

EXTRACT FROM

A Personal History of the
Royal Greenwich Observatory
at Herstmonceux Castle
1948 – 1990

By George A. Wilkins

Sidford, Devon: 2009

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APPENDIX D. THE ROYAL GREENWICH OBSERVATORY CLUB AT HERSTMONCEUX CASTLE

D.1 General overview, 1948 to 1956

D.1.1 Organisation and facilities

The 'Royal Observatory Social and Sports Club' was formed at Herstmonceux Castle on 28 October 1948 and the Astronomer Royal was invited to be the President. This probably followed the tradition of the pre-war clubs at Greenwich. (Greenwich was not used in the name until it was changed to the RGO Club in 1959, but I shall normally use the later shorter name from now on.) There was already a separate Club at Abinger; it was formed on 11 July 1947 and was affiliated to the Civil Service Sports Council. It was called the 'Royal Observatory Abinger Social and Sports Club'. As far as I know the staff at Greenwich did not have any such organisation after the war. (The history of the pre-war clubs at Greenwich and of the post-war clubs at Abinger and Herstmonceux is described in the booklet that was produced at the time of the opening of the RGO Clubhouse in 1960. There are also articles about the RO Hockey Club by Whichell in *The Castle Review*.)

The Club was open to all persons working at Herstmonceux Castle, and so it covered both non-industrial and industrial staff, including members of the Works Department from Chatham who were then working at Herstmonceux. Others who came to work for limited periods, whether civil servants or in a few cases staff of commercial companies, were also eligible to join. The first chairman of the Club, E G Rowlands, was a member of the Chatham staff. When he left in 1949 his place was taken by Norman Rhodes, a scientific assistant in the Solar Department. Arthur Shortland, then in the Chronometer Department, was the first secretary, and H G Barker, the Secretary and Cashier of the Observatory, was the first treasurer. They in turn were replaced in 1950 by Joan Perry, who was the secretary of the NAO, and John Whale from the General Office.

The Club had the use of two large rooms in the huts by the South Courtyard. One was used primarily for table tennis, although it had a stage that was used for the annual pantomime. The other was used as a lounge and for darts, draughts/chess and billiards/snooker. The subscription of 6d. per week was supplemented by promoting dances in local village halls. A first-class billiard table was bought on hire-purchase (H.P.) terms for £145 10s., which was soon recovered by a charge of 6d. per half hour.

"The Astronomer Royal offered the hard tennis court (just behind the north wall of the formal garden) for the use of the Club, but it had suffered badly from neglect. To put it in order, a sum of £145 was estimated by private tender, but as the Club could not afford this sum a 'do it yourself' scheme resulted in which members rolled up their sleeves and tackled the necessary repairs for a total cost of £32." [RGO Club booklet, 1960, p. 5.]

The sports field on the hillside to the east of the Castle was also brought into a useable condition by voluntary effort, led by George Harding and Eric Smith. The traditional RO game of hockey was supplemented by cricket and stoolball, which was a very popular Sussex game.

D.1.2 Early activities

The first Club Pantomime (??) was held at Christmas 1949 ?. The floor of the raised stage in the table-tennis room was made by cutting out part of the floor of one of the huts that was not in use. Audrey Nevell and Evelyn Grove, both from the NAO, were the principal girl and boy, respectively, and they took these roles in some later years, too. Afterwards a party was arranged for the pantomime cast and hostel residents with a budget of 35/-. In the event, many of the senior staff (including Sir Harold and Lady Spencer Jones and Mr Barker) attended, and this set a precedent for later years.

The first issue of *Castle Review* appeared in January 1951. It contains accounts of many of the activities of the Club, as well as interesting articles on other topics. In later years it became less regular, and it was supplemented by an Information Bulletin, which also gave notice of coming events. Early in 1951, the Club printed a leaflet on the history of Herstmonceux Castle, which had been written by Joan Perry and George Harding; it was sold to visitors in aid of Club funds. (A official *Guide for Visitors* was issued free from June 1952.) The Club also endeavoured to raise funds by organising dances in local village halls on occasional Saturday evenings. The music was provided by a small group, which I believe used to consist of a pianist, a violinist and a drummer. One of them was Freddie Parsons, a packer in the Chronometer Workshop. Such a group also used to play at the annual party at the beginning of each year. These parties included social games as well as ballroom and party dances.

The staff party was preceded by the children's party in the afternoon, which started with games (for the tots in the Castle and for the others (up to 15) in the Clubhouse), then tea in the canteen followed by presents from Father Christmas (usually the AR or George Harding) in the Staircase Hall. Before each party the members of the Club Committee were each given a list of children for each which they had to buy a present for about a given price. Finally, there was a pantomime in the Clubhouse. Subsequently the pantomime would be presented in Herstmonceux itself (and sometimes in other villages) for the benefit of the other children of the local school.

As I lived in the hostel for two years, I was able to take part in many of the activities of the Club. For example, I became a member of the second table-tennis team, which was then made up mainly of ladies, and was known as the RGO Comets. The first team, which was entirely of men, including Mr Sadler and Gordon Taylor from the NAO, was called the RGO Stars. These teams played in the Eastbourne league, so our away matches were in Eastbourne, Hailsham or Herstmonceux, whose teams were called the 'Zoo lions' and the 'Zoo cubs', since the local pronunciation of Herstmonceux ended in 'zoo' not 'sew'! I soon became the treasurer of the Club.

In 1953 Gordon Taylor won the Eastbourne Men's Singles Table Tennis Tournament, but he and Winnie Barton lost in the final of the Mixed Doubles; the finals night was held on Eastbourne Pier. [The RGO booklet gives 1956 for Gordon's win; I have an annotated programme for the 1953 Finals night.] In 1955 Aileen Grogan and I also reached the finals of the mixed doubles, but we were well and truly beaten by a couple who played for Eastbourne in the county league; Aileen won the Ladies Championship in 1959.

