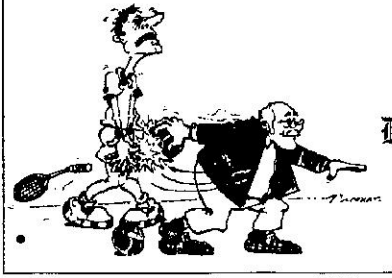
Yeovil Bowls Club 1908

to

Yeovil Bowling & Squash Club 1998



By

Dennis E. Taylor

Preface & Acknowledgements

I should like to thank Derek Whitlock who encouraged me to write this history and other members who helped with information and photographs.

It was fortunate that all minutes of the club from its incorporation in 1926 had been retained. To find details prior to that date proved more difficult.

The early assistance given by local historian, Jack Sweet, was much appreciated. He was able to suggest the best way to proceed. He also did some personal searching and produced evidence of the very early days of the Yeovil Bowls Club.

Factual information was obtained from early *Western Gazettes* with the help of Yeovil Library staff. Copies of photographs were supplied by the Museum of South Somerset at Yeovil.

I have resisted the temptation to include lists of names such as Life Members, Presidents, Officials and those that have gained County Honours. All can be found in other places. No history would be complete, however, without reference to some whose efforts have helped in the progress of the club.

To select events and personalities from ninety years of the club's history has proved a daunting challenge. There are, no doubt, some not included which ought to be, yet, all that are here should be.

It is hoped that the end result will be of interest to present and future members.

This Club history is dedicated to the two longest serving members. Inez Harris and Frank Reeves who joined in 1939 and 1953 respectively.

DENNIS TAYLOR, Past President

The Formation of Yeovil Bowling Club

During 1907 a small group of businessmen, led by Mr. W. R. Collins, who was appointed acting secretary, investigated the possibility of forming a Bowling Club in Yeovil.

Their first approach was to the Mayor and Corporation asking if some space could be provided in Sidney Gardens for a bowling green. Although this request was turned down it did have the effect of involving the Mayor and raising some enthusiasm in the town.

Mr. Collins then advertised a meeting to the general public for the purpose of determining whether there was sufficient interest to justify the formation of a bowling club in Yeovil. This was held at the Boro' restaurant on Wednesday the 24th June, 1908. The Mayor, Alderman W. Cole, was in the chair and there was a fairly representative attendance, including a large number of tradesmen of the town.

The Mayor outlined the history of bowls and referred to its recent popularity. He said that he thought it would be a good thing if they had a bowling green in the town. He then asked the secretary to address the meeting.

Mr. Collins, after referring to information he had obtained from bowling clubs, said that as far as Yeovil was concerned the first thing to be considered was not the forming of the Club, but where they would play. He had made enquiries from Yeovil Cricket Club and they would be pleased, this season, to let a bowling club have a portion of the cricket ground which was almost level for a rent of two pounds. Mr. Collins thought that two or three rinks could be laid there. He had also heard

from a Mr. V. McMillan who had a piece of ground which he would lay down at a cost of £150 and which he would rent to a club.

A Mr. Park said he was rather surprised that they had not previously had a green. He would support the green if they had a proper one. He proposed that a club should be formed. Mr. J. Moffat seconded and it was passed unanimously.

The following officers were elected:- President, the Mayor (Alderman W. Cole); Vice President, Mr. W. McMillan; Treasurer, Mr. Godfrey; Secretary, Mr. W. B. Collins. Committee: Messrs. Park, J. Howell, Gaylard, J. Moffat and McFarlin.

A sub-committee was appointed to negotiate with Mr. McMillan to establish the most favourable terms on which they could get a green made up and to report further on rules and subscription

Play begins and the Club progresses

On Tuesday the 21st July 1908, in the presence of a fairly good number of the members of Yeovil Bowling Club, the Mayor, as President, formally opened the bowling green on a portion of the Town Cricket Ground, then situated in West Hendford. A "Fours" game was played on one rink. At the close the Mayor congratulated the club on its commencement, and considered it would be a useful adjunct to the outdoor games of the town. He saw no reason why the Club should not become exceedingly popular, the game having been so in other towns, and he wished it every success.

The Mayor was later to say "that the number of members who joined the Club and the unsuitability of their temporary rinks made the provision of a permanent ground imperative".

On the 19th February, 1909 the *Western Gazette* reported that "the new green for the Yeovil Bowling Club had been completed. The green had been laid down in West Hendford, the approach being from the south end of the Fairfield. Its total area is 35 yards by 45 yards giving sufficient room for six rinks, is surrounded by ash paths, and is well drained, the whole of the work having been carried out by Mr. F. R. Bartlett. A fence of galvanised iron encloses it, and the total cost had been about £70. The Club is already about 30 or 40 strong. During the short time of its existence the Club has become very popular, and seeing that the new ground is expected to become one of the best in the West of England, will prove another attractive addition to the Town's already

Opening of the green, West Hendford 10th June, 1909.

long list of sporting clubs."

