

# WELCOME to ESSEX COUNTY BOWLS CLUB.

## The Club

In **1901** Southend Corporation purchased Chalkwell Park that contained a bowling green located on the present Garden of Remembrance site.

In **1906** a group of enthusiasts had formed themselves into a club and in May of that year the Essex County Bowling Club was established with an original membership of 78. The Club was formally inaugurated by the Mayor of Southend who opened the green and the Mayor's rolled the first jack. Alderman J C Ingram was elected as President of the Club.

Full use of the green was made in **1906** and it became obvious that, with an increase in membership, improved and larger accommodation for members and visitors would be necessary. For this purpose the Essex County Bowling Club Limited was formed with many members of the Club as shareholders and the present ground in Imperial Avenue, initially used as a Tennis Club, was purchased. The ground had a footage of 292 feet with a depth of 310feet.

One green measuring 120 feet was laid with Cumberland turf at a cost of **£250** and the original pavilion was built at a cost of **£350**. Subsequent generations owe a debt of gratitude to the pioneers of the Club for their foresight, generosity and public spirit in preserving for posterity a large space which otherwise would have fallen into the builder's hands.

The President of the Club from **1907 to 1909** was Mr. A W Robertson. On **6<sup>th</sup> July 1907** the South Green was officially opened in perfect weather and in the presents of 300 members, visitors and friends, the Mayor of Southend declared the green open and the first jack and woods were bowled. To mark the occasion a silver jack was presented to Mrs. Robertson as a souvenir of the opening ceremony. It was soon apparent that with the increase in membership a second green was required. The following year on **8<sup>th</sup> May 1908** the North green was completed and officially opened. A second silver jack was again presented to Mrs. Robertson as a souvenir of the occasion.

*Post script: This would have been the last that the Club would have known about the jacks until the Club received an e-mail on **11<sup>th</sup> February 2003** from the granddaughter of Mrs. A W Robertson. After the death of her grandmother they had been sent to Bonham's Auction Rooms with golfing cups and trophies but had not been sold. Her mother had kept the jacks and whilst clearing out the house prior to moving they were re-discovered. On reading the inscription showed that the jacks were unique, having been presented to the wife of the then former President of the Club. Currently the whereabouts of the silver jacks is only known to a few people.*

On **Sunday, 12 August 1917** a bomb fell on the adjoining tennis court and the south green was smothered by debris without serious damage being caused to the green.

From **1917 to 1927** there was an Annual competition or match between Essex County Bowling Club and Southend Bowling Club for a Shield presented by HP. Dodridge of Southend Bowling Club. The original company was later liquidated and the property was acquired by a great friend of the Club Mr. AW. Robertson and leased by him to the Club. Following his death in **1919** a new limited company was incorporated and the ground and premises re-purchased from his Executors by that company for £3250.

The North and South greens were both re-laid in **1922** at a cost of **£1450**, financed by an issue of debentures of £5 each taken up by members. Later, it was considered advisable to effect a fusion of the Club and the Limited Company with the arrangement being completed in February 1926 with the officers and the Club committee members becoming Directors of the Company.

In **November 1924** the pavilion was damaged by fire, the present pavilion was built on part of the ground then being used for tennis and croquet and opened by the Mayor on Presidents day in **June 1925**. The cost of **£2500** was covered by the issue of 500 non-interest bearing notes of £5 each repayable over five years- but in fact they were redeemed earlier. This building provided not only accommodation for the members but also for E.C.B.A. and L&S.C.B.A. who availed themselves of its facilities for their various contests, whilst it was used during the winter months for whist drives and dances arranged by the Club and other organisations in the Borough.

In 1928 G E Cutler, immediate Past President of Essex County Bowling Club, presented a Shield to be played for between Essex County, Bournemouth Park, Southend on Sea and Thorpe Bay Bowling Clubs on greens laid in Cumberland turf.

The original Social Club built on the west side of the ground in **1907** had been damaged by fire in **1924** and when it was decided to erect a new Social Club on the same site the members readily

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responded to the appeal for loans, with the result that the new Clubhouse costing £3400 was opened by the President of the Club in **May 1931**.

