully.

The only other batsmen to score over 250 runs on Saturdays were regular 1st XI opener David Hodson and Tommy Howgego with 333 and 261 runs respectively. Bowling wise young medium pacers Tyler Phillips and Callum Young both took 16

Cambs League wickets each at decent averages in support of Skinny and James Harradine. Tyler's figures included an excellent six wicket haul against Warboys, a match where he also scored an undefeated match winning 34 not out.

Sundays proved a more difficult proposition. There are some very strong teams among the top teams in Rutland League Division 1 and matches against the likes of Oundle, Peterborough and Bourne are challenging, especially for our young side led by new skippers Ben Pyle (captain) and David Hodson (vice captain).

Sadly we only managed to win four out of 15 completed matches and finished bottom of the table, but Division 2 offers us much more hope away from the powerhouses of the top section. That's not to say the group of young players did not gain valuable experience which, hopefully, will help them in the season coming up. Among those players who gained from playing at this higher level was wicket keeper Lewis Welcher, who began the season in the 3rd XI but finished up making five appearances for the Saturday 2nd XI and two in the 1st XI's Cambs League side. As a result Lewis was chosen as the Most Improved Player of the Year (donated by Nick Lowe)

Stephen Shaw was undoubtedly the leading performer with 457 runs, an aggregate that included a remarkable 89 out of a team score of 108 against Bourne. The next highest leading scorers were David Hodson and Ben Pyle with 191 and 160 runs respectively. Stephen deservedly won the Sunday 2nd XI Player of the Year award (The Michael Wallis Trophy).

The wickets were shared around with Callum Young leading the charts with 19, whilst James Beresford recaptured his bowling form with 14 wickets to add to his achievements with the Saturday 2nd XI.

One exciting feature which was embraced by the club in 2014 was the return to the local midweek 20 over competition the Jaidka Cup. The club had not entered the event for many years but had won the trophy back in 1990 and 1999. David Hodson led the March Crows to some impressive victories starting with a home win against Peterborough Newflames, followed by victory at Harecroft Road against the defending champions Wisbech Wildcats. Steve Seymour playing a crucial role with 81 not out in the seven wicket win against the top dogs Peterborough.

However, all of the above was mildly dull compared to the excitement of the much delayed semi-final away to the Market Deeping Dragons, most of the shenanigans due to yours truly. Back in early May I had simply picked up some pink balls from Hunts County Bats completely unaware that we had the wrong ones, the cheaper versions. The Treasurer was pleased! An innocent mistake though it certainly enlivened the match which we won by 30 runs courtesy of a Steve Seymour hat-trick, a powerful 74 from Stephen Shaw and some 'ordinary or extraordinary bowling' from Stuart Mills depending on your point of view.

Sadly we lost the final to the strong Royal Challengers Bournegalore by 17 runs, but everyone thought it was an adventure worth experiencing, even the secretary. We intend to compete again this summer and also in the proposed ECB twenty over event for under 19s.

The Saturday 2nd XI were indebted to some competitive golden oldies that helped guide the team to a very respectable fourth place. This is a worthy achievement for a club's 2nd XI in a league full of 1st XIs.

The final position was very much to the surprise of skipper John Wallis, who regularly remarked early in the season that he thought the side would struggle to stay up. Indeed at some point they did feature in the relegation spots. Keep going John even with your hip problems you continue to inspire the team.

The Saturday 2nd XI Player of the Year was Matthew Vail, the well regarded 'White Lara', which confirms he is in the oldie bracket as Brian Lara made his test debut way back in 1990. In fact the youngsters of today might say who is Brian Lara? Matthew scored 259 runs which included an unbeaten 87 in the opening game against Cambridge St Giles and was rewarded with the Saturday 2nd XI Player of the Year award (The Pat Ringham Trophy).