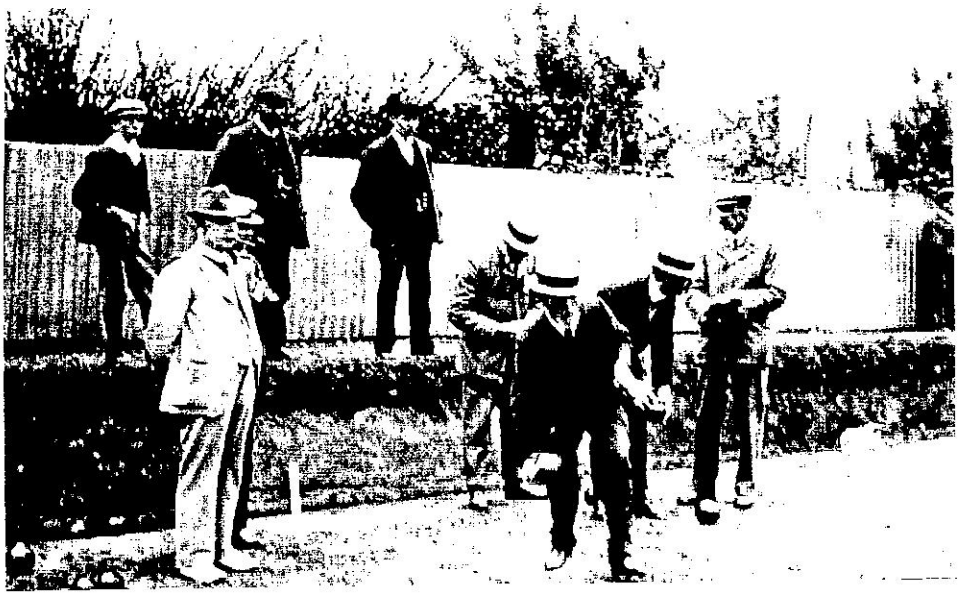
From the above report and having regard to numerous alterations in the centre of Yeovil it is difficult to establish the exact location of the bowling green. Some reports referred to it being at West Hendford whilst others placed it at Huish. It is believed to have been on the area now occupied by the car park of the Yeovil Sorting Office.

On Thursday, the 10th June, 1909 in the presence of a large company, which included many ladies, the Mayor formally declared open the new bowling green in West Hendford. It was reported that although far from perfect, it was in good playing condition, and shows promise of great things in the future. Perhaps the condition can be judged by the fact that in spite of an informal "opening" by Corporation horses which strayed on to the green the previous Tuesday and left ample evidence of their visit in the way of disturbed and mutilated turfs, play carried on. It being reported that the evidence had been almost entirely erased.

The Mayor had relinquished the presidency and the new President was Mr. F. Whitmarsh Mayo. The Mayor, when opening the green said that he thought with such a green and such a committee, bowling was going to be a success. He welcomed it because it was not only good for the amusement of the people, but would help to make the town an attraction as a place of residence. Personally, he should be glad to hear that ladies were going to join the club. There were shouts of "Hear, hear". In view of later developments, one wonders whether that expressed the true feelings of those present or was just a pious hope.

Formalities concluded, four players, including the Mayor played a team led by the President. Victory rested with the Mayor's team by 19 shots to 15.

Little is known of the progress of the Club from 1909 to 1926. The only item of interest being an unconfirmed story, passed down through a family living in Richmond Road and overlooking the bowling green, that in 1914 during the Great War soldiers bivouacked on the green.



Bowling begins on opening day.

The Club becomes a Limited Company

and opens a new green

It was decided that the green at West Hendford, which was not full size, was unsatisfactory and inadequate for the growing membership and activities of the Club and in no way worthy of the town.

During 1926 land was being sold at Higher Kingston and, in course of development for the erection of private houses, the scheme was such that a plot of land became available. The plot formed part of an orchard, having a considerable slope from north to south with apple trees thereon and only a short time before had been occupied by a dairyman for grazing his cows. A special committee under the presidency of Edwin Snell was formed to consider the purchase.

The problems facing them must have seemed enormous. The accounts showed a credit balance of £13. After much deliberation the committee decided to embark on an ambitious scheme. They resolved unanimously "that the plot offered by Mr. Adams be purchased; that a Limited Company be formed and the necessary funds be raised by the issue of debentures." On the 26th September, 1926 at a Special General Meeting of the Yeovil Bowling Club it was resolved to form the club into a Limited Company.

Matters moved rapidly and the Yeovil Bowling and Tennis Club was incorporated as a Limited Company on the 3rd. November, 1926.

The first meeting of the Directors was held at the Mermaid Hotel, Yeovil, on Thursday, the 26th November, 1926 when Mr. Edwin Snell was elected as Chairman, and a busy session followed.

Two contracts, dated the 20th August, 1926 and the 20th September, 1926, were produced. These were for the purchase of land at Higher Kingston, the cost being £339. It was resolved that as soon as the necessary funds were available the purchase should be completed.

It was decided to raise the sum of £1,800 by the issue of debentures for £5 each bearing interest at 4½% per annum. Circular letters were to be sent to members and residents to ask them to take up debentures. The Westminster Bank was appointed as bankers of the Company. A seal was produced and adopted as the Common Seal of the Company.

Seventeen meetings of Directors were held in the next 12 months. On the 16th December, 1920 the purchase was completed and the title deeds received. These were placed at the Bank for safe keeping.

It was decided that a Club dinner, should be held a fortnight before the Annual Meeting, the club should affiliate to the E.B.A, and the S.C.B.A. and an entry to the Turnbull Cup would be submitted.

