GETTING YOUR CLUB ON FACEBOOK

Social Media – what's the point?

Being online is useful for all clubs. Many people now use the Internet as a key source of information, either through a laptop at home or at work, or on the move via a phone.

This is an opportunity for clubs to communicate with members quickly and easily, but also to advertise to potential new players. Of course, not everyone uses Facebook, but two billion people have access to it, and it's a simple and free way of getting the croquet message out to the public.

Setting up – what you'll need

Setting up a page on Facebook is quick, and this guide could have you up and running in just a few minutes. The key thing you'll need is a Facebook account. You'll either need to sign yourself up or delegate the task to someone who can do the work.

It's a good idea to hand the role to someone with a smartphone. They can take photos or make videos and post them instantly to the club page, along with news and details of any events.

Once your page is live, you'll want some pictures to liven it up. You can add these at any time, but you should try and get your hands on:

- A 'profile picture' – a simple image, about the size of a passport photo on screen. This should be something that'll look OK when squashed up small, such as a club logo. For this example, I've downloaded a photo of some croquet balls.
- A 'cover photo' – a bigger image which is going to fill the width of the screen, as a banner that sits at the top of the page. You might want a photo of your lawns with people in play. For my example, I've got a big close up of some balls near a hoop.

That's the preparation done, so we're ready to go.

Building your page

This will vary depending on whether you're using a phone or a full-sized computer. I'm using a laptop, but the instructions aren't very different.

Open Facebook. Somewhere on screen there's a list of options – this may be in a column on the left, or (on a phone) you may have to press the menu button with three horizontal lines.

The options list should include things like shortcuts to pages you like, and Facebook features for you to explore. At the bottom of this is a section headed "Create". Click where it says 'Page'.
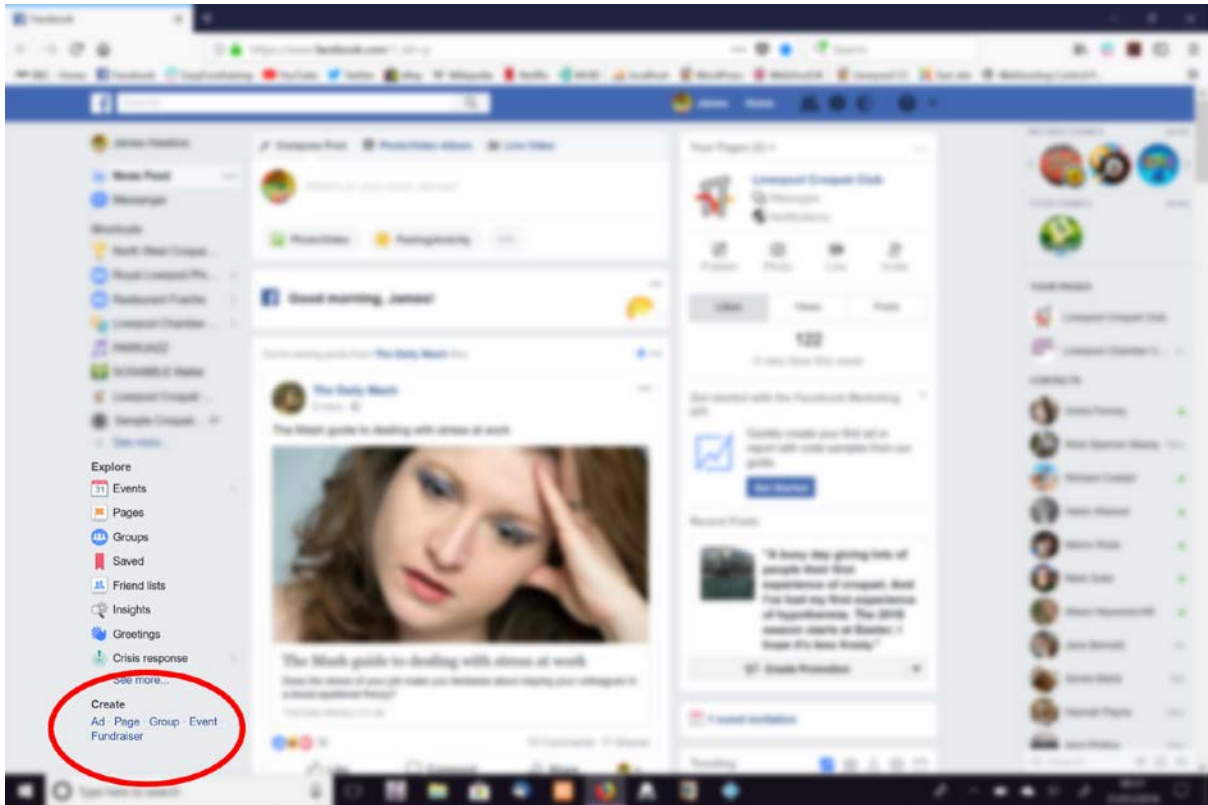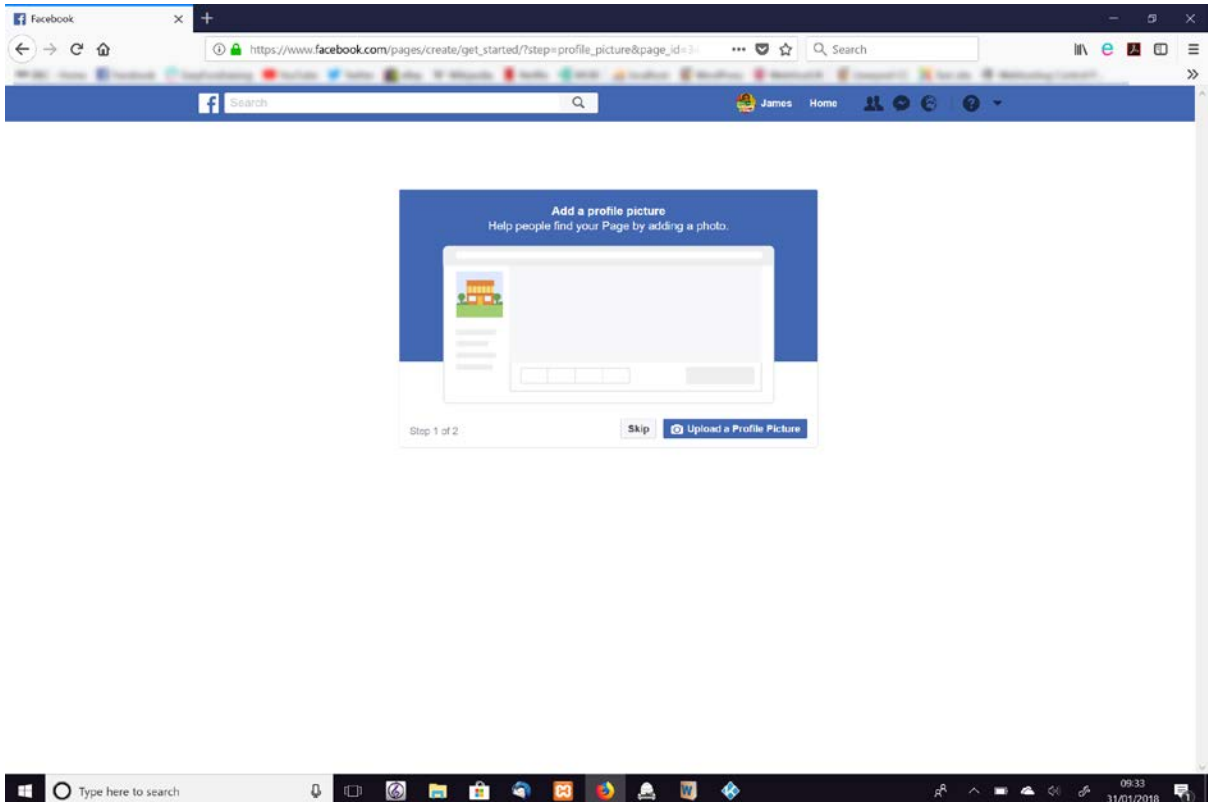
Choose "Business, brand or place".
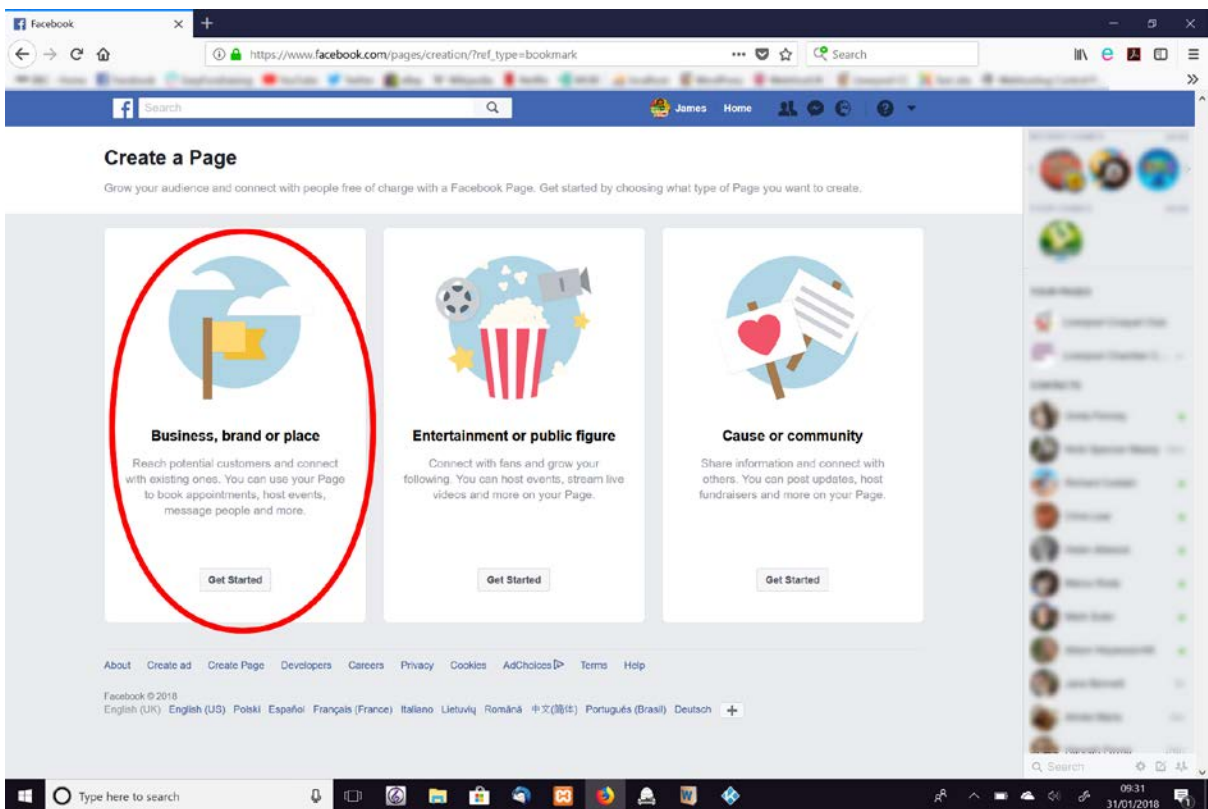
Enter your club name (my demonstration is optimistically called "Sunnytown Croquet Club"), and type "sports club" as the category. Enter some address details, and choose 'Next' when you're done.
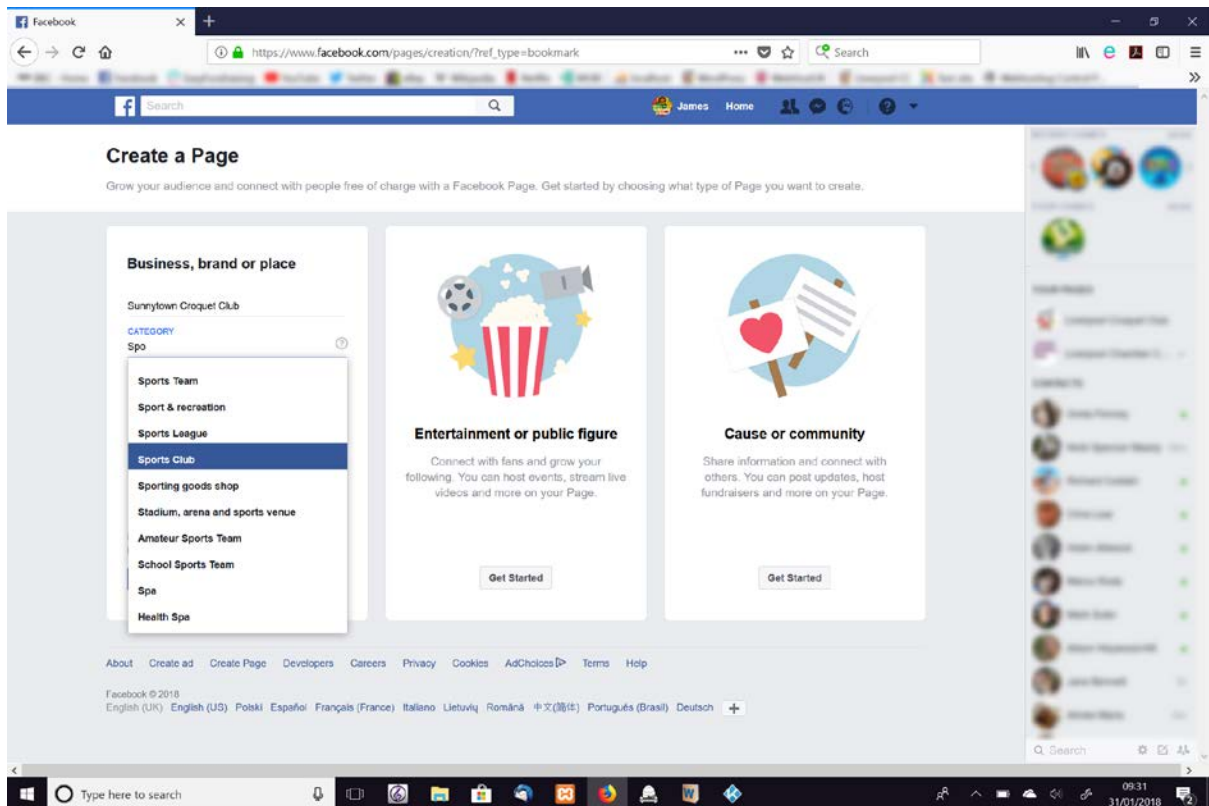
Now you can add your pictures. I'm going to skip this and do it later.

