

Charlie's Story

An appreciation of the service provided to this club by Charlie Biggs over 50 long years.

It was 50 years ago that Charlie Biggs first took up membership at Princes Risboro' Bowls Club. It takes a remarkable level of dedication and loyalty for anybody to stay around that long especially when it's someone who still calls himself a "Wendover boy - born and bred."

The town's first encounter with Charlie came in 1939, when his dad Bill Biggs moved the family into Risborough from Aylesbury, having been posted to the local Police Station as Sergeant. Even in those days, Charlie showed all the signs of becoming the man we all know - definitely someone not to be trifled with. Danny Richer is one person with clear memories of those times, when they were still both in their pre - teen years. In an open area that used to be called Station Hill (close to where there is now a water softener shop) he recalls they often played cricket. Times were tough. The stumps for the wickets were cut from the hedgerow and Charlie possessed the only proper cricket bat for miles around. Danny, who provided the ball, tells of a particular occasion when after querying an "out" decision, Charlie put an end to both the dispute and to the game by clearing off home with his bat. He spent the next 3 yrs at the local school before being sent out to earn his living.



In late 1945, another posting for his Dad saw the family moving to Brill and Charlie getting work on the farms. That is where he stayed until when in 1951 his dad retired from the force. He returned the family to Risboro' taking up a job as a Postman. It was in 1953 when his father, having got involved with looking after the green got Charlie to help by promising to pay his annual subs. That's how he was introduced to the game of bowls. In those days, subs were a whole guinea with a concessionary rate for women of 10s .. 6d, which brought with it an obligation to go on the tea roster! He insists that in those good old days, the club was renowned for its homemade cakes, trifles and blancmanges and that the ladies would fight for the opportunity to prepare the teas.

Charlie tells the tale of how he "met this old girl" cycling to her work at Goodearl's Furniture factory. She turned out to be the daughter of George Barnard and after a courtship of 4 -years, he and Joyce decided to marry. For a brief period he worked at the Barnards's building business before deciding to return to farming on Lord Carrington's estate, where he remained until his retirement in 1993. Charlie clearly holds "his Lordship" in the highest esteem and will often refer to him as "a perfect gentleman".

When he was working with cattle during his time at Brill, he caught an illness, which was described locally as "abortion fever". This meant that for the rest of his working life he had to avoid contact with livestock. So, he developed the skills to drive virtually anything on the farm but has steadfastly ever since refused to have anything to do with driving a car! His chosen mode of transport has always been the moped. Right up to his retirement, he could be seen around the town on his Honda 90 - crash helmet firmly on head.

He was reputed to be a very good ploughman and it has been said that he operated the biggest plough in Bucks - one of the boasts being that, "It had more shares than the Nationwide". As a true man of the soil, Charlie knew that a mid day nap was needed after the

morning's toil. The story goes that he always took it under the same leafy hedgerow up near Lodge Hill. After Charlie retired, he devoted even more time to the club, working alongside Norman Richardson the then professional green keeper. When Norman retired in 1999, Charlie took on the full responsibility. He readily acknowledges the great help he gets from Mick Pearce and Clive Lipyeart.

Looking at a group photograph taken in about 1959, it strikes you that Charlie is one of the few still with us to provide the link between the present membership and those who were around when first the club was formed. Then the members seemed to be strictly local people - an outsider was someone from Lacey Green and there were none of your Naphill rabble around in those days. The membership was about 50 strong and included about 15 ladies. That photo shows the old WW1 army hut which served as the clubhouse. Soon after in 1961, Charlie got involved in digging the footings for the new building. He makes the claim that he alone and unaided dug out the three septic tanks at the rear of the clubhouse - which to this day are still in use. Dug to a depth of 11feet, nobody else would go down for fear of a collapse. However, he remembers there being no shortage of people quite happy to stand on the edge offering advice on how he could best slice his way through solid chalk rag - equipped with little more than an iron bar.

Ron Hoyle was also around in those early days and can still picture Charlie taking up his favourite pre-match position at the end of the bar, enjoying a pint of mild and bitter. He would proceed to hand roll 20 or so Golden Virginia smokes which subsequently he would place in a tin at the end of the rink for easy access throughout the game. Ron tells of Charlie's fabled waterproof garb, which consisted of a very long Arran cable knitted off white pullover reputed to contain "more lanoline than 3 sheep."

When it came to playing the game, he soon showed a good eye and strong shoulders and it was not long before he was representing his Club and County as a Middleton Cup bowler. A glance around the honours boards will show the many bowling achievements that followed along with several appointments as Captain. He was honoured with the Club Presidency in 1988. In years that are more recent, he is still contributing as a sort of perpetual Vice Captain.

Over 50 years, he has witnessed and influenced huge changes in our green. He remembers how things were in the very early days and on into the 60's. It was so pushy that as a fit young man even he found it difficult to reach a full-length jack. The top half away from the clubhouse used still to have clinkers showing through the surface and fell away several inches. Therefore, Charlie has directed his work over all these years at rectifying these defects. He talks enthusiastically about the 5-year program that began a couple of years back and looks forward to progressing to the next element. It will include an increased level of scarification - aimed at improving the running quality.

This year for the first time ever, he has not entered any of the EBA National competitions. When asked why, he replied, "Didn't think the old legs would take it." With a shrug of his shoulders, he turned the heavy roller around and leaning into it, began to traverse the length of the green for the umpteenth time that morning. That's our Charles! Clubs like ours need people like Charlie. Long may he continue to enjoy playing such an indispensable role. What's sure is that Club members and the bowling fraternity of Bucks are the richer for knowing such a colourful character.

Compiled by Ted Stratford. July 2003