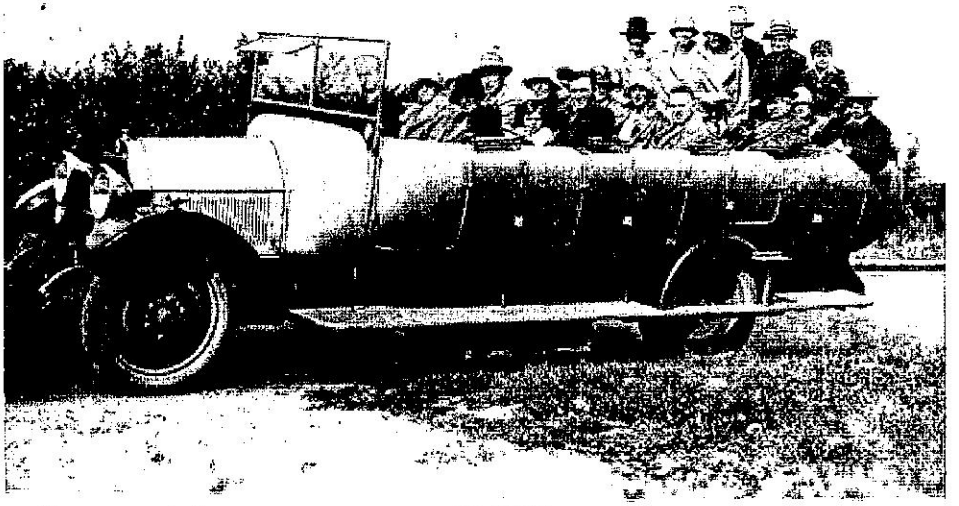
A Committee of five Directors was formed to deal with the laying-out of the new premises. On the 4th January, 1927 it was reported that the cost of laying out the grounds would be £892. It was resolved that no work could commence until there were funds to meet the expenditure.

The first Annual General Meeting of the new club was held on the 1st February 1927, at the Half Moon Hotel, Yeovil. By the 14th February £725 had been subscribed in debentures. In an attempt to raise further funds the rate of interest was increased to 5%, a further circular letter was sent out and an advertisement placed in the *Western Gazette*. It was agreed that work could commence on the layout of the grounds.

Meanwhile, play was continuing on the old green at Huish, which was reported to be in a bad condition. Authority was given to engage a part time groundsman. A Mr. Lambert was employed at a cost of £1 per week. The season was to open on the 30th April, fixture cards to be printed and the ladies requested to undertake catering. The cost of teas was fixed at nine pence per head. (N.B. This was pre-decimal coinage when there were 240 pennies in a pound). A charabanc would be arranged for away matches. This method of transport was continued

until 1932 when cars were hired from Hutchings and Cornelius.

In 1927 it was decided to give the Club a symbol of identity and it was agreed that the Club colours should be blue and gold and that the Borough Arms should be adopted as a Club badge. This proposal was not greeted with enthusiasm by the Town Council who informed the Club that they had no legal power to grant the use of the Borough Arms as a design. Subsequently a member, Mr. Hughes submitted a design which was agreed. Three dozen badges were purchased at a cost of three shillings each, a request being made to members to wear club colours and badges when playing.



Transport for away games until 1932

To return to the site at Upper Kingston, considerable excavations and levelling were necessary. The plans included a bowling green, hard and grass tennis courts. In December, 1927 the plans for grass tennis courts were abandoned, the space available to be used for a putting green, Ultimately the necessary turf for the bowling green was obtained from Batcombe Downs at a cost of four pounds. The Green was laid by Mr. A. Fisher of Weston-super-Mare, the first and last plots being laid

by the President and Company Secretary respectively. The cost of laying the green was £65, it being completed in December, 1927. The hard courts and putting green had to be completed and equipment purchased. Two hard courts were laid by the Mendip Hard Tennis Court Company of Shepton Mallet at a cost of £148. Within three months it was realised that a full-time groundsman would be required at Higher Kingston and Mr. Lambert was appointed at two pounds ten shillings (£2.50p) per week.

Whilst work was progressing, the financial side was not neglected. The cost of hiring the hard courts was advertised at three shillings per hour. It is interesting, in view of our close relationship with Yeovil hospital that an approach was made by them to hire the courts at £10 per annum for the benefit of nurses. Whilst this was refused an offer was made for reduced charges.

It was only to be expected that a scheme such as this was bound to entail and did, in fact, cause considerable anxiety for some years. The first evidence of this was when an Extraordinary General Meeting was held at the Mermaid Hotel on the 11th November, 1927 to report progress and discuss the financial position. Debentures and gifts had brought in £1,116 all of which had been used. There were liabilities of £694. An overdraft was taken out to meet the accounts.

The Bowling Green and Tennis Courts were opened on the 12th May 1928 by Ernest S. Stradling, Esq. JP. (the then President of the Somerset County Bowling Association), supported by the then President of the Club, the first Jack having been thrown by the Mayor of Yeovil, Sidney C Clothier, Esq. A six rink match was played. Result Yeovil 98 County Players 85.

The putting green was opened by Wreford J. Pittard, Esq., J.P., supported by the then Company Secretary.