That's it. You've finished. You now have a live Facebook page for your club. If someone searches for your club name, they'll find this page. All we need to do now is to add some finishing touches.
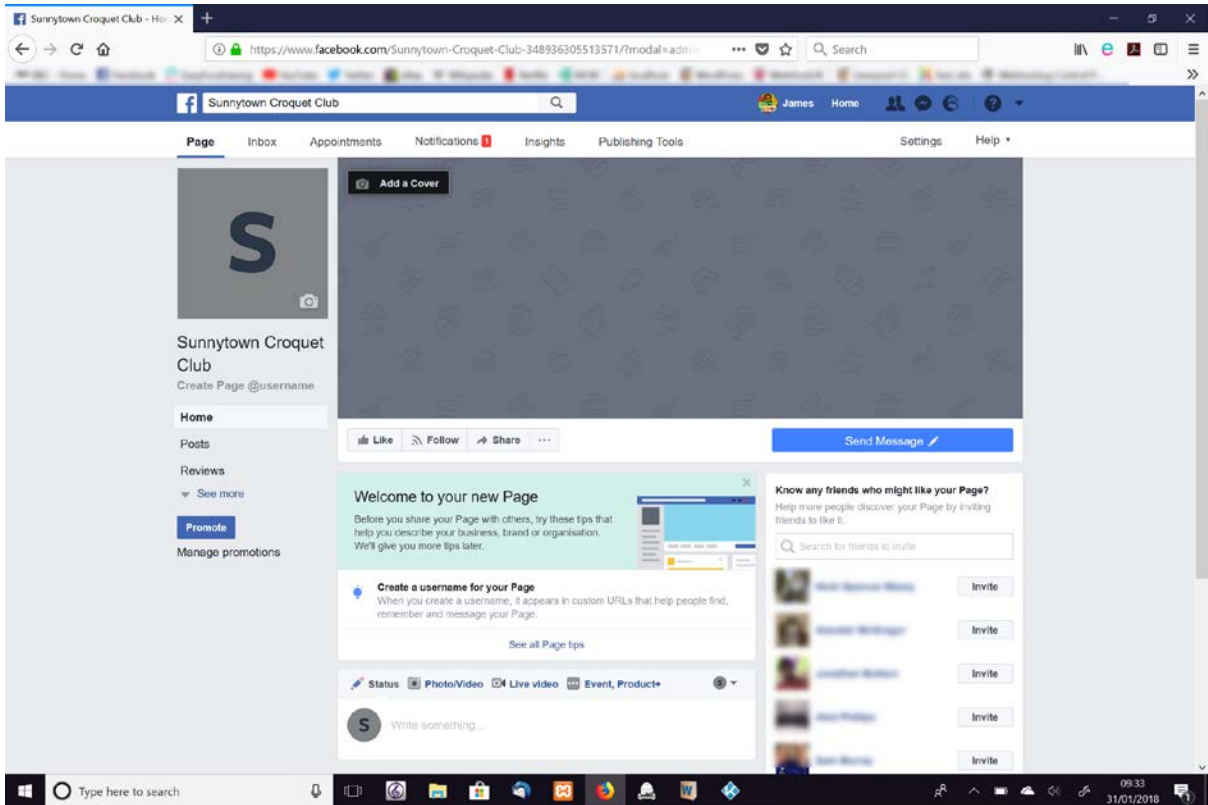
Smartening it up