Most of the activity in the Clubrooms took place at lunch-times as after-hours transport was not available to most of the members. Each autumn there was an tournament for the *Spencer Jones Indoor Sports Trophy*. This had four sections:

billiards, snooker, table tennis and darts. My recollection is that each person who had entered a section played one game against every other person and 3, 2 or 1 points were awarded for the best three. Then the person with the highest total from all four sections won the Cup. Mr Sadler won the cup on at least one occasion (1955). (In later years, chess was added.) The trophy was presented by the Club's President at the annual party. Richard Woolley kept up this tradition when he became AR at the beginning of 1956; it was the first occasion on which he was seen by most of the staff.

The Club had a mixed hockey team that played friendly matches with clubs in the surrounding villages. I had my first initiation to the game in a practice match with the formidable ladies of the Hailsham Ladies Hockey Club. During the summer the Club played cricket and stoolball, a local Sussex game that was usually played by mixed or ladies teams; it had rules like those of cricket, but a square board on a post was used as a wicket, the bat had a circular face and the ball was softer and smaller. These games were then played in the evenings, rather than at weekends.

Tennis was played throughout the year as it was possible to fit in about half-an-hour's play during a lunchtime. As we only had one (very rough) court, and not many players, we could not play in league matches. We did, however, enter a knock-out tournament for small clubs that was organised by the *Sussex Express and County Herald*. In the first year (1953) we were beaten at Mayfield in the first round — but a photograph of our all-NAO team appeared in the paper. The Club used to organise its own tournaments each year for both singles and doubles. Mr Sadler dominated the men's singles, but doubles partners were chosen by a draw and so the results were much less predictable.

The Club used to arrange occasional visits to entertainment in Eastbourne, or even Brighton, by hiring a coach. A visit to the Festival of Britain — to both the exhibition in the Dome of Discovery and a concert in the Festival Hall — was made on 1951 June 24 (before my time!). I recall, for example, a concert at the Winter Garden with Moira Lympany as the soloist; I had had very little experience of classical music and so I was amazed when Arthur Milsom complained that she had left out (or changed) a cadenza in a piano concerto. We also went to a performance of the Gondoliers at Brighton — again a first for me, I believe.

The Club was allowed the use of an official vehicle (and driver) for transport to away sports matches (and for the pantomime cast), but I do not know what limits (or charges) were imposed.

A Sussex custom was the holding of bonfires and fireworks, preceded by processions in costume, with tableaux, on or before Guy Fawkes night. The really big celebration was on November 5 at the county town of Lewes, where there were about half a dozen bonfire societies that would vie with each other to produce the most spectacular show. The villages around Hailsham would hold their celebrations on the preceding weekends to an agreed schedule so as to avoid clashes and so that the tableaux could go to the different villages during the 'season'. The Club's float won the Herstmonceux competition on several occasions.

There was probably some resentment amongst the local community that the RGO staff should be given special treatment in the allocation of Council houses, but we hope that most people welcomed the boost the Club must have given to local activities, such as in sports and the pantomimes.

Shortly after his arrival, Woolley started a country dancing group that met each

week in the clubroom that was normally used for table-tennis matches and other events. There was, however, one occasion when the Club wished to use the room for a special event on one of the evenings that would have been given to dancing. Woolley was annoyed and later had the office partitions in the Long Gallery in the Castle taken down so that it could be used by the country dancing group, which was then organised separately from the Club. The Long Gallery had a sprung floor as it was originally intended for dancing and so it made an ideal venue for other social events and it became known as “the Ballroom”.

D.2 Changes in 1957 to 1960

It was realised that the Club would lose the use of the huts once the new buildings were in use and so attempts were made to raise funds that could be used later for building a new clubhouse. For example jumble sales were held in local village halls. The huts were demolished in 1957, but the Club was then able to use the Long Gallery in the Castle for some functions and the canteen in the West Building for evening league table-tennis matches until the Clubhouse was completed.

The completion of the West Building made possible the move to Herstmonceux from Abinger of the staff of and associated with the Time Department. This led to a major increase in the number of members of the Club and to major changes in its officers and committee members. Some of the newcomers had new ideas and were prepared to put in the effort necessary to bring them to fruition. I was in the USA at the time and on my return in February 1958 many changes had taken place. Norman Rhodes remained as chairman, but Leslie John (Joe) Bates was the secretary and Henry Gill was the treasurer.

A major improvement of the sports field was made in 1957 and 1958, largely on the initiative of George Harding and Eric Smith, after it had been ruined by straying cattle. It was levelled and extended by transferring earth from the slope of hill on the east side to the south-west corner of the field. A wooden pavilion was built by members in the north-east corner, using timber from a small chapel that was demolished in Bexhill. Unfortunately, the field had only a thin covering of topsoil, but not long afterwards Woolley arranged for one of the ponds to be drained prior to restocking with fish. The silt on the bottom dried and cracked and so Eric and I started to transfer some of it to the field. Woolley, who was a keen cricketer, agreed that the job could be carried through by some of the ground staff.

Agreement to a proposal for the building of a new clubhouse was given at the Club AGM in May 1958. One member suggested that it should be built in Herstmonceux village and the minutes record that this was supported by G. Wilkins, but that Dr. G. Wilkins objected! (Our second initials of C and A were not given.) It was realized that it would be necessary for the club members to provide labour as well as money and ideas, and work was started in the spring of 1959. The project was largely organised by Joe Bates with Harold Rodemark as the site foreman and chief instructor; he also did most of the skilled work, such as bricklaying. The most popular time for work was on Saturday mornings, but some work was done on Sundays and in the evenings. Luckily it was a dry summer and the main construction phase, including the roof, was completed by October. The Astronomer Royal laid the ‘foundation stone’ high in the south wall in September.

The progress report in October 1959 shows that during the 28 weeks some 4000 hours had been worked. There is a list of the “hours worked by gentlemen club

members”, but there is no list for the contributions of the lady members, even though I have a photograph that clearly shows Rosemary Cornford at work with a shovel. The list has 70 names, starting with: H. Rodemark, 481 hours; L. Bates, 301 hours; E. Turner, 188 hours, G. A. Wilkins, 143 hours; E. Smith, 128 hours; and 5 others with above 100 hours; and ending with 11 others with less than 10 hours each. A small core worked during the winter, but work almost came to halt in the spring when the local council claimed that the building did not have planning permission and should be demolished. By chance one of the councillors lived near me and so I sought his support. He had not realized that the clubhouse was being built by the members and that the Club did have the approval of the Admiralty. Eventually the matter was resolved and work was finished during the summer of 1960. It had cost £2400 (met partly from loans from the Civil Service Sports Council) and 9000 working hours. The formal opening ceremony was held on October 1. A booklet giving the histories of the Abinger and Herstmonceux clubs and of the building of the Clubhouse was issued at this time..