Consolidation

It was now necessary to consolidate. 1928 saw the Articles of Association amended to reduce the number of Directors and simplify the working of the club. In July the club took part in a Yeovil Civic week by arranging bowling, tennis and putting matches.

A pavilion, with a verandah, was built in 1928 by V. & A. Edgell of Radstock at a cost of £114. It was 35 feet long and 15 feet wide with an 8 feet kitchen and offices. It says much for the original construction, that with some alterations the pavilion is still in use today. Conveniences were installed near the entrance.

Charges for the various sports were determined. The joining fee for bowls was ten shillings. Tennis was £2 per season, casual play being three shillings for four players and two shillings for two players. Putting was £1 per season, casual play being threepence per round per player. There were combined season tickets available - Bowling and Putting £2.15s.0d. - Tennis and Putting £2.15s.0d and Bowling, Tennis and Putting £4.

Mr. and Mrs. Edwards, senior on putting green circa 1934.

The green at Huish, having served its purpose, was let at £25 per annum until the lease ran out in 1931.

Mr. Saunders, a neighbour offered to sell adjoining land, known as the orchard, for £250. It was recorded on the 26th September, 1930, that the Club was not in a position to entertain the offer. It is of interest that a tentative enquiry, made in 1981, revealed the price of purchase to be £5,000 and in 1998 it had risen to £10,000.

The Second World War appeared to have little effect on the club. In 1941 a local serving Lance Corporal was welcomed into the club at a reduced subscription. Competitions were played and collections made to raise money to donate to the Red Cross and British Sailors Society. Meanwhile the ladies were knitting balaclavas and other items for the troops. An Air Raid Shelter was erected in the entrance drive. The club eventually purchased the shelter from the Borough at a cost of one shilling, on the understanding that this would not increase the rating assessment of the club.

Not until 1956 was electric light installed in the pavilion. In 1958, thirty years after its erection, the pavilion was extended providing for a new bar and kitchen, at a cost of £400 This had been agreed at an Extraordinary General Meeting on the 30th October 1953 when members were requested to contribute five pounds each towards the cost. It was a request which was doomed to failure, and the money was not available until five years later.

A social committee was formed and a surprising amount of entertainment was enjoyed in the small area within the pavilion. A piano was available and visiting teams sometimes stayed until midnight for fellowship and a sing-song.

In 1964 toilets and a car park were provided. The club site was now a valuable piece of land in the centre of Yeovil and not surprisingly Yeovil Hospital Management Committee have cast envious glances in our direction. They first made a tentative approach in 1965 but an enquiry gave an assurance that we were not likely to be disturbed for 20 or 30 years if at all. This seems a speculative comment as the whole of the ground was and is owned by the club and any purchase would be the subject of negotiation.

A Very Special Greenkeeper

Greenkeepers form an integral part of any bowls club, although in 1928 at Yeovil he could more appropriately be termed a groundsman. When Mr. Lambert left in 1932 an advertisement attracted twenty six applications. Bill Edwards was appointed. No history of the club would be complete without his story.

Bill came from Maiden Bradley and was made redundant whilst working on an estate. In 1933 he married, his wife jokingly commented that she married him because he was the only one with a new A.J.S. motor cycle.

There is no doubt that Bill was dedicated to his work and was held in high esteem by players and management alike. On many occasions his salary was increased with unanimous approval, although on others Bill was not slow to seek increases. During one wage negotiation in 1952 Bill resigned but within three weeks was re-employed with an enhanced wage.

During the war years Bill joined the local police force as a War Reserve but continued to maintain the green an a part-time basis.

Bill Edwards cutting green c. 1934.

In 1954, in a special reference, the Directors said, "through his unselfish devotion in the interests of all members he has given Somerset one of the finest greens in the County". He had, undoubtedly by this time produced a playing surface which was his pride, and the envy of many other clubs.

Bill had his own methods seldom seen today. He never used a roller and, after cutting, used an old fashioned scythe to trim the grass. This was unusual even in the '70s and students were brought from the agricultural college thirty miles away to watch him at work. It was he who made the decisions as to whether the green was playable or if groundsheets should be used. He never hesitated to close one or two rinks for a few days to let them recover.

Bill looked after many facets of the club and when there was difficulty with running the bar in 1955 it was to Bill that the Directors turned. In addition to his many tasks he took over control and was granted twenty per cent of the profit of approximately £100 per annum.

Bill did not play bowls but had another sporting interest. In his early days he played football at a local minor level but was forced to give it up due to a knee injury. He then took up refereeing and, when travelling was not easy, handled matches on virtually every ground in the south of England. The highlight of his career was the 1953 Amateur Cup Final at Wembley. A crowd of 100,000 saw Pegasus beat Harwich and Parkeston 6 - 0. He was a member of the referee's society for sixty years, and President of the Yeovil League until the age of ninety.

In 1971 when it was anticipated that Bill would be retiring he was made a Life Member for his services to the club. He did not, in fact, retire until the end of 1976. At the age of ninety he could be seen riding his moped over short distances. He died at the age of ninety one.

Mrs. Edwards also gave considerable service to the club. For many years she did the teas in the old pavilion. She said the players always wanted the same, brown bread and sandwiches and currant buns topped with jam and cream which earned the nickname "touchers". Today in numerous clubs scones with jam and cream are now referred to as "touchers". It is tempting to say that the name originated at Yeovil.