If you skipped adding photos, you can do it now. Click the little camera on the small picture, and you get some options. I'm going to upload a photo which I'll choose from my computer. I'll do the same with the cover picture.
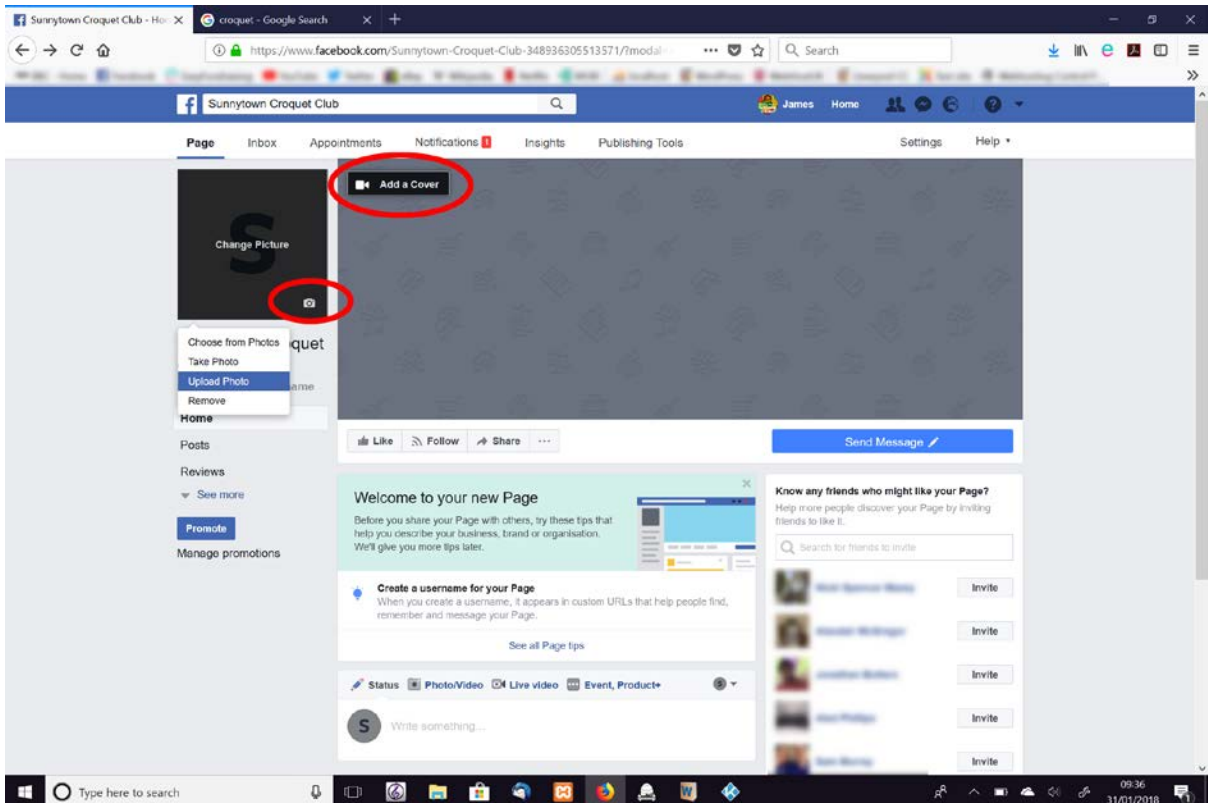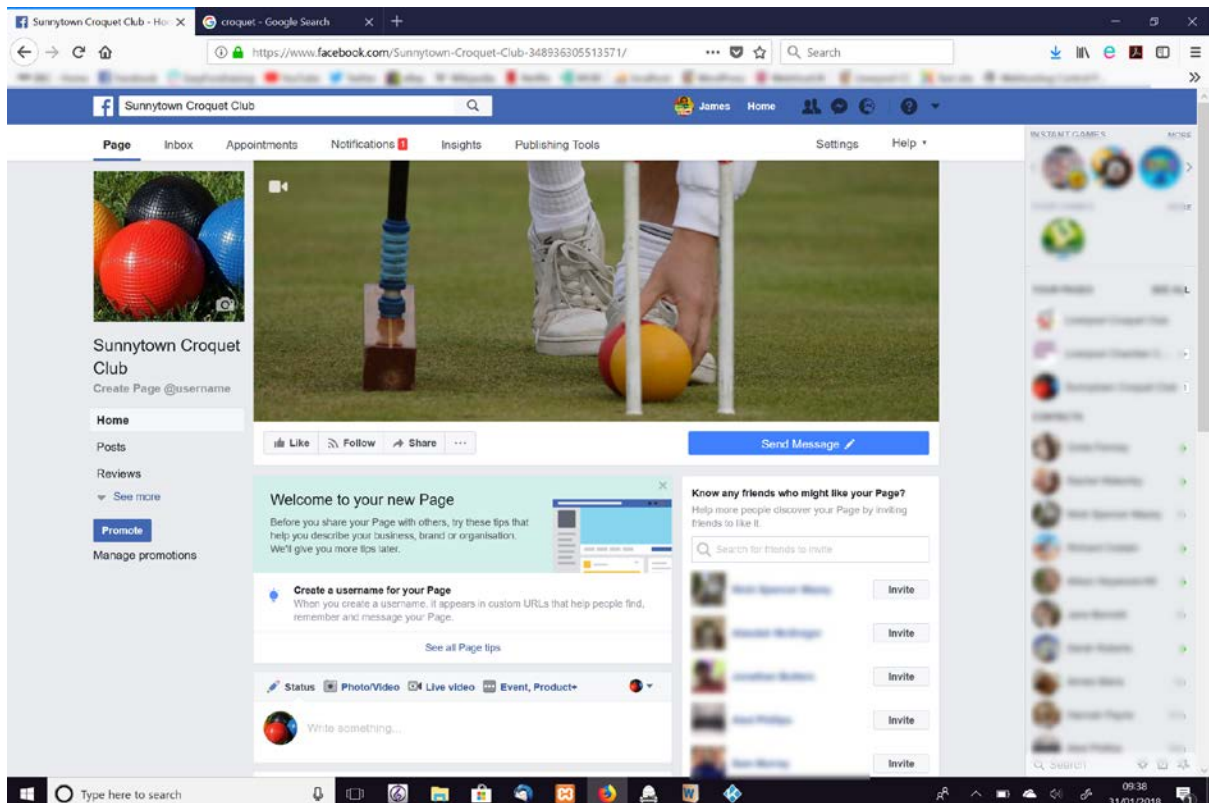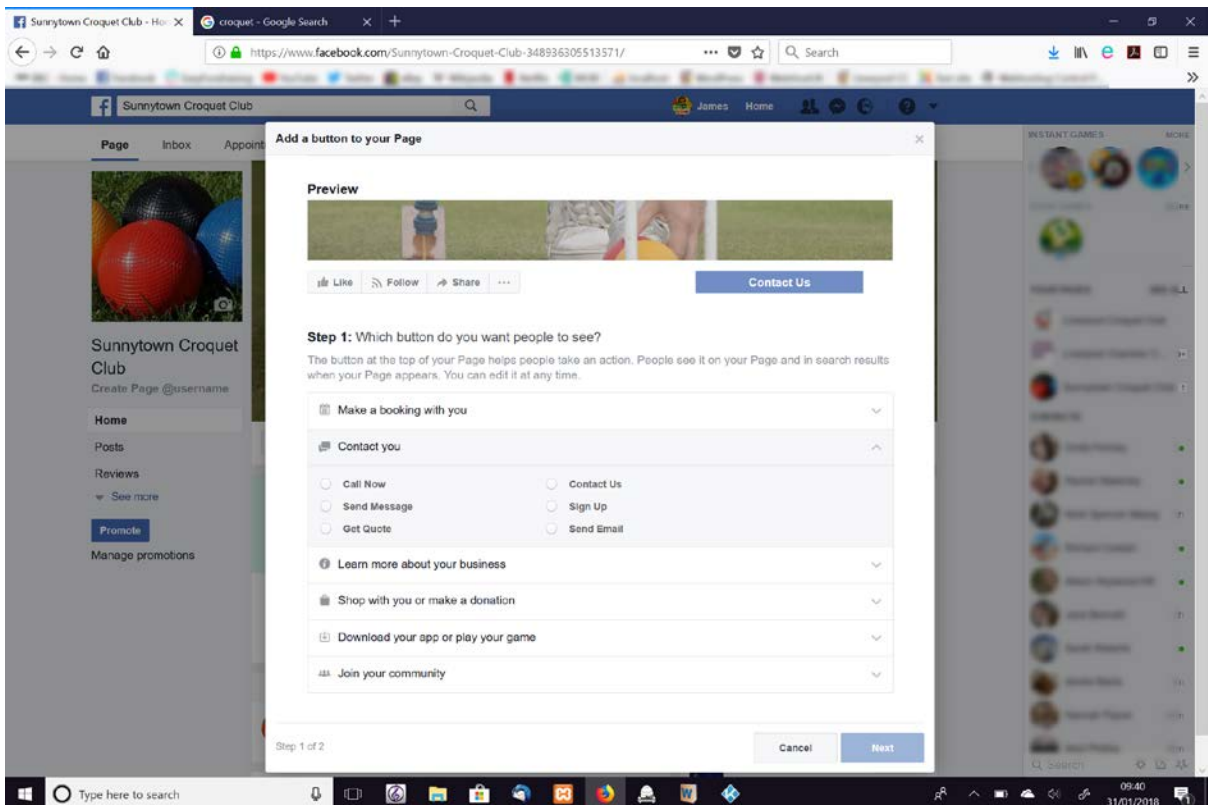
Now I'm going to change the big blue "Send Message" button. It's up to you whether you want visitors to contact you with phone calls, visits to your main website, emails, or Facebook messages. I'm going to set this up for emails.
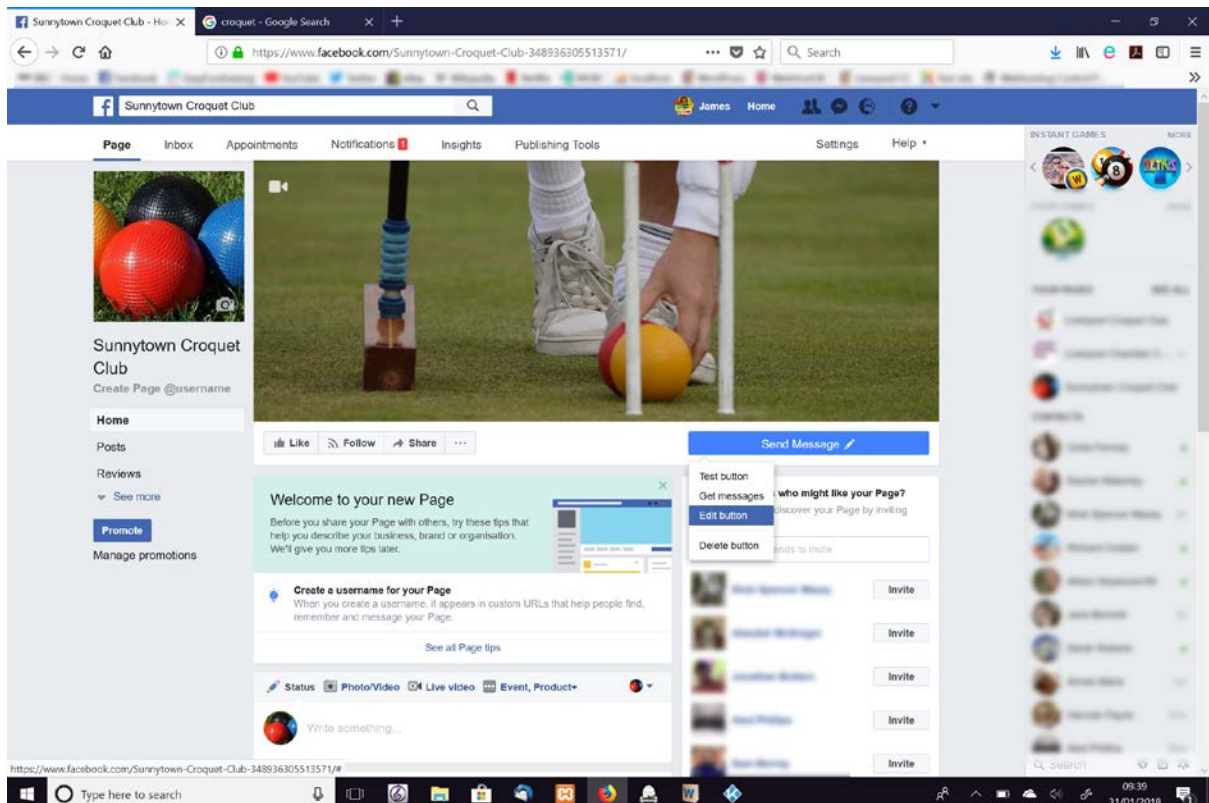
Choose the 'edit button' option, and you get a screen like this:

I want 'Send Email' so I'll click that. You may prefer to supply a phone number of to use one of the other contact methods. Click next, and you'll be asked for more details.
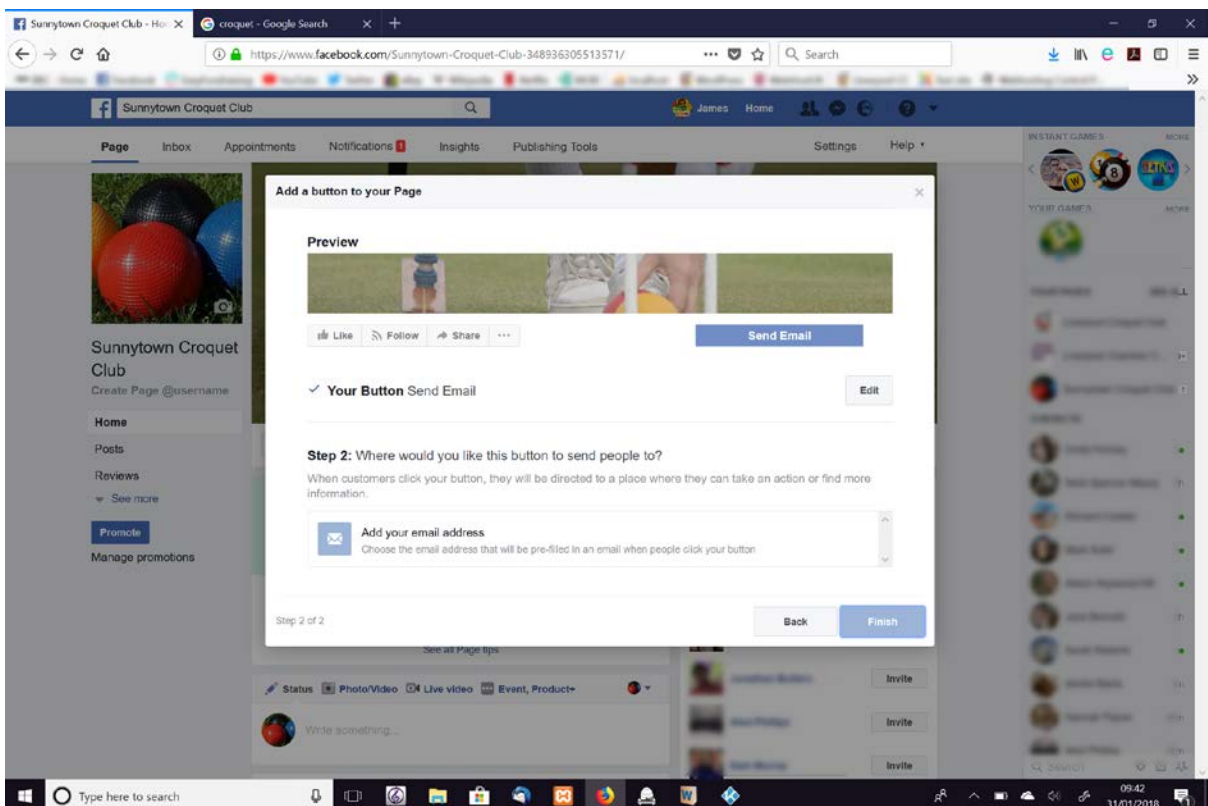