Another batsman to shine was former 1st XI captain Jody Betts who scored 183 in his six innings in impressive style. The only other player to score more than 200 league runs was former 1st XI batsman Steve Hinson with 205 runs. Meanwhile skipper John and 18-year-old Toby Nulty tallied 190 and 178 runs apiece.

On the bowling front new signing James Fountain topped the league averages with 20 wickets at 12, whilst three others each took twenty league wickets. Andrew Wright led the charts with 23 followed by veteran slow bowler Richard Green 22 and James Beresford 20. James took the most wickets overall on Saturday's with 25, which included a five wicket haul against Bluntisham in an early season friendly.

After relegation the previous year hopes were high that the 3rd XI would be challenging for honours in CCA Junior League 3. These soon evaporated when they lost their opening five games under the new team of skipper David Haslegrave and vice-captain Greg Short. Nevertheless, they bounced back strongly to win six of their 13 completed matches to finish in fifth place.

Bowling was the teams' strength with vice-captain Greg Short leading the way with 19 wickets at a miserly average of only 8. He was well supported by a trio of seamers John Haslegrave, James Shepherd and Stuart Arnold alongside 14-year-old leg spinner Rob Conyard. Rob snatched 12 wickets which included 6-46 against Abbots Ripton.

For his tight bowling the 3rd XI Player of the Year was awarded to Greg Short (The Mel Pooley Shield).

Anthony Henson provided two crucial scores of over 60 to help win two of those matches and we hope as the proposed new captain he will be able to get the 3rd XI to challenge for promotion in the season ahead.

One remarkable performance in the 3rd XI came from Adam Conyard who struck an amazing 164 against NCI 4th XI in late August. His phenomenal run feat included 19 fours and 8 sixes. Adam is a very promising young cricketer with great potential who we need to see more of during 2015.

The 3rd XI again played their home matches at Doddington and I would like to thank Doddington Cricket Club for providing such excellent grass wickets to play on.

With the old warrior Glen Hulley back in charge, the 4th XI made the opposite start to the 3rd XI and for a short period led Junior League Division 5 North. . Eventually against a background of failing availabilities they drifted down the table to finally finish seventh of nine in their section, though points wise, well safe from relegation.

But as Glenn would confess it's no easy task being the last side to select their 11 on Monday nights, in fact it's more a weekly task to get your 11 players on the field. Despite this Glen looked to give more of our young players opportunities like Charlie Revell, Will Curtis and Dan Waltham mixed in with veterans Dennis Furnell and Bill Hilliard.

Their Player of the Year was opening batsman Dennis Furnell, who at the tender age of 62, scored an unbeaten 102 out of a team score of 147 in the home defeat against Needingworth 2nd XI.

The Sunday 2nd XI managed to win the Fenland Trophy for the second time in three seasons, this time under the new leadership of young Jacob Gray. Jacob Gray handled the development side, plus the experienced duo of vice-captain, Stephen Wallis and Pat Ringham, with great ease. In total they won eight of 12 completed Fenland Trophy matches.

The team has evolved into a very youthful eleven and promising signs were seen from a group of the club's under 15 stars. These included Sam Clarke and Curtis Oldroyd with the bat, Charlie Revell and Will Curtis with the ball, whilst Rob Conyard delivered in both departments. Special performances from the names mentioned above came via Sam Clarke's 52 at Wilburton, Curtis Oldroyd's 48 against Wisbech and Charlie Revell who grabbed 14 wickets with his lively bowling.

Rob's promising leg-spin headed their bowling averages whilst he also scored 169 runs at a healthy average of 42. He struck the team's highest individual score with a composed 72 not out against Ely in June. Rob's performances on a Sunday and in the 3rd XI resulted in him being named the Young Player of the Year (The Chris Littler Shield).

The leading two batsmen were Stephen Wallis, now set to enter his 40th season with the club with 391 runs and Jacob Gray with 250 runs. Jacob's also captured 11 wickets to deservedly win the Sunday 2nd XI Player of the Year (The Les Mills Trophy). Their leading wicket taker was opening bowler Sam Mason, who took 22 wickets. Sam's achievements helped him win the Fenland Trophy bowler of the year award at their Annual General meeting in December.