Maintenance of the Green

The excellence of the playing service throughout the fifties, sixties and seventies was not reached without a lot of hard work and anxiety.

The unsatisfactory state of the green was recorded in 1928, 1934 and 1944. Remedial work included seeking assistance from the County Council Agricultural School at Cannington and Sutton's seed company. The green was renovated by seeding in 1934 and 1944 and in the early days was treated with fish manure and many tons of sand. In May. 1944 the green had to be closed due to a water shortage and no doubt this led to a water supply being installed the following year. The opening day

The green is flooded, July, 1989.

on the 16th April, 1966 was abandoned for a very different reason. There was a heavy fall of snow two days previously.

There were added problems to counter. The green was liable to flooding at one end, although the surface water soon disappeared. On one occasion in July, 1989 the green was completely flooded. Foxes lived in the adjoining garden and at one time had their lair under the pavilion. During the 1980s they were digging into the green and became a nuisance. They eventually disappeared and it was rumoured this was due to the efforts of some members, but the method was not disclosed.

The playing service eventually obtained was excellent but there was a price to be paid. No doubt due to the large amounts of sand used, the surface was extremely tender and divots were easily removed by the delivery of bowls during damp weather. This led to closing of rinks and use of groundsheets on many occasions. A watering device was purchased in 1976, a tank and pump installed in 1984 and a semi-automatic system fitted in 1994.

Following the retirement of Bill Edwards there was a deterioration in the condition of the green. A variety of groundsmen were employed. For a few years a maintenance company from Bristol was hired. They removed a great deal of sand and the surface of the green is now much harder. Whilst all have had varying degrees of success, the previous excellence has never since been achieved.

Liquor Licensing and Sunday Play

Whether there should be a Liquor Licence and play on Sunday were two matters which caused some dissension.

Although members raised the issue of the club having a liquor, licence in January, 1930 and on later occasions, It was not until 1935 that the club was first registered.

The playing of games on Sundays was the subject of much controversy. In 1929 a request for Sunday play was refused, although a year later a similar request by tennis players was granted.

At an Annual General Meeting in 1939 there were 21 votes for and 19 against. The Directors, however, did not agree and gave as their reasons:

(a) there would be no recognised supervision;

(b) that it would involve opening all the grounds for play;

(c) the green would not get its proper rest; and

(d) that it might be disturbing to the neighbourhood.

At the next A.G.M. there was a further vote with 25 for and 10 against. The Directors obviously could not resist further and on the 1st April, 1940 resolved that there should be Sunday opening.

This was not the end of the Sunday issue as in March ,1945 there was a vote as to whether matches should be played against visiting teams on a Sunday, 16 voting for and 22 against. In April, 1953 it was resolved that there should be no organised games on Sundays. Obviously at some time the club did start playing matches on Sundays but it is not recorded when.

The Ladies

From the outset, ladies assisted, particularly with the provision of teas. They were not allowed on the green but with the formation of the new club at Higher Kingston talks were obviously taking place. On the 11th October. 1934 approval was given for the construction of a ladies' bowling green. To make way for it, nine holes of the putting green were relinquished. A ladies' committee was formed early in 1935.

In a newspaper dated Friday, the 10th May, 1935 a photograph appeared of Mrs. T. Moore, the first President, sending down the first wood after opening the Yeovil Ladies' new bowling green. The same

In front of the Ladies' Pavilion, the ladies celebrate the end of 1939-45 war.

paper reported events which occurred on Jubilee Day 6th May, celebrating 25 years of the reign of King George V.

The ladies quickly became organised and had a small pavilion built by Edgells of Midsomer Norton at a cost of £44 Matches were arranged and they played against the men in both August and September of their inaugural year.

It was probably assumed, that with the provision of a green, nothing further needed to be done for the ladies. Events proved otherwise. Within fifteen months the ladies were complaining of the condition of their green and were granted permission to play matches on the men's green. Annual requests, often meeting with little success, were made for this to be extended. Concessions were granted and the ladies' rights to play were agreed as follows:

1938 Matches and County competitions .

1942 Extended to afternoon practice on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays but must be completed by 5.30 p.m.

1952 Extended to 6.30 p.m.

A major development hastened integration. In 1973 the ladies' green was sacrificed for buildings and the ladies were granted use of the men's green with conditions:

(a) full use of green every day until 6.30 p.m.

(b) Evening - two rinks reserved for ladies up to 6.30 p.m. when no match being played but not on

Mondays and Thursdays.

(c) Ladies matches - Tea could be taken in the men's pavilion.

(d) All subscriptions in future would go the main club.

By August of 1973 some men members were complaining that the ladies were being given too much use of the green. One member resigned in protest, although he later returned. By the 1980s joint use was being made of the outdoor green with little dissension.

Play continues with some success and other Honours

From the opening of the new green in 1928 it was an uphill struggle to find sufficient members. As late as 1961 it was reported that there were difficulties. In 1947 there were one hundred and three men and in 1952 eighty three men and twenty seven ladies. By the late 1970s this had grown to one hundred and twenty men and more than fifty ladies.