Type in the email of your club contact, and you're ready to receive any enquiries.

Now I'll look at some of the other options on screen. There's a Welcome message suggesting I create a username for the page. I'll click that, and enter '@sunnytowncroquet'. Don't worry about what this does, but it may be useful later.
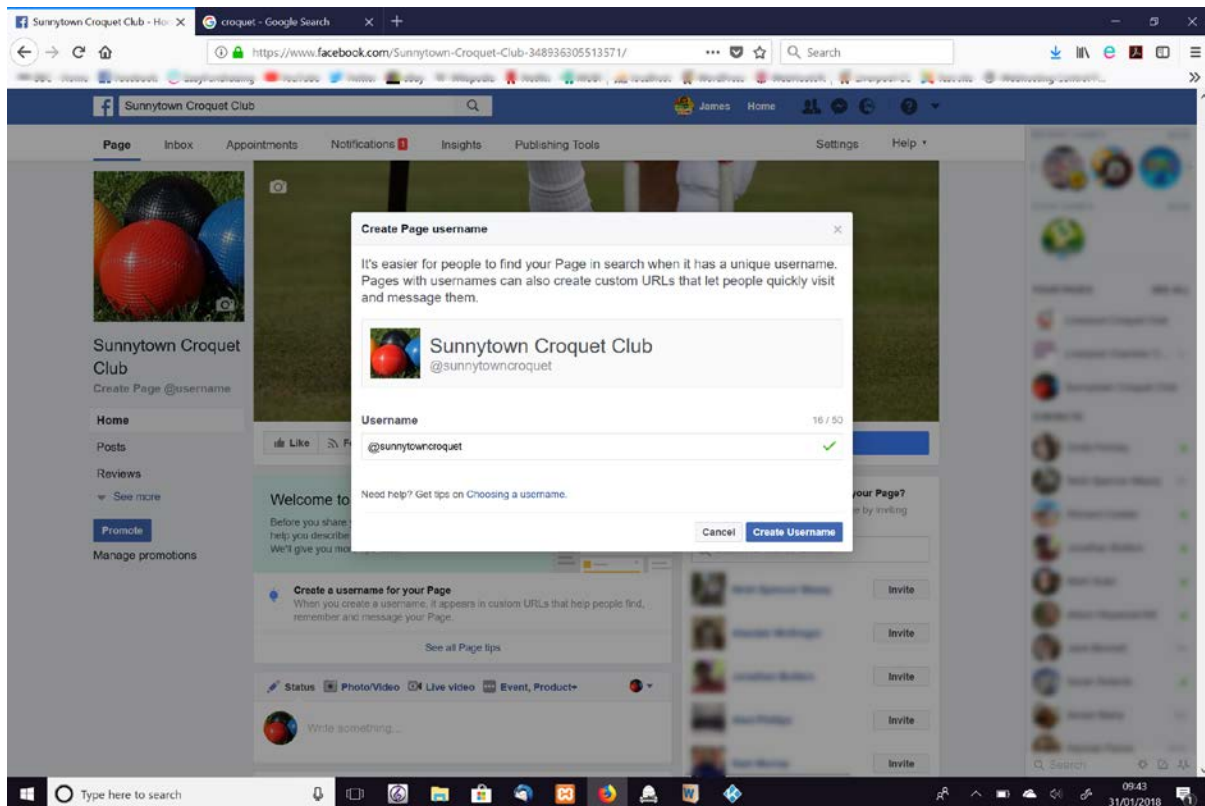

There's a button with three dots, which is worth looking at. I'll choose the option to 'Edit Page Info'.
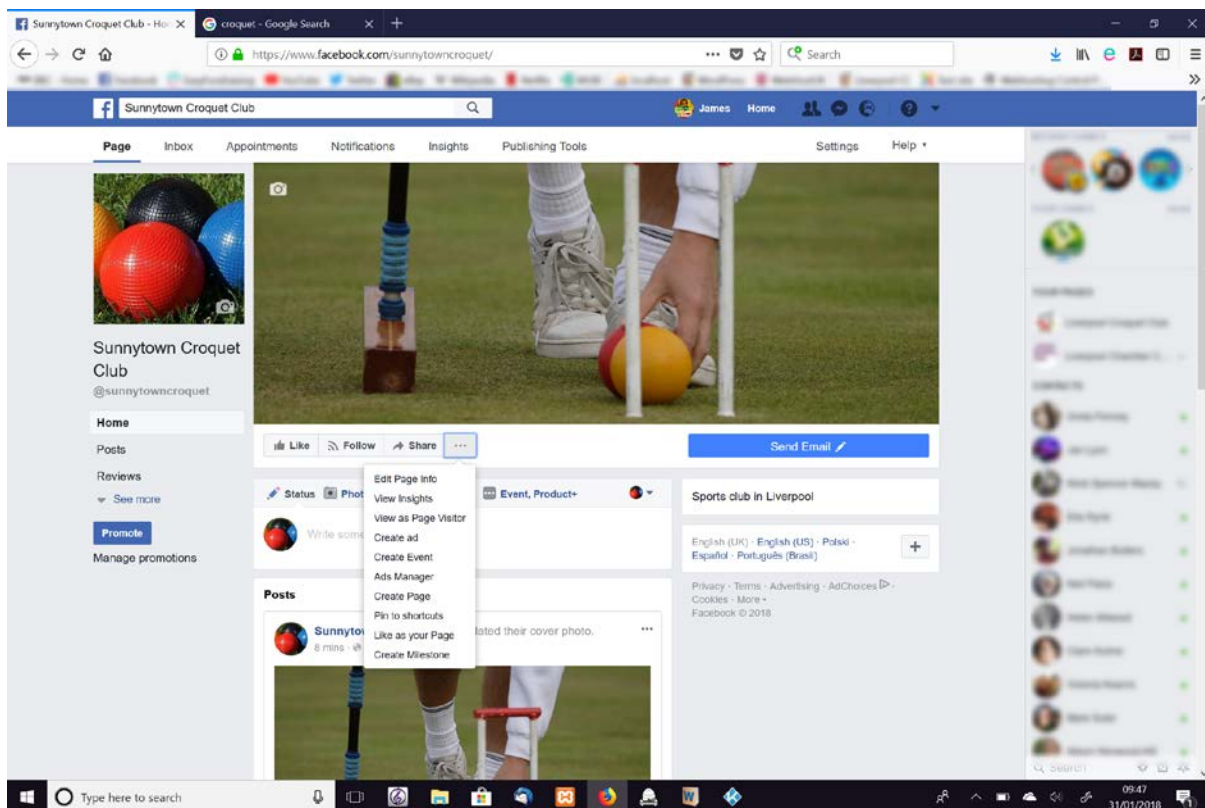
Here I can add some more contact details. Ignore the option to 'Add Impressum' (this is a corporate