Keeping with the senior cricket theme the recently retired Gary Nicholls passed his Level 2 umpiring exams. Gary is now able to umpire in any Premier League cricket matches in addition to some county representative games. Well done Gary.
The club again fielded sides at Under 11, 13 and 15 for boys

Their respective players of the year were as follows;

Boys

Under 11

Batsman – Jenson Carpenter
Bowler – Kian Pooley
Manager's award – Robert Shepherd

Under 13

Batsman – Geoff Kirby
Bowler – Sam Green
Manager's award – Doug Furlong

Under 15

Batsman – Curtis Oldroyd
Bowler – Rob Conyard
Manager's award – Will Curtis
Finished 2nd of 5

A special mention needs to be given to the under 15s who, amazingly, defeated their Wisbech counterparts in the Hare and Hounds Cup Final with only eight players. Sam Clarke leading the magnificent 7 to victory at Harecroft Road.

There was no girls' team last summer, although on an early positive note March Ladies have entered this year's Ernie Wool Trophy and we wish them luck with this venture.

The Avenue did host an under 17s county boys' match and county matches at both under 12 and under 17 are planned for the forthcoming season.

In addition the club hosted two Kwik cricket festivals during the summer.

We are grateful to all the coaches who helped with winter and summer nets, the full list of coaches being; Stuart Mills,, Pat Ringham, Jenny Lambert, Emma Alerton, Toby Nulty (under 11 team manager) , Tara Nulty, John Wallis, Bill Crumly (under 13 team manager), Bill Adamson, Lewis Welcher, Stephen Shaw, Paul Oldroyd (under 15 team manager) and Nathan Foad.

Despite the sterling efforts of the coaches the committee are very aware that we need to upgrade our net facilities. We currently await the decision of a Living Sport Inspired Facilities grant application which we hope will be successful. Whatever the outcome, the committee are determined to improve the quality of our practice facilities which are vital for the development of our younger players, senior players and to help attract additional quality players to the club.

The above was highlighted at the recent Players Meeting which was well attended by players, coaches, parents and members. The meeting chaired by the president Alan Day raised many important issues in an open forum which the committee are looking to address. However to do this we will need the support of the membership.

The three-day festival celebrated its tenth anniversary and once again provided great entertainment for over 100 children at the end of July. Blessed with fantastic weather last year the event has become firmly established on the junior calendar during the school holidays.

This is a tribute to the social committee members who prepare for the jamboree many months in advance and the merry band over the three days headed up by Stuart Mills. The team of Bill Adamson, Helen Foad, Les Mills, Steve Seymour, Stephen Shaw, Lesley Knaves, Tony Knaves and Carol Gaskin (first aider) helped ensure the three days of entertainment ran as smoothly as it always does.

We must also thank last year's festival sponsors Fenland District Council, Fenland Youth District Council, Fenmarc, Fruit Bowl, plus Fenland District Council Sports Development Staff member Verity Allen.

Festival Awards 2014 – Presented by the Mayor of March Kit Owen at the presentation evening.

Bob Terry Trophy - Isaac Thompson
Greg Ward Trophy - Alicia Green
Cliff Pearce Trophy - Jesses Cowles
HMP Whitemoor Trophy - Layla Ali

The club continued to be a part of the ECB initiative for schools "Chance to Shine" which I am pleased to report will carry on in 2015. It's a great honour for the club to be involved and a boost to the game of cricket.

Off the field on match days fixture secretary Pat Ringham kept the cricketing news flowing on the website (www.marchtowncricket.com) with his excellent reports and observations, whilst the club's Facebook page provided regular instant news for those members on their phones, tablets and PCs

On the ground, the dramatic effect from the crows (more specifically the chafer grub) was controlled by our resident expert Mel Pooley. Simon Bradshaw added his support in helping to apply the necessary treatment. Mel's actions have helped virtually eradicate the issue on the outfield, though he informed me the situation is being carefully monitored and we are greatly indebted to him for his work.