Whilst outdoor seasons started, as they do now, about the middle of April, closing dates were much later. For example in 1942 it was the 10th October. It is interesting that some of the playing problems encountered in the early days are still being repeated. In 1947, with a membership of over one hundred, difficulty was found in getting sufficient names for two teams on Saturdays. In 1954 the Thursday Captain resigned due to lack of support. During the fifties there were numerous difficulties with the provision of teas. And, in 1963 it was decided that the Captain, Vice Captain and Thursday Captain would all be on the committee of selectors.

The club played a varying number of visiting club teams. It first hosted a county match when Somerset played Dorset in 1932, To entertain the visiting sides it was necessary to erect a marquee by the side of the pavilion. This was repeated for all county and touring visits, the marquee being hired from Yeo Bros and Paull at a cost of five pounds.

An Irish touring team visited in 1933 as did Kent, our first County tourists. Since that time we have been hosts to numerous tourists and to Middleton Cup and Johns Trophy games. There is now none more welcome than Notts County Tourists who have returned annually since

their first visit on the 27th June, 1949.

In 1949 we were honoured to host the Middleton Cup match between Hampshire and Devon. The following amusing report appeared in the *Western Gazette* under the heading "Prepared for Rain - But not Fire".

"Many Yeovil Bowling Club members and visitors carried umbrellas with them when they went to watch Hampshire's match against Devon on the Yeovil Club's green on Saturday. Rain held off, but two Yeovil members lost their umbrellas by fire.

Retired postal official Mr. W. Cheney, and Mr. E. Cook, were sitting outside the pavilion soon after the match had started. So intent were they and the other spectators around them that for some time no one noticed that someone had apparently tapped out their pipe and still-burning dottle had fallen into the unfurled umbrellas hanging on the backs of the two adjacent chairs. The fabric smouldered to such an extent that the umbrellas could not be saved. The hot frames with burning fabric still attached, were hurriedly removed to a safe place."

The club achieved some success winning the County Club Championship, the Turnbull Cup, in 1940, 1946, 1948 and 1956 whilst they were runners-up in 1939, 1949, 1957, 1963 and 1980. The ladies were winners in the corresponding Fear Cup in 1940, 1952 and 1968.

Players from Yeovil were in the Middleton Cup teams in the 1940s and '50s whilst the ladies have supplied players for the John's Trophy in more recent times.

The men have won five county titles whilst the ladies have been the winners of twenty eight county events and in 1991 Sheila Cowcher, Margaret Fellows, Mary Taylor and Edna Bessell were runners-up in the National Fours Competition whilst Mary Taylor, Margaret Fellows and Edna Bessell were also runners-up in the National Triples.

The greatest individual achievement has been that of Edna Bessell who was an outdoor International in 1991, 1992 and 1993 and represented England in World Cup and Atlantic Rim games. She holds an impressive nineteen county titles. With her mother she took the National Mother and Daughter title on three occasions. She has been

runner up in five national events, and was adjudged England Bowler of the Year in 1991.

The Yeovil Club has assisted with County organisation, one member has been President and a Life Member of Somerset County Bowling Association whilst the ladies have supplied three presidents, two treasurers and a secretary to their county outdoor association. Four of the Ladies were subsequently made County Life Members.

Drama on the Green

At 10.30 a.m. on Wednesday, the 24th May, 1978 a Hawker Hunter jet aircraft took off from Yeovilton Royal Naval Air Station on a routine training flight. Shortly afterwards eye witnesses at nearby Tintinhull heard the engine splutter and misfire and saw the plane plunge into a field at Brearly Farm, Martock, where it burst into flames.

The pilot, Richard Statham, a civilian who worked for Air Works Services, and his passenger, Sub-Lieutenant Alan Brooks, used their ejector seats and parachuted to safety from 1,000 feet. Both sustained some injuries.

The R.N.A.S. emergency services sprung into action and fire tenders from Yeovil and the air station found the plane almost completely burnt out. A Sea King helicopter went to the scene and conveyed the injured to Yeovil Hospital for check ups.

A pre-arranged emergency procedure with Yeovil Police was put into operation. This demanded that police would man the Fiveways roundabout on which the helicopter would land.

Whether the helicopter pilot made a genuine mistake or saw what he thought was a more suitable landing place nearer the hospital was never disclosed. Suffice to say the helicopter landed firmly on Yeovil Bowling Green immediately in front of the pavilion from where the injured were conveyed to hospital just a few yards away. Sub-Lt. Brooks needed a few stitches for a nose injury whilst the pilot was detained, for observation, with a back injury.

Bill Edwards, the greenkeeper, surveyed the green for possible damage and pronounced that there were two indentations where the wheels had been in contact with the grass. Repair would not be difficult.

An apology to the club was received from the Captain of H.M.S. Heron at Yeovilton. He said that he had taken steps to ensure that this type of incident was unlikely to be repeated.

Finance and Improvements

Following the move to Higher Kingston the club had many years of financial anxiety. Annual profits did not exceed one hundred pounds and overdrafts and difficult financial positions are recorded. The issue of debentures in 1925, whilst providing essential funds caused many problems. A disproportionate amount of time was spent in dealing with transfers or attempting to get holders to accept lower rates of interest. In 1942 a member offered to surrender his £10 holding if the club would make him an honorary life member. Surprisingly the directors agreed. Whether this was due to the poor financial state of the club or some other reason is not known, but the person concerned died less than two years later.

