



▲ First and foremost, what makes the game in **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 biased 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 11lb 12oz (again lighter than the crown green minimum of 21lb), 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

One of the many quirks at Lewes is that one bowler in each of the games taking place on the green carries with him a hinged, two yard wooden rule in order to be able to measure when the need arises. Again, at a time when most bowlers use modern tape measures or strings, this harks back to what was once standard practice on bowling greens.



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 without dendrochronological testing,

but some have Georgian pennies 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 joining. And yes it will be a man. For although the Society rules do not spell it out, membership is by invitation only, and to date no member has proposed a woman.

Maybe in another century or so...



▲ 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.

'The latter distance, when uphill', wrote Society Secretary and proprietor of the White Horse Hotel, Herbert Walton, in 1945, 'requires

a vigorous, long, steady pendulum swing, sometimes accomplishable only by the lusty player, of whom there are a few.' That said, given the age range amongst members, it remains a convention that no-one sends the jack so far that the other players are unable to reach it.

A further challenge is presented by the green's profile. It falls away to the south by at least six feet, with countless depressions, ridges and channels for the bowlers to negotiate at every turn. Hardest of all is when both the slope and the bias act in the same direction.

Because of this, experienced players tend to play with the bias fighting against the gradient.

Then there is the surface itself.

Described as 'indigenous Southdown turf', it was recently found to consist of a mixture of at least 30 types of grass. In effect, just as most greens were in the days of scythes and heavy rollers.

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.