Many willing volunteers helped on the ground last year including two new recruits - our new groundsman Phil Readman and one of the club's old stalwarts, batting great and former groundsman Malcolm Southwell. It was very comforting to see Malcolm back working on the ground alongside Phil, the now retired, ex-2nd XI player. John West, Barry Short and Bill Ransom also gave up their own time to work on the ground.

We should also mention the help we have had from Martin Wilkinson with his machinery and former 1st XI captain Ian Bradshaw for the use of his workshop to service the gang mowers. Recently Lee Emmington has joined the group of helpers, which as a committee we very much appreciate.

On the county front we had great pleasure to host a three-day Minor Counties match against Northumberland 75 years since Cambridgeshire played their first game at The Avenue in August 1939. Cambridgeshire comprehensively won the match by eight wickets.

The club had more players than ever in county Over 50 and 60s action. Richard Green played all season for the Over 50s, a side in which 2nd XI skipper John Wallis made his debut.

At the next level Stuart Arnold made his first appearance for the Over 60s 1st XI alongside their co-manager Pat Ringham. Meanwhile Glen Hulley and Dennis Furnell played for the county Over 60s 2nd XI. Both of the Cambs/Hunts Over 60 teams held a county match at The Avenue during the summer.

All three teams made it through to the national knock-out stages for the first time, which kept Pat very busy managing his county administration duties.

Away from the action on the field, although not in the background, Linda Smart typifies the specification of a perfect member. Last year she provided match teas at weekends and midweek for various county/touring matches along with barbeques on some other cricket match days. In addition she regularly worked behind the bar, which included her voluntary work every alternate Tuesday, helped with membership collection and was the cleaner's holiday cover. If I missed anything Linda please accept my apologies, because your award as the Club Person of the Year was richly deserved.

The bar remains in the reliable hands of their chairman Nick Lowe who continues to order the beer, clean the pipes, organise the staffing and serve behind the bar himself all on a voluntary basis. He receives very able support from his other bar committee members, Graham Smart and Michael Wallis. Gary Nicholls, Matthew Vail and Les Mills complete the regular team of voluntary bar staff who have helped during the last year. The bar also receives invaluable support from Norman Alterton, who makes regular trips to the cash and carry to help stock the bar with food and drink.

Another member who gives up much of his time for the club is 1st^t XI scorer Norman Topliss. Norman is a meticulous and accurate scorer who has become an essential member of the first team squad. We would really be lost without his services. I have on many occasions advertised for anybody wishing to become a scorer and this year is no different. If anyone knows someone who might be suitable please let me know. Training can be arranged.

The social committee again held a variety of events for the members. These included two race nights, an Aussie Night, twenty /20 match and barbecue and vice-president's evening. Another successful 200 club draw was held during the summer with thanks due to the promoter, Terry Hunt. One new project was the club's first golf day at March Golf Club in October where John Peckett emerged as the first winner. We hope this event become an annual event with more members in competition on the day.

Whilst the events were successful, it would be nice to see more players support them. Certainly the social committee are very open to other ideas to generate interest amongst the playing membership so please don't hesitate to come forward with ideas. One such idea the talents and favours evening will shortly be discussed.

Former MCC President John Barclay was the guest speaker at the 2014 annual dinner, whilst former New Zealand skipper Jeremy Coney entertained a packed audience only a few days ago.

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. Furthermore, Helen Foad organised the New Year's Eve event raising £200 for the British Heart Foundation charity (now topped up to £250) whilst her quiz evening in April raised £211 for the three day festival. Quiz queen Helen has another scheduled for Friday 6 February with entries still being taken. Please see Helen if you would like to enter a team.

