

A TRIBUTE TO GRAHAM HARRIS

At the Club's AGM on 25 August, President Graham Harris formally tendered his resignation from the role. It marks a significant moment in the history of the Club when one reflects on Graham's remarkable tenure.



Most notably, Graham steps down as the **longest-serving President in the Club's 131-year history**, having held the role for 16 consecutive years. That surpasses the previous record held by **G.T. Booth**, who served from 1914 to 1929. The longevity of Graham's presidency is particularly significant given the circumstances under which he first assumed the position. When the committee approached him in 2009, the Club had experienced considerable turnover among key officeholders, with many roles changing hands every two or three years. As a result, the Club was struggling to establish a clear direction and continuity.

Graham quickly set about addressing this by recruiting capable people into key roles, many of whom have remained in those positions throughout his presidency. That continuity is a testament to the culture and leadership he fostered during his tenure.

Over those 16 years, Graham has guided the Club through numerous challenges. Only two or three months into the role, the **Christchurch earthquakes** struck, resulting in the early cancellation of the 2010 cricket season and leaving Sydenham Park badly affected by liquefaction. A decade later, the **Covid pandemic (2020–2022)** created another period of uncertainty for sport and community organisations. Throughout his term, there has also been a shift in the funding landscape for community sport. Graham used his considerable people and relationship skills to maintain the confidence of funders, as well as encouraging the club to seek out alternative revenue streams, thus keeping subscriptions at an affordable level and player participation strong.

Despite these challenges, Graham's presidency has been marked by several significant achievements—

Pavilion and Grounds Redevelopment

Graham oversaw the completion of the redevelopment and post-earthquake repairs of the pavilion. It was a project that had stalled for some time, and his leadership helped bring it to completion. He also worked hard with the Council to ensure that the post-quake ground renovations meet the needs of cricket as well as other users of the park.

Women's Cricket

In 2013, Graham made the difficult decision to terminate the shared arrangement with the Lancaster Park Cricket Club and moved our women's players back under the Sydenham banner – with Park retaining its own side, this effectively gave the Premier competition an additional team in a competition that even now only has four teams in the grade. Under Graham's leadership, the Club strengthened its commitment to women's cricket, supporting the growth and development of the women's programme within the Club.

Sydenham Youth Cricket

Likewise, in 2017 Graham made the decision to close the South West Youth partnership between Sydenham and Halswell, when both clubs recognised that it was no longer working effectively. With Halswell's agreement, Sydenham Youth Cricket was established as a standalone programme. Since then, the youth section has grown strongly, benefiting from the focus and identity of being a single-club operation.

Playing performances

Competition successes had been relatively scarce in the 15–20 years before Graham's appointment as President. That changed significantly during his 16-year tenure. Graham played a pivotal role in attracting outstanding playing talent to both the men's and women's premier teams, successfully promoting the club's proud history, strong culture, and ambitious vision to both local and inbound players.

His leadership has been instrumental in reinstating the club as one of Canterbury's leading cricket clubs, with Sydenham securing multiple Premier Men's, Championship Men's, and Premier Women's titles during his time as President. Graham's ability to recruit talent has extended beyond players, attracting high-quality coaches whose expertise has helped build and sustain the club's on-field success.

The Sydenham Indoor Centre

Perhaps Graham's greatest legacy will be the creation of the Sydenham Indoor Centre in 2023. Sydenham remains the only club in the South Island with its own indoor practice facility. The centre has been an enormous asset, not only for Sydenham players but also for cricketers across Christchurch and for other sports and community groups that use the facility throughout the year.

This project simply would not have happened without Graham. It was his original initiative, and he was personally involved in helping fund and driving the development throughout. The project tested his considerable skills in property development, with numerous challenges arising during its development, including consent issues, financing complexities and construction hurdles. Through persistence and determination, Graham ensured the project was ultimately delivered to the benefit of the entire cricket and sporting community.

Lesser known, is the extensive work Graham has done behind the scenes over his years in mentoring many players through the likes of visa issues, work opportunities and personal struggles.

Graham steps down from the presidency at a time when the Club is arguably in the strongest position it has been during his entire 16-year tenure. It is particularly fitting that this moment comes after one of the most successful seasons for the Premier men's side.

Encouragingly for the Club, Graham has always been very conscious of succession planning and thus will not be stepping away entirely. He has agreed to remain involved by leading a small **advisory group** which will support the committee in key areas such as fundraising and finance, strategy, infrastructure and player recruitment. This will allow the new President and committee to focus on the day-to-day running of the Club while continuing to benefit from Graham's experience and guidance.

A Life Member since 1991 and a member of the Club for more than 50 years, Graham's contribution is truly unparalleled. The Club also acknowledges the unwavering support of his wife, Linda, throughout his presidency. Sydenham Cricket Club owes them both an enormous debt of gratitude. Graham's legacy will endure for many years to come.