At the AGM of the Club in May 1959 its name was changed to “The Royal Greenwich Observatory Club” in order to facilitate trading as a source of income and as a service to members. The Clubhouse included a bar and the small kitchen also served as shop. In 1965 the income from these activities was about £200 out of a total income of £500. The Clubhouse included a main area that was sufficient for a badminton court, although the ceiling was too low; it was used also for table tennis and dancing. At first there was only one full-sized snooker table, but after some time one of the supporting interior columns was replaced by a joist so that a second table could be installed. There was also a lounge and space for playing darts. The Clubhouse was well used at lunchtimes and there was some activity during many evenings.

D.3 General overview 1957 to 1990

D.3.1 1957 to 1971

The Club catered for a very wide range of indoor and outdoor sports activities and also for social events of varying kinds. After a while the General Committee was unable to properly arrange and supervise all these activities and so a series of sections, each with their own officers, was set up. Section representatives met with the General Committee at meetings of the Club Council. *The Castle Review* was supplemented by a more frequent *RGO Club Information Bulletin* that gave details of current activities. Unfortunately the *Review* appeared only occasionally after 1959 and the *IB* became less frequent after 1968. There were several changes of the principal officers after about 1965 and, although the activities flourished, the attendances at the AGMs dropped and it became more difficult to find members who were willing to take on offices in the Committee.

In addition to the regular evenings for indoor sports, the annual competitions for the Spencer Jones Indoor Sports Trophy were continued with the addition of Chess. The Clubhouse was regularly used for ballroom dancing sessions with a professional instructor and from time to time for a variety of social evenings, such as a Jazz Dance, a Tramps Supper Party, children’s Christmas parties and so on. Some informal dances (to records) as well as dance with a live band (the Blue Stars) were held in the Castle Ballroom. In addition, from about 1965, the Clubhouse was used for film shows (often of documentaries on free loan), travel talks with slides (mainly by members who had been overseas on duty) and slide competitions. A photographic section was formed in

1966. The attendances for these activities also dropped off, presumably as television took over many Saturday evenings.

Cricket, stoolball, hockey and tennis continued. From 1968 onwards the Club participated in the SRC Sports Days that were held at the Civil Service Sports ground at Chiswick. In addition to cricket and tennis there were also netball and bowls. Players and spectators were allowed to go as if on duty as the event was intended to encourage good relations between the staff of the establishments in the Science Research Council. The Club had a fair share of success.

The Motoring Section organised events from time to time. Visits were arranged to places such as the Dungeness Power Station. Collections of clothes were made for Oxfam and there was a fund-raising jumble sale. A small library was formed from donated books and loans from the county library. Angling and gliding were added to the list of sections. A float was entered in the Bexhill Carnival in 1971. Other less popular activities included cleaning and maintenance work!

For some of this period, I acted as the Social Secretary and then Assistant Secretary before I became the Vice-Chairman. I had been Treasurer before I went to the USA in 1957, but I declined to take on the offices of Chairman, Secretary or Treasurer after 1960 as I was not prepared to be a member of the Bar Committee. My principal activities in the Club were tennis, table tennis and ballroom dancing. I also arranged some film shows and slide-talks.

D.3.2 1972 to 1981

The official Information Bulletins contain occasional references to the activities of the RGO Club but the Club IBs ceased in about 1975 and so the principal source of information about the later activities in the Club is the annual report of the Secretary. In 1976/77 there was an appeal for loans from members for the purchase of furniture and fittings for the Clubhouse. The general support for the Club gradually fell, but Graham Smith was very helpful.

In 1975 the Clubhouse was used for slide shows for the public who visited the Observatory at the time of the celebration of its Tercentenary. In the same year, the SRC started to pay the Council rates on the Clubhouse. In 1978 the Clubhouse was transferred to the SRC and the RGO assumed responsibility for heating, lighting, maintenance and decoration.

Swimming became a new activity in 1976 as Dr. Alan Hunter gave back the staff contributions to his retiring present as a donation to the Club for the purchase of a filtration plant for the swimming pool in the north end of the formal garden. This proved to be very popular on fine days in the summer. The hedges near the pool provided two changing cubicles! Another new activity was rock-climbing.

Snooker continued to be a popular activity and 110 members and friends were entertained by Terry Griffiths, World Snooker Champion in 1979, on 13 October 1980.

Various outings were also arranged.

The SRC sports days were, not unexpectedly, also popular. The summer outdoor sports were supplemented by indoor sports. My recollection is that the first was held at Runcorn as it was held on the initiative of the staff of the Daresbury Laboratory. The RGO fielded a volley-ball team even though none, or hardly any, of us had played the game before; needless to say we were 'slaughtered' by the other teams that played

regularly in local leagues. Later events were held at the Oasis Leisure Centre at Swindon and were followed by a disco and supper at the Central Office in the evening. The Oasis had a swimming pool that I used to visit when I was in Swindon for meetings of the SRC staff review boards.

The Club used to make occasional use of the Castle Ballroom for various events, such as socials. One of the members, Jim McConnell, was a member of the Hailsham Photographic Society and arranged for it to present its "Colour Show '80" in the Castle in November 1980. The show consisted of a series of audio-visual sequences of colour slides on a wide variety of topics. The Society used to give the show in village and church halls in the area to raise money for charity.

The production of an annual pantomime was also resumed after a lapse of about 30 years. In 1979 Mother Goose included a guest-star appearance by Graham Smith; it was followed by Aladdin in 1980. The pantomime was held in the Castle Ballroom on several evenings and on the Saturday afternoon so that it could be seen by audiences that included old folks, a youth club and schoolchildren, as well as the families and friends of members of the staff. There was also a children's party after the Saturday afternoon performance.