requirement in some countries, but not the UK). Add any phone numbers or email addresses. Zoom in on the map, and position the marker on your croquet lawns. Save any changes. Add the times when your lawns are available.
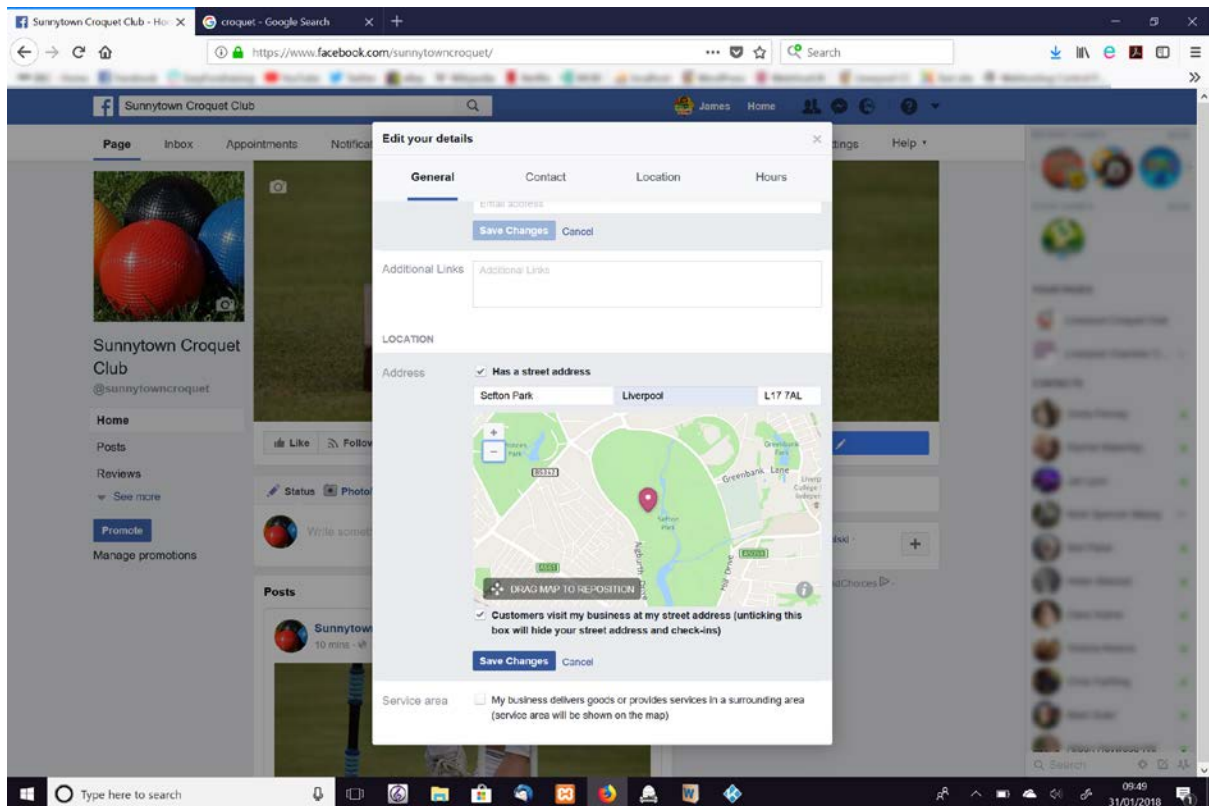
Everything a visitor needs to know about your club is now available to see.

Keeping it running

Attracting followers

This is all good, but no one knows what you've done. Invite some of your Facebook friends to like your page. There's a list of friends to pick from, so ask some of them to click your 'thumbs up' Like button. Tell any members in a newsletter to look for @sunnytowncroquet on Facebook, or to search for 'Sunnytown Croquet Club'. And ask members of neighbouring clubs to 'like' you.

This works for the general public too. If you speak to a potential new member, tell them you're on Facebook. Put the little blue Facebook logo in the corner of your advertising posters. If they're interested, they'll go online and opt in to receiving updates from you.

Posting

Now you've got people's attention, it's time to talk to them. So I'm going to write my first post. I can take photos or videos and publish them to all my followers, but I'm just going to write a simple message – come and learn croquet.
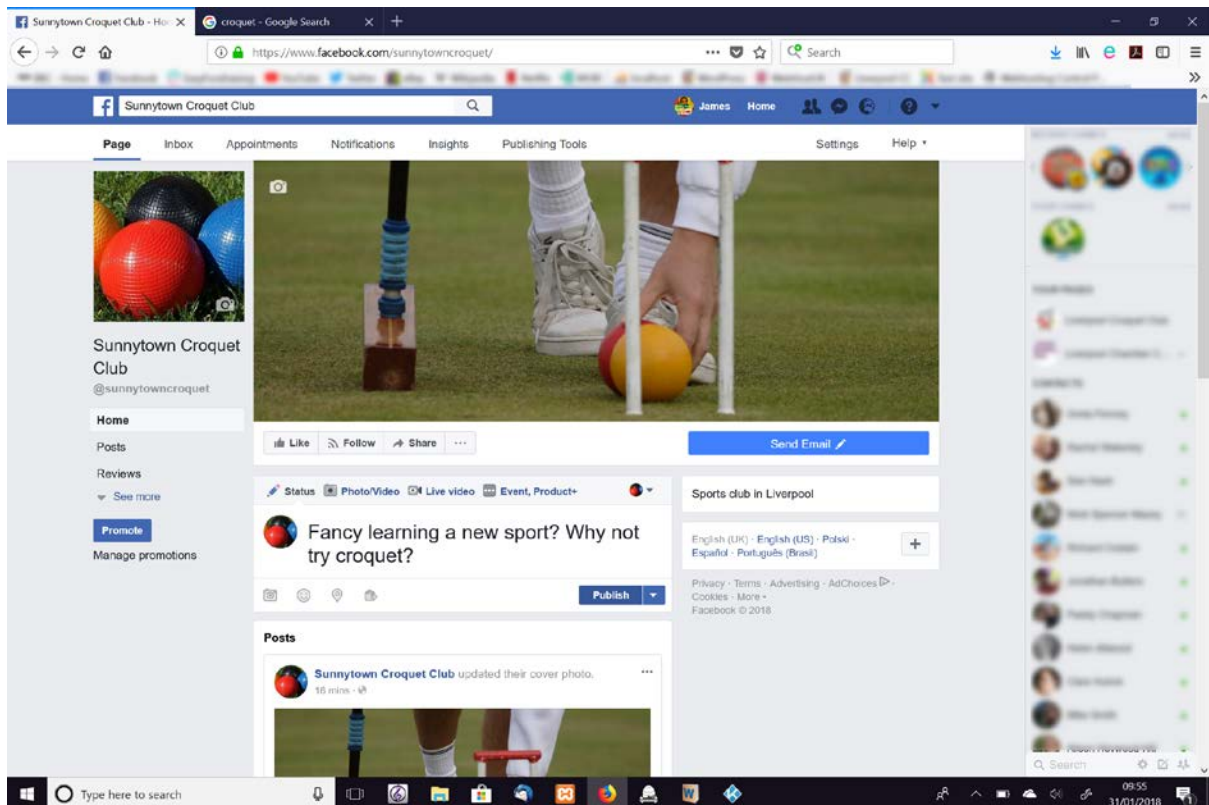
This is slightly cleverer than your personal Facebook page. I can press 'Publish' and my message will be immediately visible. Or I can choose to delay an announcement until a set time or date.

