A First and foremost, what makes the game at Lewes so different from any other played in Britain is the type of jack that is used. Because the green is so uneven, the jack, as would be expected, is biased (as explained on page 13). But note that, compared with a standard biassed crown green jack (held on the right), the Lewes jack is smaller and with flatter sides, like a cheese, thereby giving it extra bias. It is also lighter, weighing 10oz, compared with 24oz for its modern counterpart. It will be noticed too that the jack, in common with the Lewes woods (right), is made from lignum vitae. Lewes is one of only two British clubs yet to allow composites onto its premises. Barnes, being the other (page 102).

Each wood weighs around 1lb 12oz (again lighter than the crown green minimum of 2lb), and measures about 4½ inches in diameter (also smaller). This means that when replacements are needed, it is possible to use old crown green woods, turned down and measures about 4½ inches in diameter (also smaller). This means that when replacements are needed, it is possible to use old crown green woods, turned down on a lathe and shaped accordingly. Note how flat they appear on one side, and also how all are matched in pairs. Since the late 19th century all commercially produced bowls have come with a measured and tested bias, making it simple to create a set. The Lewes woods, by contrast, have all been matched by hand and eye, and all differ subtly. Hence each player learns from experience and chooses which is his lead wood, and which his second. Quite how old the Lewes jacks and woods are is difficult to state accurately, but some have Georgian pence screwed on as mounts and almost certainly date back to the 18th century. So too may those with lead weights inserted, a once common method of adjusting a wood’s bias. In total the Society owns 55 pairs, and six jacks — this being the maximum number that can be comfortably used on the green at any one time. For the same reason membership is limited to 55. When a member dies, his bowls are allocated to the next man going next with his second wood. Each game is played to ‘11 points’. Marks may be set in any direction, but it is an unwritten rule that players do not bowl across the line being played in another game. Unusually, the order of play is determined by the position of the first woods sent by each player, with the man closest to the jack going next with his second wood. Finally, tradition has it that at the end of a session it is off to the White Hart, on the High Street, the gathering point for Society members since records began.

A Viewed from the Castle keep on a Saturday morning — the best time to catch some action — we see that, as in crown green bowls, members of the Lewes Bowling Green Society play in any direction, using the full extent of the green. However at Lewes the green covers just over three quarters of an acre. Before incursions by neighbouring properties started in the 18th century it was even larger. As it is, it still measures more than twice the area of a typical flat, or crown green. Casts can therefore vary in length between 20–60 yards.

A Second, the surface itself. Viewed from the Castle keep on a Saturday morning — the best time to catch some action — we see that, as in crown green bowls, members of the Lewes Bowling Green Society play in any direction, using the full extent of the green. However at Lewes the green covers just over three quarters of an acre. Before incursions by neighbouring properties started in the 18th century it was even larger. As it is, it still measures more than twice the area of a typical flat, or crown green. Casts can therefore vary in length between 20–60 yards. As is only to be expected, the Society has its own set of rules and conventions. Each player pays a fee of £1 per session, with the losers stumping up a further 50p. Each game is played to ‘11 up’. To decide who plays whom, coloured balls are drawn from a bag (see page 34). Marks may be set in any direction, but it is an unwritten rule that players do not bowl across the line being played in another game. Unusually, the order of play is determined by the position of the first woods sent by each player, with the man closest to the jack going next with his second wood. Finally, tradition has it that at the end of a session it is off to the White Hart, on the High Street, the gathering point for Society members since records began.

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