

WOODCOCK PARK BOWLING CLUB

A Brief Historical Review

Club founded in 1953

While the prime intention of this document is to record as far as possible the historical background of Woodcock Park Bowling Club, perhaps it would be as well to start with a brief review of the local history of the area within which the Club is situated; namely Kenton and Woodcock Hill.

According to some references, Kenton dates back to Saxon times and one account suggests the name is derived from a Saxon farmer named COENA and the Saxon word for farm which was TUN. In the 13th century it was spelt either Keninton or Kennington.

In the early 19th century the hamlet of Kenton was centred around the Kenton Grange estate on which a mansion of that name had been built by one John Lambert. It is part of that estate which today we know as Woodcock Park. Kenton Grange appears to have changed hands on several subsequent occasions and more recent occupants were John Gwynne, a lover of horses and a sportsman; also Albert Jeffress whose son Joseph, as some of our members may recall, was a miniature railway enthusiast. It was he who built and ran the narrow gauge track and rolling stock in the grounds of the Grange. Members living in the area during the mid to late 1930's may recall the annual fair held in the grounds of the Grange just off Gooseacre Lane, also the small village school located nearby.

Woodcock Hill was originally called Woodcock Hill Lane and, according to one reference, the name Woodcock is said to derive from an old English word WOODCOT, meaning someone living in a cottage within or adjacent to a farm. There is no doubt of the existence of several farms in the area, one of which, Woodcock Hill Farm, is said to date back two or three centuries. References indicate that around the mid 19th century it was purchased from Lord Northwick by a Nathaniel Kinch. The farmhouse backed onto what we now know as the Ridgeway and remained there until the late 1950's when it was purchased by the local building firm of Costin and demolished for continuing residential development.

N.B. Ruby Kinch and her sister Marjorie, although not members of our Club, did support our winter evening whist drives and are grand-daughters of the above Nathaniel Kinch. It is also worth noting that Sheepcote Farm, on which site now stands Northwick Park Hospital, was farmed by one Tom Smith, the maternal grandfather of Ruby and Marjorie Kinch.

Many of our local road names originate either from family names such as Northwick, Churchill, Rushout, Kinch, Spencer, etc., or from the Cotswold area, e.g. Ebrington, Donnington, Ilmington, Draycot, etc.

Kenton station was opened in June 1912 and Northwick Park station opened in June 1923.

The foregoing notes provide only the briefest insight to our local history and are offered only as a prefix to the attempted biography which follows.

THE CLUB:

Although founded in 1953 the history of the Club really begins in 1938 when Bill Harrison, the Founder, had discussions with the then Wembley Borough Council, regarding the

laying down of a bowling green in Woodcock Park. At this time he had the backing of Councillor Harold Sirkett, one time Leader of the Council and eventually one of the original Vice Presidents of this Club. Also involved in these discussions was one Sidney Newlands, another Wembley Councillor and at one time Recorder at the Old Bailey.

In 1938/9 work was started on digging the foundations for the green but was abandoned due to the outbreak of the Second World War. During the period of the war it is understood the site of our present pavilion was used as an ARP (Air Raid Precautions) Post and was known as Post 17. This Post was also used by local Fire Watchers and some of their training exercises were carried out on the area which is now our green. Many of the original Club members were men associated with Post 17, the Fire Watchers and St John's Church. It is worth noting here that the Club's first fixture was a game played against a team from St John's Church.

Some of our Senior Citizen members will no doubt recall that just after the war, a number of prefabricated houses were erected on the Shaftesbury Avenue side of Woodcock Park and remained there for some years. Work on the green and pavilion was eventually recommenced and was completed about six years after the end of the war.

As already mentioned, W(Bill) F.Harrison was the prime mover in the formation of our Club, and this at a time when he was a member of Kenton Bowling Club. (see reference to Harrison Shield game under 'Competitions' section). With the green and pavilion completed the Inaugural Meeting of the Club was held in the Bowls Pavilion, Woodcock Park, on 30th January 1953 at which time certain Club Officers were elected and a Constitution agreed. Later that year, on the 30th October the first AGM was held. At this meeting it was agreed the following Club Competitions be introduced:-

Championship, Singles Handicap, Two Wood Handicap and Pairs Handicap.