When I choose to publish it, that post will appear on the list of news items of all my club's followers. If any of them choose to 'share' the post, it'll appear on the news list of their followers. If your post was interesting, or had a good photo, it might get shared again.
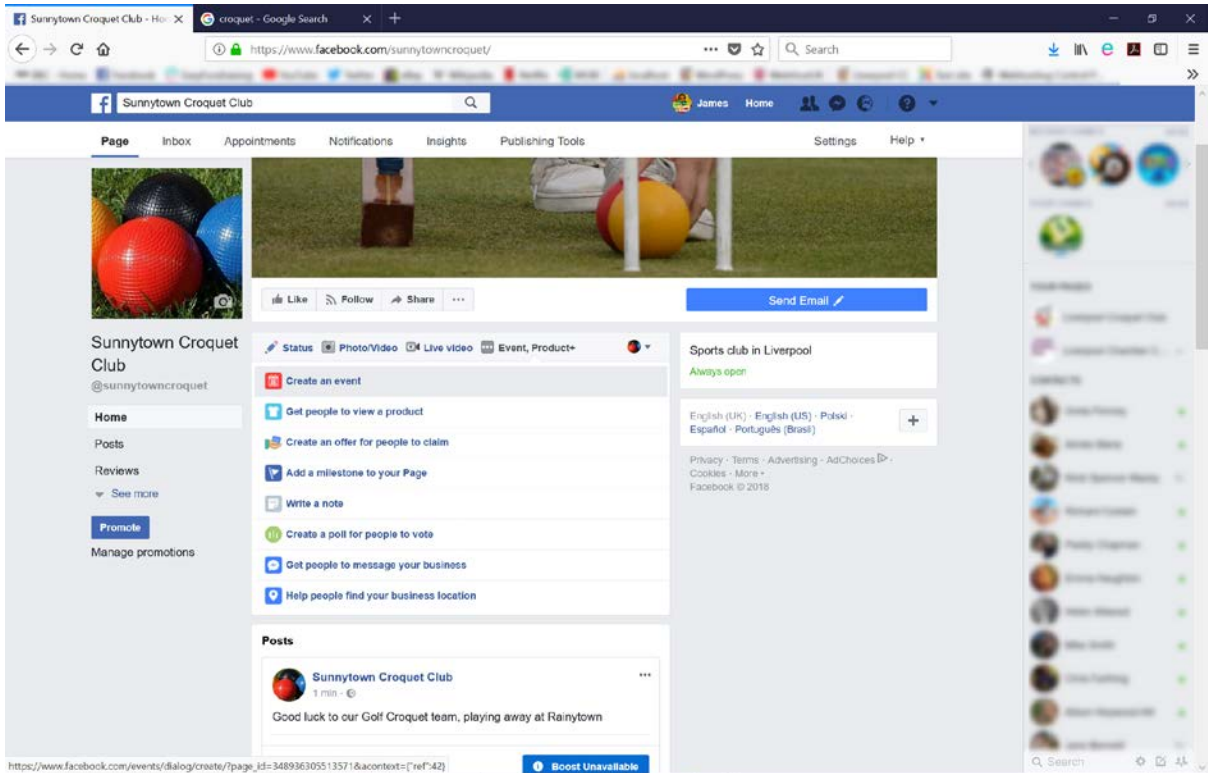
Here's a genuine post from me, which got a lot of attention very quickly for no effort. I wrote it for the club page, shared it among my friends, a croquet friend shared it, and someone else shared it again. News spreads fast on the internet.
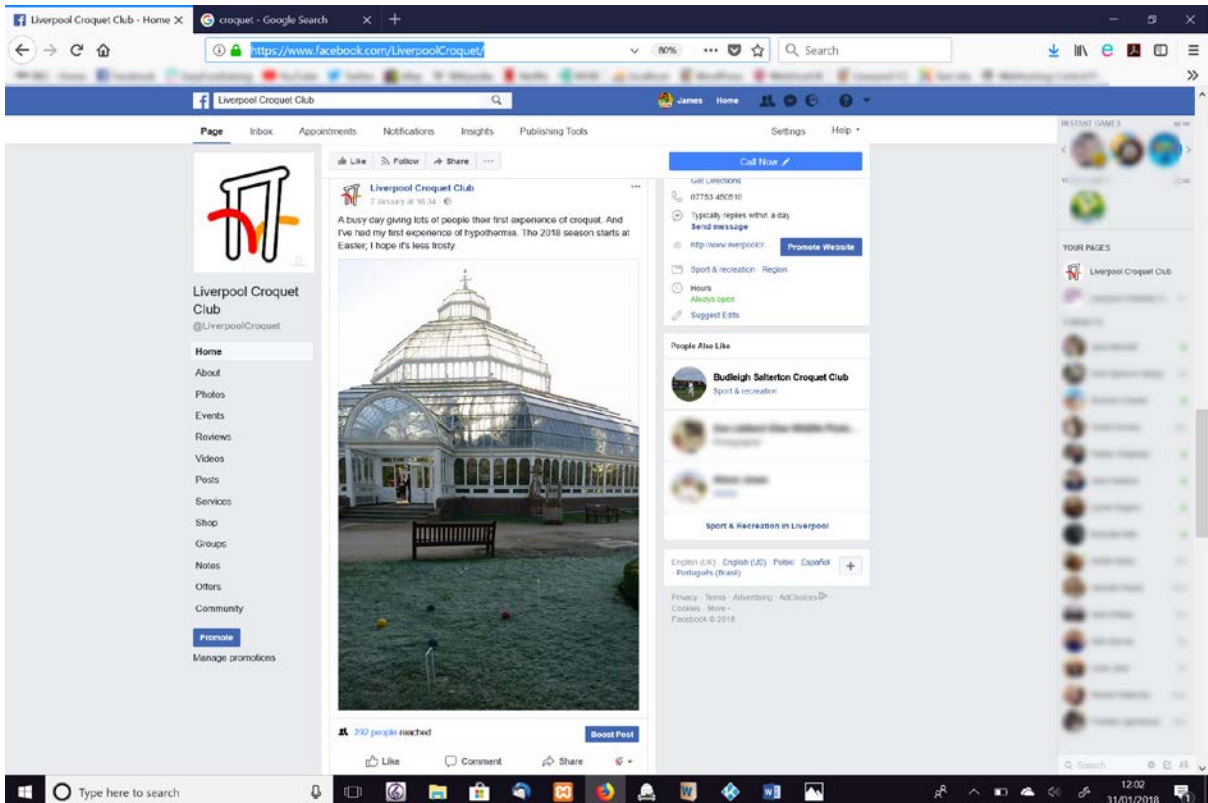
What to post

Facebook will tend to show users the sort of stuff it thinks they want to see. You need to make sure your postings are:

- interesting
- regular

If you're using a smartphone, you can take photos or videos of people playing croquet and put them in your posting. You can even do this without leaving Facebook – you really can't miss the big button marked 'photo'.

You can use Facebook to notify members of league results or when the lawns are out of action, or you can tell newcomers about recruitment sessions. But you can be creative in order to vary the tone of the messages – talk about the weather, the cakes at this week's match, or celebrity croquet players in the news.

The important thing is to keep the volume of postings fairly regular. If Facebook sees your club as a dormant account, it'll stop prioritising your important news on other people's screens.
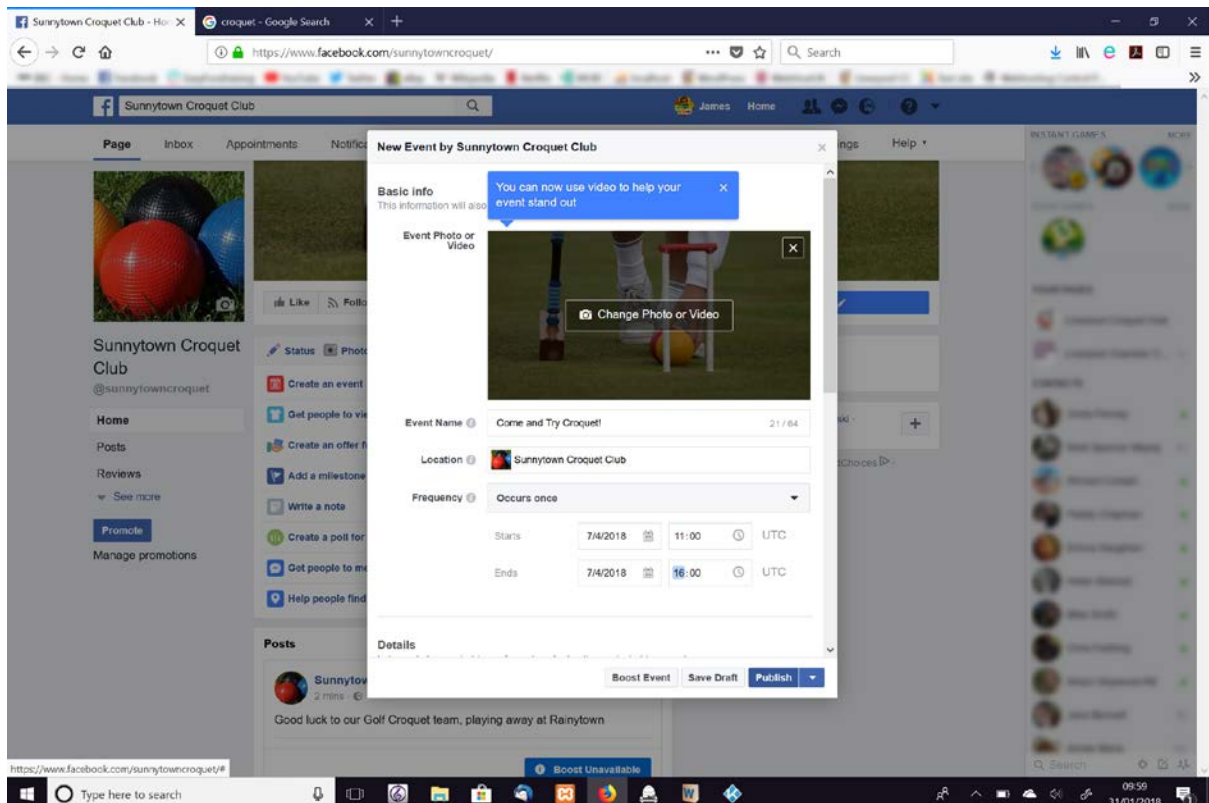
Bells and whistles