In 1966, following the report of a deficiency of £192, an extraordinary General Meeting was called during which a collection was made from members and thirty nine pounds ten shillings was raised.

The same year Fred Sanders, a life member, made a donation of £100 for redemption of debentures and appealed to members to donate for this purpose. It is recorded that some responded. Following this a determined attempt was made and three hundred pounds worth were redeemed. All holders were asked to surrender on payment or otherwise.

The problem was still with the club in 1969 when a committee was appointed to finalise debenture redemption. Later that year a legacy of £250 was left by Fred Sanders to pay off debentures and in November 1971 it was reported that all had been cleared.

In the running of any club, improvements and finance are inexorably linked. Whilst the club had no capital, at least all debts were being

cleared. In 1970 the President Jack Knight, considering the time right, put forward suggestions for a building expansion to include a new bar, lounge and toilets. The suggestion was put to an extraordinary General Meting thirty voting in favour and two against. A decision was then made that the building would include two squash courts and an Indoor rink. A circular to all members asking them to lend money for the project resulted in twenty one replies promising £1,400. In June 1971 a unanimous vote to proceed was given at a further General Meting.

There were, however, insufficient funds available. It was recorded in October 1971 that it might be necessary to look into selling the ground to Yeovil Hospital and leasing the green and clubhouse from them. Whether this was a serious suggestion or was made to spur members into activity is not known.

The project would alter the whole nature of the club. The Ladies outdoor green was being sacrificed, squash and indoor bowls were being introduced and membership would increase alarmingly. This, and the cost was causing concern and the President had to resell the idea to members, who in the main were not enthusiastic. He eventually won their support. The President also did some hard bargaining and obtained ready cash from the following sources:

Sports Council £10,000 grant,

Yeovil Borough Council - £12,000 interest free loan

Bass Charrington - £3,000 interest free loan

Bowls Club members - £4,700 interest free loan

Bank - £4,000 at Bank rate.

Building commenced in 1973 and in November squash members were called in to form a Squash Section before the building was completed. Squash was first played on the 1st May 1974 whilst the bar and Indoor

Rink were opened on the 1st September 1974.

The next development was initiated by the Squash Section who developed at such a rate that by 1978 they were requesting an additional court. There were doubts as to the advisability of this as it would necessitate taking part of the tennis courts.

Indoor Bowls was also thriving and the Section requested that in the event of a building extension they should have improved facilities. The Club Council then asked the Section to present a feasibility plan for indoor rinks on the ground occupied by the tennis courts. Four or five rinks were initially considered but this would have taken up all of the space available for car parking. At an A.G.M. in April, 1980 it was resolved that there should be one squash court and indoor rinks. By forty eight votes to twenty it was agreed that there should be three rinks rather than two. In April, 1981 it was decided to ballot all bowlers before proceeding. Ninety nine voted for three rinks, twenty nine for two and a surprising forty four voted for the status quo.

It was then agreed to go ahead with the joint project, at a cost of £75,000, and the new three indoor rinks and squash court were opened on the 1st October, 1981.

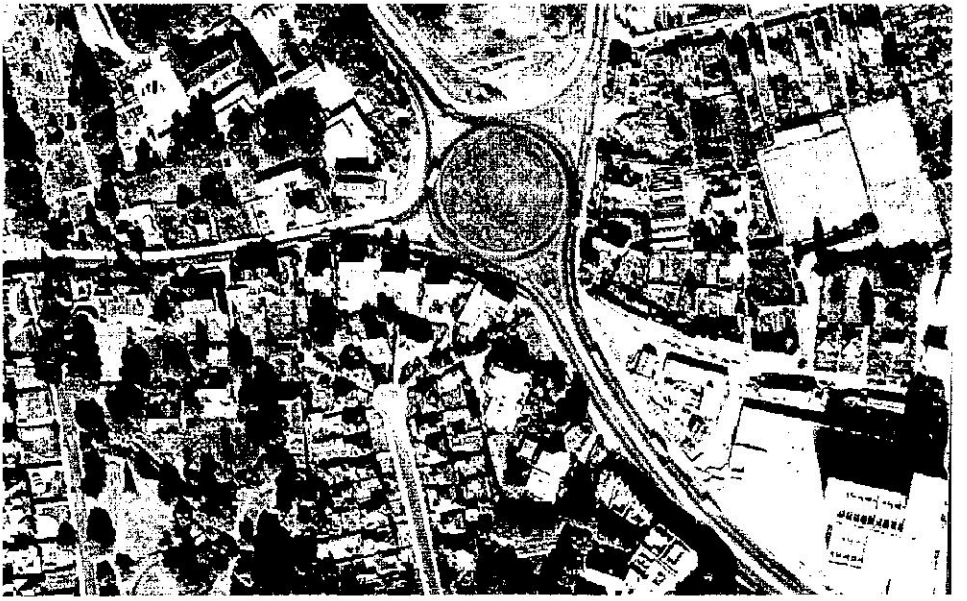
For a time the single rink was used for training purposes but the bar facilities were proving to be inadequate for the increased membership and in April, 1984 a Steering Committee was appointed to consider and make recommendations on extending the bar. At an A.G.M. in April, 1985 the extension, costing £11,000, was approved by the narrow margin of forty two votes to thirty eight. It was completed within a few months.