The first twenty years of the Clubhouse were celebrated by a social on 1980 October 1. A short while later (November 15) a party was held in the Ballroom to mark the retirement of George Harding, who had made major contributions to the Club in its early years.

When Graham Smith retired in 1981 he too returned double his retirement present from the staff on the understanding that it would be used to provide social and sporting facilities for the staff on La Palma. Subsequently, a branch of the Club was formed on La Palma

D.3.3 1981 to 1990

The RGO Club continued to play an important role in providing sports and social activities for its members in spite of the increase in the amount of spare time that many spent in watching television. These shared activities included staff of different departments and grades and helped to keep up the morale of the staff even when faced, first of all, with the cutting of staff numbers and, later, with the relocation to Cambridge.

The general activities of the Club continued much as in the previous years. Details, and sometimes photographs, of some of the following special events and new developments given in the official information bulletins.

A barbecue, a disco in the Clubhouse and dancing to the Catsfield Steamers in a marquee on 1985 August 10 to mark the 25th anniversary of the opening of the Clubhouse.

A pantomime, 'The Sword in the Stone' was held in December 1985.

Children's Christmas parties were continued, but a large drop in attendance was noted in January 1987. For the older children there was a treasure hunt around the Castle.

A rally for Hot-air balloons was held at Herstmonceux in September 1987 and 1988.

The Club participated in raft races at Lewes in 1987 and 1988 and raised money for charity.

A bonfire and firework display was held on 1988 October 29.

The Club had some successes in SERC Sports Days.

Inter-departmental darts tournaments proved to be very popular.

Archery was added to the list of activities.

The RGO Golf Society (!) hosted an SERC Golf Tournament at the Royal Eastbourne Golf Club on 1987 June 19.

Weekly Oxfam Bread-and-Cheese lunches raised a total of £?? since they were started in 19??

A “Farewell to the Castle” social evening was held in the Castle on 1989 April 22.

The Club gave up any claim on the Clubhouse when it was established that the new building at Cambridge would include a Clubroom with space for a kitchen/bar, a billiard room, and a general area that could be used for table-tennis as well as for a lounge. Staff would be expected to use other facilities in Cambridge for other sporting activities. Unfortunately, many members of the RGO Club lost their jobs as a result of the flawed decision to move the RGO to Cambridge.

D.3.4 1990 to 1998

I had no involvement in the general activities of the Club at Cambridge after my retirement and I have not seen any record of them, nor of any activities on La Palma. They are not even mentioned in the final issue of *Spectrum*.

There was, however, an RGO staff reunion at Cambridge on 1998 June 21. This was fine sunny day for an outdoor barbecue.

D.3.5 1999 to 2009

After the closure of the Observatory the RGO Club was replaced by the RGO Society, and its activities are described briefly in section 7.3.6 of the main text.

At first I tried to keep in touch with the staff who had been in or associated with the A&T Division and I prepared and distributed A&T Newsletters in November 2000 and December 2001. I have, however, not made the effort to produce another one as the level of correspondence with former members of the staff has fallen considerably in recent years and the web-site of the RGO Society provides a place where staff may record their recollections and activities.

D.4 Principal officers of the RGO Club

At Abinger the President of the Club was Humphry M. Smith, while at Herstmonceux the Astronomers Royal and then the Directors of RGO became Presidents of the Club.

The other officers of the RO Club at Abinger are listed in the booklet about the RGO Club that was issued in 1960 when the new clubhouse was opened.

The following list of the officers at Herstmonceux is to be completed if possible.

Chairman	Secretary	Treasurer
E . Rowland, 1948	A. Shortland, 1948	H. G. Barker, 1948
N. S. C. Rhodes, 1949	J. E. Perry, 1950	J. H. Whale, 1950
	G. E. Satterthwaite, 1956	G. A. Wilkins, 1952
	L. J. Bates, 1957	H. G. Gill, 1957

G. A. Harding, 1966	W. Nicholson, 1963	J. S. Griffiths, 1967
E. Mitchell, 1969	M. Fisher, 1968	P. J. Willmoth, 1968
P. Cottrell, 1974	K. P. Tritton, 1969	
R. E. Wallis, 1974?	W. L. Martin, 1970	
	R. Selmes, 1971	
E. Mitchell, 1976	J. Emery,	C. A. Parker, 1976
R. H. Tucker, 1977	R. E. Wallis, 1976	S. F. Griffin, 1977
R. A. Nicol, 1980	R. W. Argyle, 1979	J. D. Brooke, 1980
B. D. Yallop, 1984,		G. E. Gibbs, 1985?
P. J. Willmoth, 1985		P. E. Eldridge, 1988

I have not yet been able to complete the following lists.

Bar Secretary	Assistant Secretary	Vice-Chairman
	Janet Cook, 1958	George Harding, 1958?
Ray Foord, 1962?	George Wilkins, 1962	???
		Eric Smith, 1966
John Pharoah, 1967		Eric Mitchell, 1967
Ken Long, 1972?	Rosemary Selmes, 1970	George Wilkins, 1970
David Harman, 1976	Pauline? Green, 1971	Bernard Yallop, 1980
Philip Gibbs, 1978		W. L. Martin, 1984

Other posts included (at various times):

Social Secretary	Canteen Manager	Shop Manager
Trading Secretary	Editor	Librarian

as well as the chairmen &/or secretaries of the individual sections.

I have no information about the officers at Cambridge from 1990–1998.

D.5 Lists of sources of information about Club activities

I am not sure how much information about the activities of the Club is held in the RGO Archives in the Cambridge University Library. I will, however, try to list here the copies of *Castle Review*, Club Information Bulletins, AGM reports and minutes, etc, that I have and that will be deposited in the RGO Archives in due course.

An important source of information for the period before 1961 is the booklet “A short history of the RGO Club” (October 1960) that was issued at the time of the opening of the Clubhouse. The prefatory note indicates that it was “compiled from the Records of the various Clubs” by L. J. Bates, General Secretary, and H. E. West, Editor. It has a photograph of the new Clubhouse on the cover and contains 13 pages of text and 2 pages of lists of officers and winners of competitions.