There are a few more features of a club page which are useful for clubs.

Events

You decide to hold a taster day for newcomers, and want to put up online posters to advertise it. We can do that in Facebook.

Instead of typing a normal post, look at the 'three dots' button labelled 'Event, Product+'. Click this, and let's choose 'Create an event'.

This should be easy – choose an event name, a date and time, and add some details. Publish it as normal, and it'll appear on your followers' newsfeeds. They can RSVP, share it, and invite friends. You get to see who's planning on coming, and anyone interested gets a reminder on the day.

Groups

Your page is a 'shop window' for your club. You can use it to make public announcements and advertise your facilities. But it's not very good for private discussions between members. For that we need to set up a Facebook Group.

Look at the menu on screen that starts 'Home – About – Photos…'. Lower down there should be an option for 'Groups'. Click this and choose Create Group. Add anyone you want to invite. You can choose whether the outside world can see what you're doing, or you can restrict membership.

Depending on how you choose to set this up, you can use it to publish minutes of committee meetings, or match results, or times when your lawns are closed. Members can arrange games, share gossip, or chat about any things you don't want to clutter up your main page.

Promotion and analytics

Look again at that photo I took when I was playing in frost in January. I know that my posting was viewed by 292 people in just two days. This is because Facebook sends me statistics monitoring the success of my club page.
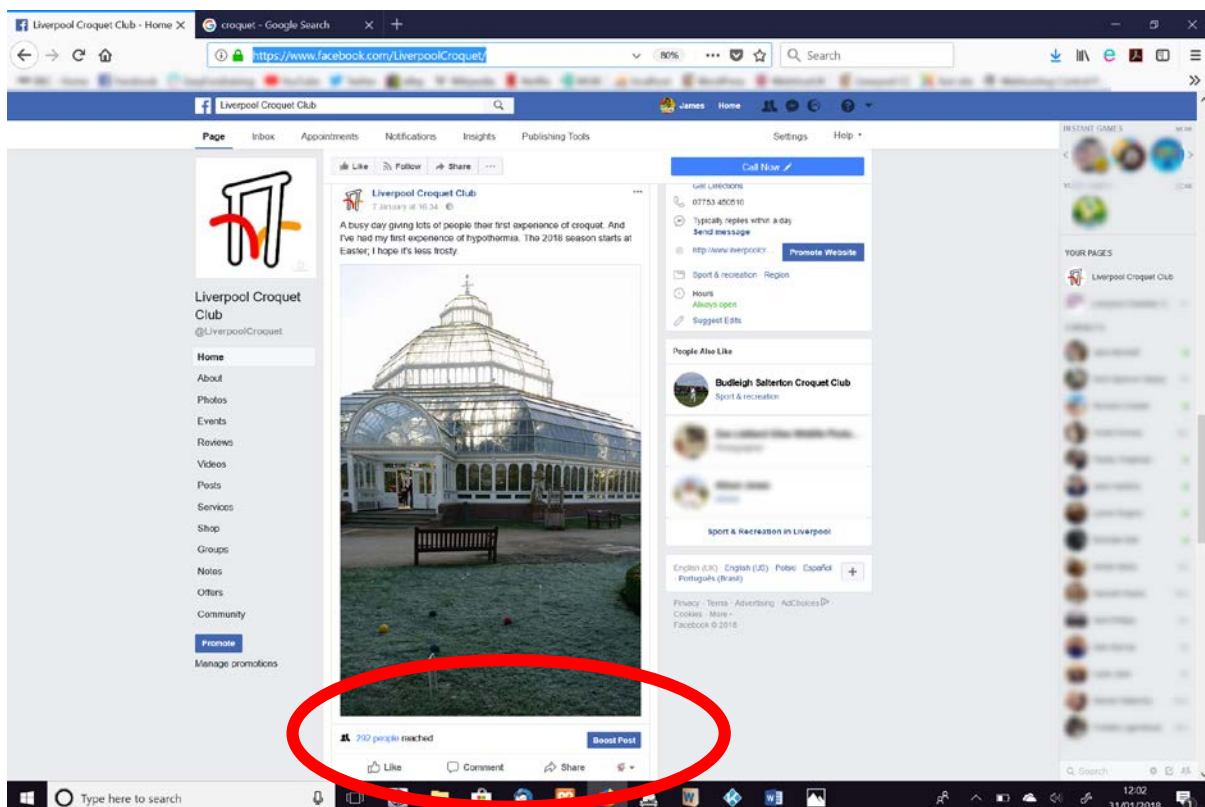
Facebook's magic number is 30. Once you get a fan base of 30 people, you'll start receiving stats on how many visitors you're receiving each week, and how many people are viewing what you put online. If you can make regular posts, and they contain the sort of information people want to see, you'll see an increase in traffic to your page.

One thing you'll notice on your club postings which isn't shown elsewhere is a button marked "Boost Post". It gives you the option to buy an advert – you pay a small fee for your post to appear on strangers' newsfeed. So, for £10 (say) the invitation to your Taster Day might appear for a few hours on the screens of 200 people locally who are interested in golf or cricket. Be warned – croquet is a niche sport, and this could be a quick way of pouring money away for no return. If you do want to experiment with this, do let the Croquet Association know as it'd be good to measure whether you have any success.

Live Broadcasting

This is a fairly new function in Facebook. When you create a post there's now an option marked "Go Live". This allows you to broadcast video and audio directly to Facebook in real time. It'll get quite

expensive quite quickly unless you're connected to a Wifi network, and you'll need a steady hand. Followers can watch action as it happens, or can review it in their own time. This has already been used for broadcasting World Championship events, and it's a great way to get croquet online.

Integrating your website

Facebook is a useful tool with many features tailored specifically at sports clubs. This makes it a valuable – and free – tool for promoting your club to the outside world, and for communicating with existing members.

Some clubs will want to have a full-scale website designed for their own needs, with more features and more flexibility. There's no reason why they shouldn't have both, and it's possible to integrate the two so they work together.

This can be more sophisticated than a button linking the website to Facebook, and from Facebook to the website. Facebook have a box of tools which allow their data to be passed directly into your site. So you could type your league result into a Facebook post, and it would appear simultaneously on your website news page. Or you could gather together all your Facebook event postings, and list them together on a single page on your site.

Experiment

Over the years, Facebook have put a lot of money into developing their system. If you follow the setup correctly, it should be quite easy to maintain a page without breaking anything. Once you have a page that you're happy with, press some buttons and experiment to see what happens.

If you do get lost, Facebook has a big Question Mark button. Type in your problem and see if the Facebook Help Centre explains what you need to do. Failing that, ask a human. There are people within your regional federation who can help.

Facebook was designed for fast and easy sharing of information. With a smartphone you can video your perfect jump-shot, post that online, and have the whole of Facebook watching you within seconds. If you make the most of it, social media can have a great effect on our engagement with members and recruitment of players.