As a sports club we value the support we receive from our many sponsors, including main club sponsor, Maxey Grounds and Co, those businesses that have sponsored 1st XI Cambs League matches, advertising boards and the brewery Charles Wells who provide the financial support for the annual fixture card.

Another area where the club receives support is through the match ball donations provided by individuals many of whom are club members. A large proportion of these donations were obtained by the enthusiasm of our hard working chairman, Les Mills, who has just completed nine years in the post, his second stint at the helm. Les is also the key man who completes all the paperwork for the various grants we have applied and continue to apply for. No mean task, but his efforts have proved very successful for the club.

On behalf of the committee I would like to thank them all for their generous support. Their help is vital as we strive to both maintain and improve the facilities we offer to all our members. This assistance is significant as we strive to maintain and improve the facilities we offer to all our members.

Whilst on the subject of sponsors I would like to thank the organisers of the old Isle Football League who very kindly donated a sizeable sum of money which along with a grant from the British Heart Foundation enabled the club to purchase a defibrillator. This was in no small part due to the work of our president and treasurer Alan Day. The defibrillator is a vital piece of equipment in the sporting arena today though

hopefully we will not have reason to use it, despite the growing popularity of Over 60s cricket! Several members have since received training on how to use the defibrillator following sessions with local paramedic David Wright and the BHF.

In addition as a part of an ECB initiative with Waitrose we staged an Open Day at the club where we organised junior coaching in the morning.

Once again I need to give a special mention to Catherine Henshaw and John Gilson who undertook landlady and landlord duties throughout the summer for our resident Aussie Steve Seymour.

I would also like to record the sad details of three former members who passed away last year, Mick Hopkins, Allan Johns and David Bartlett. Mick with the booming voice was a prominent umpire at the Avenue during the late 1980s and the '90s. He memorably umpired along with the now late George Granger the 1986 Keith Pont benefit match, yes almost 30 years ago now, when a March XI played Essex County Cricket Club. Allan played for the 2nd XI and 3rd XI in the 1980s switching from a bowler to a batsman. He also played many years for one of the club's Friday night darts teams the Leftovers.

David meanwhile will not be known to many players, but despite his physical difficulties he was a magnificent friend and supporter of the club. Over many years he attended social events, sponsored match balls and travelled over for the county matches from his home in Peterborough. Those of us who fondly remember David know how much he loved his days in the Fens.

More recently the club has also learnt of the passing of life member George, or as he would cheekily say the County Scorer/Umpire/Butcher. George had been connected to the club for over 60 years. A first team scorer, umpire, bar chairman, committee member, he became a life member in 1975. George enjoyed being in charge and all of the older players and members will most likely have fond memories of his time in those various roles. After he stopped umpiring in the late 1990s he has been a regular supporter of the teams at The Avenue where he would convey his unique opinions about the players, teams and officials.

Pat Ringham summed up George's contribution so perfectly: "There's no doubt they broke the mould with George, a true friend and character, who had an unbelievable love and loyalty for March Town Cricket Club. He will be greatly missed."

2014 was the year when the ECB identified that participation in cricket was falling which is worrying. We ourselves have been affected. Games have been called off though lack of players, though to date on small scale. We need to ensure this doesn't become a more regular feature.

Better coaching facilities will obviously help develop our players as well as attracting them to play cricket at the club. We also need to create an expanding atmosphere of supportiveness within the club whereby players, parents and coaches become more involved both on the cricketing and social side. You hear some members say that cricket is obviously the most important part of the club and to an extent they are correct, but without the bar, well supported social events and the outside financial support the former will struggle.

So whatever the committee and the old guard of workers do we need the support of the membership as a whole both now and the future.

We remain one of the premier club's in East Anglia, yes we are not in the Premier League or have a side full of Minor County players, but we do have wonderful facilities, hard working coaches and some talented young players.

I believe if we can engage more across all sections of the club and gather their support and ideas we can continue to progress as the great community sporting hub we know as March Town Cricket Club.