Initially the main source of information about forthcoming and past activities was *The Castle Review* from 1951, but after a few years its frequency and coverage

decreased. From 1962 until about 1969 the *RGO Club Information Bulletin* largely took the place of the Review, but it did not include articles of general interest. From then on the official information bulletins tended to take the place of the Club IBs and sometimes even included photographs of special events, although the standard of reproduction was poor. Announcements about forthcoming activities was usually made by individual circulars. It is necessary to refer to the annual report by the secretary to obtain an overall view of the activities of the Club.

D.5.1 The Castle Review

Copies of *The Castle Review* were duplicated from typescripts for distribution to members of the RGO Club. The first issue was dated January 1951 and there were ten issues in 1951, but the frequency dropped to quarterly and then to only two issues (or less) from 1960 to Autumn 1965. (I am not sure that I have a complete set.)

A new series was started at Christmas 1981, but as far as I am aware there was no further issue. An issue was planned for 1985, but I do not have a copy..

The editors were: David C Smith, 1951– 1952(5); Arthur S Milsom, 1952(6)–1957; H (Bert) E West, 1958–1963; Roy Wallis & Dilys Holter, 1965; David Calvert & Philip Gibbs, 1981.

The review contains mainly reports on Club activities and current news about members and future events. There are, however, some articles on other topics.

The following list gives the titles of the principal articles and, except for the first issue, it excludes the reports of regular activities, such as table-tennis league matches, and also minor notices and short articles. Some give notes on engagements, marriages, births and deaths. The month of issue is given in parentheses when it is uncertain.

The issues for 51–53(4) and 58–63 were 20.5 x 16.5 cm; while 53(5)–57 were 20.5 x 13 cm; 1965 was 24 x 19 cm & 1981 was 21 x 15 cm.

- I, 1. 1951 January Editorial; Hockey games to date; Dances; Dr. Coleman's lecture; The Club Party; Table tennis; The children's party; Table tennis tournament; The Brewer Cup; The pantomime "Dick Whittington"; Snooker tournament; (Postcards for sale); Leaving members; Thank you..
- I, 2 1951 February Games Field; Bertram Mills' Circus at Olympia; Letter re orchestral concerts in Eastbourne; Bonfire Tableau prize; Dr Coleman's lectures (music); Balance sheets for a Dance & Parties.
- I, 3 1951 March Tennis court; Future trips; Ice hockey at Brighton; Chess matches; Indoor sports trophy
- I, 4 1951 April Royal Observatory Hockey Club: Former days (1); Visit of the Monkey Puzzle Club; Lecture by the Astronomer Royal (at Lewes).;
- 1, 5 1951 May RO Hockey Club (2) by W. Witchell; Stoolball as she is played; Sunday cricket; Article on the Castle (now on sale); Basket ball (at Brighton); Memories of the Computer grade (1), by E. G. Martin.
- I, 6 1951 (July) RO Hockey Club (3); Computer grade (2); Yokels in London (South Bank Exhibition).
- I, 7 1951 (August) 4th Annual Report of RGO Social & Sports Club; RO Hockey Club (4); [Many cricket match reports].
- I, 8 1951 (September) Report on AGM of Club; RO Hockey Club (5).

- I, 9 1951 (November) How to send parcels to America, by J. G. Porter; Halley's transit instrument, by P. S. Laurie; Music diary, by Celia V. Hewerdine; RO Hockey Club (6).
- I, 10 Christmas 1951 (in blue cover) On Christmas past (anon); Herstmonceux ghosts (anon); Star talk – December 1951, by J. G. P.; A short history of the R. G. O. at Abinger, by R. H. Tucker; Our tableau wins again; Yuletide decorations.
- II, 1 1952 (c. February) Club parties; American impressions, by D. H. Sadler; R.O. Edinburgh, by R. H. Tucker; Circus visit; Panto time; Magham Down Dance; Music diary; Some historical items, by E. G. Martin; Table tennis; Spencer Jones Trophy (GET v RT)
- II, 2 1952 (c. May) (separate cover sheet) Star talk, by J. G. Porter; Dunsink Observatory, by R. H. Tucker; American impressions 2 (food), by D. H. Sadler; Visits; Bedtime story of 2152; Hockey; Table tennis.
- II, 3 1952 (c. June) (advertisement at back) SGM for new rules; Music diary (CVH); The first woman computer of the Nautical Almanac (PSL); Visit to RO Belgium, Uccle, 1951 (RHT); Astronomy at Burlington House (AH); Sports.
- II, 4 1952 (c. July) The Gondoliers (D'Oyly Carte at Brighton (DCS) American impressions 3 (misc) (DHS); Flat or round (Earth) (DCS) Mosquitos (DCS); Train travel in India (GAH) Sports
- II, 5 1952 (August) Paper and papers (DCS); Appeal for volunteers for Home Guard at Obs. (GAH) 18th century view of H Castle; Where are we? (Spelling of H'ceux etc); Sec's report to 5th AGM; Hints to travellers abroad; Music diary; Sports.
- II, 6 1952 October Report on 5th AGM; Rome, Sept. 1952 (PAW); Outing to Eastbourne Herald printing works (ASM); Music; Sports.
- II, 7 1952 Christmas (green cover) Lewes on Bonfire Night (PAW) Evening at the opera (Iolanthe) (WJS) First impressions (CGH from USA) Canterbury Tale (ghost story in RO records) (PSL) Tennis tournament final (HGB) Eastbourne return (walk at night) (ASM)
- 3, 1 1953 February (cream cover) Children's Xmas Party & Panto (DWE) Annual Club Party (HGB) Babes in Wood (outing to Brighton) (HPCC) Treasurer's report (GAW) Sports Music Crossword (CGH)
- 3, 2 1953 March (pink cover) Senlac refought (squirrel shooting) (Anon) Abinger Club Growing your own tobacco (1) (ASM) Music Sports Anniversary of RO – GMT by telegraph (PSL) Crossword (CGH)
- 3, 3 1953 Coronation (blue cover) Visit to flour mills (WGG) Musical evenings (ES) Brighton Music Festival (successes) Visit to Wisley (ASM) Youth Hostel trip (ACM) Tobacco (2) (ASM) Sports Music Crossword
- 3, 4 1953 August (orange cover) Trip to Blackboys Youth Hostel (JL) Alfriston YH Re-visited (EJMG & ABG) Farewell party to Herricks & Jeff Tobacco (3) (ASM) Visit by party from McDougalls Mill Report to 6th AGM Sports Music Crossword
- 3,5 1953 November (no cover) Report of 6th AGM Flamsteed's will (PSL) Tobacco (4) (ASM) Sports Music Crossword
- 3, 6 1953 Christmas (red cover) Astronomical alphabet A – F