It does appear the 1954 season achieved a full match programme with most games being played on a Home and Away basis against the following Clubs and Associations:-

St John's Church

H.& D.B.A. Executive

Alperton

Harrow*

C.B.A. Waterlows

Lupton*

Preston Park*

H.M.S.O. Wealdstone

Carreras Harefield

'1571' Club Harrow Weald

Stanmore L.N.E.R.

G.E.C. Northolt

Kenton Osram

Culver

Wembley

*Indicates fixtures which are still played today as Club or Vets' matches.

At the first AGM it was agreed the Club should affiliate to the Francis Drake Fellowship, (FDF), a benevolent association whose purpose has always been to provide help and some financial assistance to members of affiliated clubs and/or their spouses should they be unfortunate enough to fall upon hard times. As members of the FDF we paid an annual capitation fee from our annual Club subscriptions, and for which each Club member received a small lapel badge. For many years one of our late members, Phil Webster, was an enthusiastic supporter of the FDF and for several years, in addition to being our Club delegate, was also a member of the FDF Committee. The Club is no longer affiliated.

Another matter raised at the first AGM was a reference to Lady bowlers. At that time it was agreed the Ladies be allowed use of the green on Tuesday evenings, but a proposal for a 'Mixed Club' was defeated by 28 votes to 1.

In the beginning the Club was formally named WOODCOCK PARK (POST 17) BOWLING CLUB. It appears that there was subsequently some dissent among members about this and at the second AGM in October 1954 it was agreed the (POST 17) part be dropped and the Club be called WOODCOCK PARK BOWLING CLUB from then onwards.

In the early years up to and including 1963, the AGM's were held in the Bowls Pavilion, Woodcock Park. Thereafter the venue changed to St John's Church Hall, Woodcock Hill. It was not until 1990 that the AGM was again held in our Bowls Pavilion.

A facet of Club activity in the early years was an annual, one day, outing to a Bowls Club outside the locality and usually one situated on the South Coast. The first reference to these outings was in 1958 and continued until 1965 when nothing further was recorded in this connection. Venues included Bexhill, Folkestone, Hove, Hastings and Brighton.

Although nothing appears to be specifically recorded, it is assumed affiliation to outside Associations such as E.B.A., C.B.A. and H.& D.B.A. occurred early on and, as nothing really changes, it is interesting to note that at the 1964 AGM, the Captain reported that as so many members played in outside games last season it was very difficult to raise Club teams for matches.

In the history of the Club to date, three members have held the office of H.& D.B.A. President. In 1969 this office was accorded to Charles Osborne, in 1985 to Bob Olds and in 1992 to Fred Alder.

The mid 1960's saw a significant change in local government when the then Wembley Borough Council was superseded by a wider spread London Borough of Brent, to whom the green and pavilion belong and under whose auspices we continue to function.

Coaching new bowlers is something to which we at Woodcock Park, along with most other Clubs, attach great importance. However it was not always held in such regard as instanced by a G.P.C. minute in 1968 which recorded the following:-

"BOWLING INSTRUCTION FOR NEW MEMBERS

It was generally agreed in theory that something should be done for new members. Previous experience had however shown that attempted class instruction would fail. Members individually promised to watch new members as opportunities occurred".

Subsequent to the above minute, Charles Osborne offered to instruct new members. A more enlightened attitude prevailed around 1975 when Ted Arrell, our first qualified Coach, started organised coaching for beginners. Since that time other members have become qualified instructors including Bob Olds, Brian Elbourn, Alan Eames and Ron Grey. These days qualified coaching is widely accepted as an essential part of a new bowler's introduction to the game.

There are a number of artefacts around the Club to remind us of past members. One of these is a purpose made box in which our six Jacks are kept. This was presented to the Club in 1968 by one of our Lady members, Gladys Charlesworth, in memory of her late husband Cyril, a member from 1963 - 7. Many of our Honours Boards were also presented by past and present members.

The London Parks Bowling Association has always been highly regarded and in 1970 it was agreed we should affiliate to that association. However this affiliation was short lived and was discontinued in 1973.

