



**Terrain and tactics**

As these photographs from the 2006 game show, the terrain around Ancrum offers a variety of conditions, from open fields, the village green, the churchyard and woodland, to the hard tarmac of The Knowe and the gravel paths of the village's housing estate.

Only the bowling green and all private gardens are considered out of bounds.

The steep banks of Ale Water behind the Cross Keys pub offer an alternative route to goal, but are perhaps too challenging to be taken by anyone without detailed local knowledge.

Ancrum blends two of the three characteristic features of the Border ball games to perfect effect. Periods of grappling for possession on the ground are ended by a swift break, when the ball is often thrown.

Skilled interpassing over just a few yards also occurs.

With sufficient players, say 15-20 a side, the Ancrum game can readily achieve equilibrium.

Enough men lie off to mark any breaks and, after a solid tackle on the escaper, build a new pile of bodies on the ground.

This way it can take as long as an hour to hail one ball, although the next might easily be away in a matter of seconds, if the first man in possession can throw it out to a speedy associate.

Unusually for a Borders game, smuggling is rather frowned upon in Ancrum. But, as illustrated right, from outside the Cross Keys pub, dummy runs can still happen.

The player in blue appears to hold something in his hand as he breaks from the pack, but once clear – perhaps after a team-mate has broken in another direction – he literally 'shows his hand'.