- Musical observations (CVH) Ancestry of the Castle Review (HGB) Sports
 Crossword (ASM)
- 4, 1 1954 February (orange cover) Children's Xmas Party (JGP)
 Future of the Club (ES) Panto in Brighton Tournaments (DHS)
- Astron alphabet 2 On the way & at home (Mrs Herrick) Sports Crossword
 The Argus & Astro Magazine — Time Dept. c 1900 (HMS)
- 4, 2 1954 May (pink cover) Music diary Caesar at Herstmonceux (PSL)
 Sports Crossword
- 4,3 1954 September (cream cover) Report for 7th AGM Report on 7th AGM
 Behind the Iron Curtain (USSR) (DHS) A trip into Sikkim (NR) Sports
 Sweden and the eclipse (JGP) Crossword
- 5, 1 1955 March (no cover) Approach to realism in sound reproduction (ASM)
 Fireworks at the ROG (bomb in 1894) (PSL) Exeter's underground passages (NR)
 Panto & parties Sports results (inc. Sussex win by GET)
- 5, 2 1955 September (no cover) Funeral of Sir Almanac + note by DHS
 International Geophysical Year by HSJ at Royal Inst. (report by RHT) Sports
 Report to 8th AGM (loose) Looking at people (with illustration) (Anon)
 Sports Crossword
- 6, 1 1956 April (no cover) Desks and tables (TEN) Report for 9th AGM
 An old country church (AN)
- 6, 2 1956 September (no cover) A sideline of the past, (testing binoculars at ROG
 in WW1 (EGM) Rules of the Club (loose) Report on 9th AGM Sports
 Report on Folk Dancing Group (HPCC)
- 1957 February Several humorous articles inc. Rhapsody (poem by WPP)
 Notes on CSSC (=Civil Service Sports Council) Behind scenes of Panto (HEW)
 Folk dancing (HPCC)
- 1957 November/December (no editorial) Notes on future activities (inc.
 dinner-dance at De la Warr Pavilion, Bexhill on 1958 Jan 17) Music diary (CVH)
 Swimming by RGO Ladies in CS events (later issues contain other such reports)
 H'ceux bonfire night (RGO float won) Sports reports. New Pavilion Sports field
- 1958 Early Summer (no cover) Club visit to London planetarium (anon)
 Life in the USA (GAW) Report on activities
- 1958 Late Summer (pink cover) Club visit to Stanmer Park Brighton (HEW)
 Note on Chairman (Norman Rhodes) Holiday in Scotland (poem by Brenda
 Denman) Tenacity (rebuilding a car) (Frank Heaton) Sports
- 1958 Autumn (pale blue cover) Report on Club barbecue Note on
 Secretary (Joe Bates) Note on making home-made wines Music diary
 Result of referendum on Club Room (House) Wedding of Virginia K & Ken Long
 Bonfire float
- 1958 Christmas Poem re Christmas at Observatory. Christmas anecdotes
 Note on Treasurer (Henry Gill) Report on new Club House Sports
- 1959 Spring (pink cover) Note on vice-chairman (George Harding)
 Notes on Club activities
- 1959 Summer (yellow? cover) Note on social secretary (Arthur Milsom)
 Ann Heather as a speed cyclist First cricket match on extended sports field

Progress report on building of Club House

1959 August (pale green cover)	German adventures (folk dancing (ASM))
That driving test (Keith Jarrett)	Laying of foundation stone of Club House
A musical holiday (CVH)	
1959 Christmas (pink cover)	A split second (Ladies swimming team) (SP)
Spanish interlude (Pat Hanning)	“This is the house some Jacks built”
1960 Summer (pink cover)	Progress report on the Club House
Report on Garden Fete on June 18	Report on 13th AGM

1960 Autumn Special publication to mark the opening of the new Club House giving a short history of the sports and social activities of the staff of the RGO. Includes lists of former officers and winners of external competitions.

1960 Christmas (pale green cover)	Appeal for blood donors
Secretary's report	
1961 Spring (pink cover)	Report on annual dinner and dance on March 25
Report on Club Party on January 7	Lessons in ballroom dancing (ES)
Improving your holiday snapshots (Mike Lowne)	Interclub games evenings
1961 Christmas (cream cover)	Secretary's reports
Christmas Party on Dec 16	Barbecue on Oct 14
1962 Christmas (pale green)	Visit to Greece (Elizabeth Portch)
Children's Christmas Party (HEW)	List of marriages etc (new series)
1963 Christmas (orange cover)	Battle victory (of Bonfire float) (HEW)
Report on motoring section	Children's Christmas Party (HEW)
none in 1964	
1965 Autumn	Humorous articles
Isaac Newton Telescope (AH)	Crossword
	Cricket 1965

1981 Christmas (No. 1 new series) Spencer Jones Indoor Sports Trophy
Sports results Echoes form the past (1787) Ballet Guide (Janet Dudley)
Exhibit (Great Galactic Museum of Life) (Richard Swifte)

D.5.2 RGO Club Information Bulletin

A series of *RGO Club Information Bulletins* was started in 1962 (by me when I was Assistant Secretary) to give information about forthcoming events, decisions by the committee and similar short items of current interest.

I have the following copies but it may not be a complete set.