The Club blazer badge is an item worthy of note, particularly as some of our newer members might wonder why it is we appear to have two separate designs. The badge currently regarded as the official design is the one originally agreed and worn when the Club was founded and today is referred to as the Founders Badge. In 1972 it appears that some members felt a change was called for and a new design was agreed and introduced. This depicted a bird in flight, (presumably a Woodcock), on a Blue background above the initials WPBC and the three County Sabres on a Red background. It was recognised that some members would wish to continue wearing their Founders Badge, and as there still remained some stock of this latter, it was tacitly agreed that either could be worn although the new design was now the official one. At the 1987 AGM the question of badge design was again debated and it was agreed we should revert to the Founders Badge as the official version, although again it was recognised that both types would continue to be worn for some time to come.

Until the 1980's a traditional feature of the Club calendar was the end of season Supper Dance at which time Cups and Trophies were presented to the various competition finalists, both Men and Ladies. Prior to 1973, two annual functions were held; one a Supper, usually held around March time; the other a Dinner Dance, held at the end of the season. After 1973 these two functions were amalgamated to form the end of season Supper Dance. Although, in 1974, the then Club Secretary reported falling support for this event, it survived and revived for several years, thanks largely to that same Secretary, Jimmy Mason, but from about the early 1980's onwards the numbers again fell away to a point where it was no longer a viable event. The annual Supper Dance was then superseded by the Presentation Buffet held in the Bowls Pavilion. The undoubted success of this style of presentation event was due in no small measure to the excellent catering provided by the Ladies Club members. The Club now enjoys an Annual Presentation Dinner at the Blue Check Restaurant in Bushey which is well attended.

Another traditional feature revived in 1976, is the President v Captain game with which we start our season. This fixture continues today and is open to all playing members wishing to play on the first Sunday of the season.

A change which occurred in 1975, to the advantage of the Club, concerns the use of the green on Fridays. Friday had always been kept exclusively as the day on which the Greenkeepers worked on the green and its surrounds. Prior to 1975 the green was rested

for the whole of this day and no play, other than outside, fixed date, competitions was allowed. In 1975 Brent Council agreed we could have use of the green on Fridays after 5pm, and Friday became sacrosanct as Club Night. No roll-ups or competitions, other than outside, fixed date events as before, could be played on that evening. For many years a mixed aggregate competition was played on Club Night. There is no longer a Club Night.

A matter of considerable concern to the G.P.Committee for many years was that of adequately insuring Club property. Due to the open location and vulnerability of our pavilion, most notable Insurance Companies were reluctant to offer any sort of cover or required a prohibitive premium to do so. With this in mind, our Treasurer in the mid 1970's, Will Smith, proposed that the Club should build up its own insurance fund. This was supported by the AGM in December 1975. In the following years this fund started to grow and the Ladies Club was invited to participate by payment of a small annual premium. This situation continued until the 1980's when changing conditions enabled us to obtain adequate cover from an insurance company specialising in the requirements of sports organisations such as ours, for an acceptable premium. In turn this released the Club Insurance fund to be used for other purposes.

By now the time had arrived when the G.P.Committee was starting to think about how best to celebrate the Club's Silver Jubilee Year in 1978 and a committee of Past Presidents was formed to make suitable recommendations. The President for Jubilee Year was Jimmy Mason; the Captain, Ron Grey. In addition to the usual programme of fixtures for the season, a number of extra evening games were also arranged to be played against combination teams composed of individual rinks from other Clubs in the District. Other special matches included games against M.C.B.A., F.D.F., and the Ladies; unfortunately we lost all three of these. In fact, although our Jubilee Year was a great success socially, our performance on the green in terms of scores fell a little short of our hopes and aspirations. From a total of forty games played, we won thirteen, lost twenty six and drew one; total shots for - 2430, total shots against - 2653. However these are only statistics and there is no doubt that members and visitors alike during Jubilee Year had a most enjoyable season. Inscribed ball pens were presented to all visiting players throughout the season.

In 1974, in order to foster and maintain social continuity during the winter months, when there was generally less contact between members, various activities such as afternoon and evening card games were started. Bingo and a variety of other games were played but, Tuesday afternoon Solo and Wednesday afternoon Whist Drives remained favourites.