In addition to major improvements the club had to deal with normal maintenance. Attention had to be given to particular problems which were roof leaks, flooding of both outdoor and indoor rinks and lighting and heating of the indoor rinks. Minor improvements included the refurbishing of the kitchen in 1991, a new indoor carpet, the provision of watering systems for the outdoor

green and, in 1995, paving around it.

A further bar lounge was first suggested in 1993 and this extension which incorporates a viewing window to the indoor green was opened on the 1st September 1996.

There is now, little room left for expansion but there may be some for improvement. Car parking is likely to remain a problem and a survey in 1993 referred to there being a life span of maintenance to wooden buildings, an issue which may have to be addressed in the future.



Aerial photograph circa 1969, showing men and ladies greens and tennis courts right of roundabout.

The Squash Section

Squash within the club commenced in 1974 with 169 members. The Club owes a debt to a few players who have run and controlled the Squash as an independent section since its inauguration. The Section was formed at a time when Squash was becoming extremely popular and the section had no difficulty in increasing. By July their numbers had increased to 237 and the section pronounced that they were full. They did increase still further in 1977 to 250 but this was thought to be too many and it was decided to reduce to 200.

The Section felt a need to expand and this resulted in the number of courts being increased from two to three in 1981 with a corresponding increase in membership to 376. This growth, or high rate of membership, was not maintained as squash either lost some of its popularity or more facilities in other places were available. By 1990 numbers were reduced to 317 and there was a steady decline until 1993 when numbers were down to 185. Whilst there have been some small fluctuations the membership in 1998 is still around 185.

Indoor Bowls

Indoor Bowls started in 1974 with a single rink, and the club immediately affiliated to the E.I.B.A. and the newly-formed Somerset County Association. To ensure constant use of the rinks leagues were formed. During the evening 16 men's teams played whilst in the afternoon there were nine senior citizens and eight ladies' teams. The cost of playing was £1.20 per team for a two hour session but this was increased to £1.60 before the end of the first season. In 1976 the annual income from Indoor Bowls was £1,160.

With the introduction of three rinks in 1981 a new era began for Indoor Bowls. Players were attracted from a wide area, some from as far afield as Weymouth, Gillingham and Shaftesbury. We are grateful to these players who in the early days contributed to our success and remained with us until indoor rinks were built nearer to their home clubs. We are even more indebted to players from Castle Cary, Queen Camel, Sherborne and Westlands who have never had an indoor green, and have remained with us throughout. They are now as much a part of Yeovil Indoor Bowls Club as members from Yeovil Outdoor Bowls,

A few members volunteered to run courses for learners. These were advertised. The success of this venture can be judged by the fact that, not only did we attract a large number of new members, but some have since been club champions at both the indoor and outdoor games.

The number of league teams was increased to 84 and to attract players a scale of charges was made so that it was cheaper to play at times thought to be less popular. Individual charges for two hour sessions were 30p for mornings, 40p afternoons and 50p evenings. There was a gradual evolvement and in 1988 charges were standardised at 60p per

person. In 1990 they were set at one pound per person. The number of league teams has meanwhile increased to 136 and the income from the section in 1997 was £28,000.

There has been some playing success for the club. A team won the Wilf Miller Trophy in 1988, this being the only men's County Championship. The ladies have been successful in winning a number of County Indoor titles.

The outstanding player has again been Edna Bessell who has been an Indoor International from 1989 continuously up to and including the present time. In 1988 she was the National Singles losing finalist. As a result she took part in an International tournament in which she was again the Singles runner-up. Mary Taylor, Edna Bessell and Maureen James were runners-up in the National Triples Competition in 1984.

The introduction of Indoor Bowls played on one rink caused some teething problems, the ladies requesting evening play and requiring additional space which the men were not prepared to concede.

In 1981 a request, by the ladies to be represented on the Indoor Committee was rebuffed by the men. They asserted that if the Committee contained ladies, affiliation to both the S.C.I.B.A. and E.I.B.A. would be refused.

It rapidly became obvious to some that it was necessary for men and ladies to work closer together. Due to their efforts, the Indoor Committee now has proportional representation of ladies and men, all being eligible to stand as officers of the committee.

Perhaps at last, it can truly be said, that the hope expressed by the Mayor in 1909, has been fully achieved!

Members have played their part in National and County organisation. The current treasurer of the E.I.B.A, is a member of the Yeovil club whilst both the men and ladies have each supplied two presidents to their county organisations.

There is no doubt that the major success of Indoor Bowls has been its growth, resulting in so many people deriving considerable pleasure from the facilities.

Conclusion

The history of Yeovil Bowls Club is one of continual progress. There is no doubt that each improvement has increased facilities and, in some cases, the affluence of the club.

It is apparent that many members have been involved in the growth of the club. Some have been Presidents, others have been made Life Members for their efforts. Not to be forgotten are the vast number of club members, some of whom, have given just a few hours of their time. Others have applied themselves to tasks requiring much more time and dedication. They have sought no recognition and in many cases received none, but without their efforts the club would not have progressed in the way it has.

Due to the vision, dedication and hard work of so many over the past ninety years we can look forward to the future with confidence.