1962	Aug (GAW)	Oct			
1963	Feb	Sep (WN)	Dec		
1964	Feb	July	Nov		
1965	Jan	June (NOH)	July	Nov	Dec
1966	Mar	June	Sep		
1967	Jan	June (MEB)	Oct		
1968	Jan	Apr	May	Aug	Oct

1969 Feb Oct (GAW) Nov (GAW)
 1970 Oct (anon)
 1971 Feb (GAW) July (anon)
 1972 May (anon) Aug (GAW)
 1973 Oct (anon)
 1974
 1975 Feb (GAW)

Editors: WN = Bill Nicholson; NOH = Nathy O’Hora; MEB = Maureen E. Berry

Some of the issues of the RGO Information Bulletin and other official publications contain information about Club activities, but I have not made a systematic search.

D.5.3 Annual reports and minutes

The other main sources of information about Club activities are the annual reports to the AGM and the minutes of the AGM and of the meetings of the General Committee. I hope that there is a complete set in the RGO Archives, but I doubt whether the minutes of the meetings of the section committees have been saved.

Some of the issues of *Castle Review* (see above) contain annual reports to and of the AGMs. for the following years.

1950/51	1951/52	1952/53	1953/54	1954/55
1955/56		1959/60	1961/62	

I have a ring-book containing my personal set of Club papers for the period 1958 to 1972 and an arch-file for the period 1973 to 1989. I have not, however, made a full list or search of them. They contain the following annual reports and minutes of some of the AHMs.

1958/59	1966/67	1967/68	1969/70	
1980/81	1982/83	1983/84	1984/85	1985/86
1986/87	1987/88	1988/89		

There are also papers about the principal changes in the rules in 1959, 1963 and 1974?.

D.5.4 Other sources

Quest was the SRC House Magazine from 1968 to the beginning of 1978. It includes some articles and photographs about Club activities, especially for the SRC Sports Days. Appendix G.12.1 includes a list of both official and Club items.

Quest was followed by the *SRC Bulletin*, but I do not have any copies of this journal at home and I do not recall whether it contained any items about the off-duty activities of staff.

I have photographs, both slides and prints, of Club activities, although they relate only to the activities in which I was personally involved. I hope eventually to digitise a representative selection of them.

I also have a collection of cuttings from (mainly) local newspapers that relate to the RGO and activities of RGO staff. Most of these were given to me by Joan Perry. They are, however, in need of TLC!

D.6 Reviews of individual Club activities INCOMPLETE

I had hoped to include a few paragraphs about each of the activities listed under the headings of the following sub-sections, but I now consider that it would be better to 'publish' what I have at hand in the hope that others may be able to supply the missing reports and details. I have given a few specific references to sources of further information, but otherwise it will be necessary to search the sources listed in D.5 or in the RGO Archives (see H.1.3).

D.6.1 Indoor sports

D.6.1.1 Snooker and Billiards

1 table in clubroom
1 then 2 tables in Clubhouse
Displays

D.6.1.2 Table-tennis

League teams – 'Stars' and 'Comets'
Eastbourne tournament (e.g. Gordon Taylor)
GET v RT in SJT

D.6.1.3 Badminton

In the Clubhouse (low ceiling)
Friendly matches

D.6.1.4 Darts

D.6.1.5 Spencer Jones Trophy

Interest fell off and the event was cancelled in 1964, but then revived.
A list of winners is to be added if possible.

D.6.1.6 SRC/SERC Indoor Sports Days.

Locations: Warrington ?? Swindon ??
Badminton
Volley-ball
Table tennis

A list of winners is to be added if possible.

D.6.2 Social activities

D.6.2.1 Bar, kitchen, shop and trading

Bar
Kitchen (for light refreshments)
Shop (what was sold?)
Trading: discounts obtained from local suppliers to benefit the Club and the members.

Slot machine for a short while?

D.6.2.2 Pantomimes and Children's parties

In the hut by the South Courtyard

Try to list dates, titles and principals

Author was G W Rickett

Repeated in some village halls

In the Castle Ballroom

D.6.2.3 Occasional social events

Announcements and reports on social events will be found scattered throughout the sources of information listed in D.5

Annual Christmas parties

Early dances in village halls

Dinner-Dances at local hotels

Socials and Dances in Clubhouse

Socials and Dances in Castle

Film shows

Travel evenings (slide-talks)

Photographic competitions etc

Projector screen bought from Norman Rhodes Memorial Fund [IB 67/1]

Concerts (usually piano) in the Castle

Fireworks

D.6.2.4 Ballroom dancing

The following note on ballroom dancing was written by Joan E. Perry in 1982 for publication in the *Castle Review*, but as far as I am aware the hoped-for issue did not appear.

21 years of ballroom dancing

“In the autumn of 1960 there was a certain amount of interest among staff to learn the rudiments of ballroom dancing and so, on behalf of the RGO Club, I obtained the astronomer Royal's permission to use the Ballroom [or Long Gallery in the Castle] during the lunch hour. Flora Penfold and Mary Budd agreed to help me and we decided on Wednesdays from 1 – 1.30 p.m. We demonstrated basic steps in the waltz, quickstep and foxtrot and, although attendances varied, I think about forty members of the staff took part in at least some of the lessons.

As the group flourished, we decided to have classes on Friday evenings twice a month (first and third to avoid RAS meetings) with a qualified instructor. Arthur Levett, AISTD, started on 21st April 1961. In the autumn the Ballroom Dancing Section became a recognised section of the Club. We had twenty registered members, and the members were augmented by relatives and friends, several of whom attended regularly and became Associate Members of the Club. Classes normally took place in the Clubhouse, but six informal dances to records were held in the Ballroom during the first

year. The first committee was elected: George Wilkins (Council representative), Joan Perry (Secretary), Eric Smith and Wally Grimwood. In 1964 David Coulthard replaced Eric Smith. After Wally's departure for South Africa in 1967 and David's sudden death in 1971, George and I carried on rather more informally.

Arthur Levett left for New Zealand at the end of 1966 and we later obtained the services of Phyllis Godfrey, FISTD, between May 1968 and June 1971. As she was unable to come regularly, practice classes were held on some evenings and on others from June 1970 to October 1971 John Taplin, MISTD, gave instruction in sequence dances. Since 1974 we have used the Ballroom. [This was mainly to avoid the conflict with the use of the Clubhouse for indoor sports, such as table tennis and badminton, that required a non-slip floor.]