During recent years and more especially since the mid-1980's, various projects concerned with improvements to the Pavilion and Club facilities generally, have been undertaken and completed by a number of our members. 1984 saw the in-filling of the veranda which hitherto had been a veritable wind tunnel during inclement weather. Today the veranda provides a very pleasant and sheltered area in which to sit and watch play. This project was partially funded by a legacy from the estate of George Walker, one of our late members. This is recorded on a small commemorative plaque located in the veranda. The next major project occurred in 1986 when a Portacabin was purchased by the Club members for the sole purpose of providing a men's locker room and changing area. It had long been felt that the practice of members and visitors having to change in the main pavilion area was undesirable on many counts. The purchase of a Portacabin was thought to be the most equitable solution and proved to be so. Funding for this project was obtained via interest free loans from members, all of which have since either been repaid or donated by the members. In 1990 the kitchen area was completely updated by the

purchase and fitting of new cupboard units etc., and having two existing pantries knocked into one; two serving hatches were provided at the same time. The main pavilion area was also extensively redecorated and a border of carpet tiles laid around the floor. The forming of the two hatches and the basic building work for the pantry refit was contracted to a local builder but the remainder of the work was again undertaken by a small band of Club members. Funding for much of this work was obtained by using some of the hitherto 'Insurance Fund', while some of the refinements such as the carpet tiles and a music centre were funded by direct donations from members to an 'Amenity Fund'. These latest improvements prompted some members to question whether or not the Club should apply for a drinks licence and use the newly formed pantry area as a small bar. The membership voted on this on two separate occasions and both times the motion was defeated.

Our chronicle would not be complete without some reference to the Woodcock Park Ladies Bowling Club and our own Veterans section.

THE LADIES CLUB:-

While the formation of the Ladies Club dates back to much the same time as the Men's Club, it is neither convenient nor intended to attempt here the same depth of historical review. Suffice it to say that they were always substantially self-governing with their own Officers and Committee; their own Constitution; their own Competitions etc., albeit within certain constraints imposed by the Men's Club who, as the formal Council tenants of the premises, were responsible for the overall general management of the pavilion, the green and its surrounds, equipment etc. The merger of the Ladies and Men's clubs took place in 2003.

THE VETERANS SECTION:-

Within the general framework of the Club, the Vets' enjoyed their own full, mid-week programme of fixtures together with specific Vets' competitions. They managed their own affairs in a semi-autonomous manner but have always been essentially an integral part of the Club and its history in all aspects. It does appear that organised Vets' matches started around 1959 and the following is a brief account of subsequent events and achievements:-

1967 Joined H.& D.B.A. Vets' League.

1969 Runners Up to Pinner B.C. in Vets' League

1970 Runners Up to Roxeth B.C. in Vets' League

1972 Beat Lyons B.C. in final of Vets' League

1974 Withdrew from H.& D. Vets' League

1977 Rejoined H.& D. Vets' League

1990 Beat Eastcote B.C. in final of Vets' League

2016 Came top of division 2 and promoted to division 1 for 2017

Until the 1980's the minimum eligible age limit for participation in the H.& D. Vets' League matches was 65, but this has now been reduced to 60. For some years the Vets' Section held its own AGM just prior to the end of the season, at which time, among other things, the Vets' Captain and Vice-Captain for the following year were elected. Now the

Vets' Captain is elected at the club AGM and is run as part of the overall club.

We should be pleased that over the last few years we have managed to increase our membership while other local clubs with declining memberships have had to close. These include Roxeth, Kenton, Kodak, Wembley and Culver.

So much for the past; what of the present and the future? Our current 'playing' membership maintains at around 80 Men and 20 Ladies which is below the maximum limit of 90 and 40 respectively, set a few years ago by the GPC although at a subsequent meeting these limits have been removed.

Our green continues to be one of the best in the District, thanks largely to the ministrations of our Greenkeepers; and together with its surrounds provides one of the most pleasant outlooks for both playing and watching the game of bowls.

In more recent times we have introduced other events to help with the club finances and promote more social activities for the members. Every year in late January we hold a quiz supper which has proved to be very popular. In 2017 over 160 people attended - the highest on record.

During the season we now hold an annual cream tea in June and a gala day in August and like to encourage as many members to attend as possible. In 2016 we held a few club afternoons which, in addition to some good games of bowls, a very nice tea is enjoyed. The club afternoons proved to be popular and in 2018 their frequency was increased to twice a month.

Of the future who can tell? We can only hope that in spite of rising costs, Brent Council will continue to maintain our green and premises as at present. Beyond this the future well-being of our Club rests as always, in the hands of its members.