The section meets regularly on alternate Friday evenings and I give instruction and guidance on a wide range of dances. Members pay a small amount on each attendance and the balance is transferred regularly to the main Club account. Party dances are held from time to time and the 21st anniversary of the Section was held on 30 April. We would welcome more members of the staff and their families at our practice classes and general dancing evenings."

The following CR-editor's note is given on the draft: "Joan retired 3 years ago and the Club is grateful to her for continuing to run this section and for all her work over the past 21 years".

I (GAW) believe that dancing section continued until the RGO lost the use of the Castle in 1989. My wife, Betty, and I attended regularly. I usually acted as MC and put on the records or, later, tapes. Arthur Levett, the first instructor, had insisted that husbands and wives, for example, should not learn the dances together and so each person learnt to dance with a variety of partners. This reduced the risk of couples persisting in using wrong steps, but it also meant that there was a very friendly atmosphere and each member usually danced with a variety of partners during the 'party dances'. Joan became a qualified dancing instructor.

D.6.2 5 Folk dancing

The following report on the Folk Dance Section was written by R. H. Tucker, for the AGM on 27 May 1981

25 years of folk dancing

This rather unusual Section of the Club continues the activity started by Sir (then Dr) Richard Woolley soon after he took office as Astronomer Royal in 1956, and the Section has therefore just celebrated its Silver Jubilee. It was probably because of his interest in folk dancing that he decided to remove the partitions that had converted the Long Gallery into a suite of offices, This magnificent room, 100 feet long, then became available for not only folk dancing:, but also conferences and staff meetings. Since that time, the club's Folk Dancers have used the room regularly on Wednesday evenings for English (and Allied) folk dancing, mainly in the Country Dance traditions associated with Cecil Sharp. The leadership of the meetings is undertaken in rotation by three experienced dance-class conductors, and a high standard of performance has been attained in a large number of dances, some of which are fairly difficult and complex.

Visiting dancers are always welcome, and beginners are given the necessary assistance and guidance; but the main emphasis is on dancers who dance regularly

together for the pleasure of doing something reasonably well.

It was natural that this highly social activity should be related to the other social and sports activities at RGO, and so become a part of the Club. The result is that the folk dancers have a “double identity”; we are a Registered Group of the English Folk Dance and Song Society (and the certificate proving this can be seen in the Long Gallery); and we are the Folk Dance Section of the RGO Club.

The enthusiasm of the Astronomer Royal encouraged many members of the staff to take up regular folk dancing, and in the early years there was no shortage of willing RGO staff to assist in the running of the group. We remember, among others, Harry Cook (and his wife Janet), Mike Candy, Don Palmer, Peter Willmoth, Arthur Milsom, Phil Cottrell, and the famous twins, Celia and Anita Hewerdine. Since the Hewerdines left the staff in about 1976, the main burden of organisation has fallen upon myself, but with the splendid support of the non-RGO dancers the folk dancing has continued to thrive. In fact, it regularly provided a small surplus contributed to the Club funds, which, not so long ago, were in serious difficulties, and glad to have this help.

The installation of security barriers in 1976 made life a little difficult, but passes were issued to two of the dance leaders, who waited at the gates to let the other dancers in and out. In 1980, security was tightened, and one dance leader was given a pass, to look after one gate, while I attended at the other with my staff pass. It would, naturally, have been easier for me if one or two colleagues had been able to share the duty with me. But, although there are several keen folk dancers on the staff at present, none of them give allegiance to our own folk dance club,

So far, so good — but now we come to the crunch! I shall retire from RGO in 1982, and unless one or two RGO folk dancers come forward to take over the running of the section, it will have to close. It is well and faithfully supported by its non-staff dancers, who do all the real work, but it is clearly impossible for the group to regain in existence as a Section of the RGO Club unless it has a nucleus of RGO staff members. As a matter of fact, I tried to close it down last year, when security problems became severe, but I was over-ruled by the Director, who told me plainly “You can’t do that!”.

The Director will leave us in October, and so I shall then be free to close the section. In anticipation of a closure at the end of 1981, I propose to remove the name of the Herstmonceux Castle Group from the EFDSS 1982 list of Registered Clubs. If anybody is able and willing to come forward and take over the section, I shall of course be delighted to pass on my responsibilities to them.

Otherwise — we close at the end of the year! Farewell!

PS. The section did continue and was flourishing in 1989. I understand that it was meeting in Bodle Street in 2006.

D.6.2.6 Folk singing

There is a reference to a Folk Singing Section in a circular dated 16 September 1976.

D.6.2.7 Visits to theatres and places of interest

Announcements and reports on visits will be found scattered throughout the sources of information listed in D.5

Musical events

Pantomimes

Local places of technical interest

Events in London e.g.

1970 Tutankhamun

D.6.3 Outdoor sports

D.6.3.1 Cricket.

Evening matches

Sunday matches from 19??

RGO v World in 1971

Teak seat in memory of Ernie Croxton c 1967/68

D.6.3.2 Tennis.

Internal tournaments

Matches with other clubs

Use of court at Cleavers Lyng

Joint social with the Hailsham Lawn Tennis Club on 1975 May 17.

D.6.3.3 Hockey.

Ladies

Mixed

Men

D.6.3.4 Stoolball.

Ladies

Mixed

D.6.3.5 Croquet

In formal garden of Castle

External competitions

D.6.3.6 Swimming

Informal outings to Pevensey Bay

Ladies in Civil Service championships

Pool in Castle garden from 1976 ?

D.6.3.7 Golf

[c. 1987]

D.6.3.8 SRC/SERC Outdoor Sports Days

Locations: Chiswick 1968? to

Birmingham ?

Cricket

Tennis

1968 GAW & RJD won MenD 1969 GAW and DVT won MenD

1971 DEH & GAW won MixD

& others later

6-a-side football

Netball

Bowls 19?? Jack Pike and Jack Johnson ?

A list of winners is to be added if possible.

D.6.4 Other outdoor activities

Announcements and reports on other outdoor activities will be found scattered throughout the sources of information listed in D.5

Building of floats for bonfire processions (mainly in early years)

Youth hostelling

Motoring section

Angling

Gliding

Archery in 1980s