In **July 1931** the international matches of the English Bowling Association were played on the greens with teams from Scotland, Wales, Ireland and England, engaging in keen rivalry for three days - Wales being the eventual winners. Touring clubs from New Zealand, South Africa, Hong Kong, Canada and other parts of the Commonwealth have also been entertained here.

Like every other club in the U.K. austerities inflicted by two wars had to be endured with reduced membership and severe restriction of inter-club matches and social activities.

In **1956** the membership was **180** Full Paying Members and **60** Social Club Members.

In the mid sixties a number of members of the club, interested in playing Indoor Bowls during the winter months, got together with leading members of local clubs and negotiated a licence from the Essex County Bowling Club Limited and also obtained a Bank Guarantee from the Company which, together with monies raised by loans and bonds, enabled the E.C.I.B.C. to be formed as a separate club.

In **1968** play started in the newly erected Indoor Green in **January**. The Indoor Club had free use of the pavilion and kitchen, etc, until **1974** when arrangements were made between the E.C.B.C. and E.C.I.B.C. for an annual contribution to be made by the Indoor Club to the Outdoor Club.

In **1975**, as an experiment, at the instigation of Mr. "Puggy" Penn and Mr. Rex Gillard, the local headmasters of the local High Schools were contacted and in view of the interest shown a meeting at the Club was arranged with the Heads of Southend, Westcliff, Belfair's and Eton House Schools, together with the School's Sports Masters.

The Clubs ideas were placed before this meeting and all agreed it was a scheme worth trying which would add a further sport to the school's curriculum. It was stressed that it was not the Clubs intention to detract from existing sports but rather to give a wider scope.

As a result of this meeting, six boys presented themselves on an arranged date for a chat at the Club. Resulting from this, a session of instruction was arranged when the boys were asked to attend with correct attire. To show their enthusiasm, the entire six pupils presented themselves for coaching and the following year those six boys applied to become Cadet Member's of the Club. Of these original six all but one became full outdoor members. This pattern in following years prevailed with an average of six pupils enrolling each year maintaining a constant Cadet membership of approximately 20 members.

In **June 1977** the Club office was destroyed and the pavilion was seriously damaged by fire. The pavilion was re-roofed and repaired and brought back into use in **December 1977** but at the instigation of the President, Mr. L.W. Johnson, the opportunity was taken to build new toilets and convert the old toilets into offices with the help of a grant received from the Sports Council.

In **1980** the Indoor Club did not renew its licence so that as from **1<sup>st</sup> May 1980** all bowling was administrated by the E.C.B.C. as one Club divided into sections, i.e., Men Outdoor and Indoor, Ladies Indoor and Social.

During **1981** a new changing room was built for men of the Outdoor Section which enabled the old changing rooms to be converted into a carpet lounge area. In the same year an Automatic Water System for the greens was installed.

Further major improvements took place during **1985** when the new Bar was built, the Indoor Bowling Pavilion and lounge area were linked carpeted and furnished and the Indoor Pavilion ceiling was insulated.

In **1981/82** ECBC Ladies won the National YETTON TROPHY – the first time in their history.

In **1987** a further extension was added to the facility by the enlargement of the Men's changing room, which enabled the Ladies to move into a larger room, leaving their old room to be used as a conference room.

None of these many improvements required the Club to borrow money to finance them. The fillip given to the Sport through TV coverage resulted in full membership in all sections accompanied by a waiting list for new members.

All these many improvements have been carried out without the necessity for the Club to borrow money to finance them. The fillip given to Bowls through TV coverage has resulted in Full Membership and waiting lists for the Indoor Section which enables the Club to look towards the future with confidence.

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The severe storms of **1987** damaged the roof of the indoor arena resulting in the need for major repairs.

In **1989/90** ECBC Ladies again won the National YETTON TROPHY.

In **1991/92** Ev Schooling was the English Women's Indoor Bowling Association President.

In **1994/95** the Club won the National EGHAM Trophy competition for the first time in their history

The next major project was initiated by a proposal made at the **1998 Indoor AGM** to improve the lighting and heating in the indoor arena. This resulted in the Management Committee embarking on a major re-structure of the ceiling, lighting and heating system. A sub-committee was appointed to manage the project. The ceilings were lowered and diffuse lighting installed in accordance with the latest practice of the modern indoor arenas. Heating ducts were located under the roof structure and vented into the arena through the new ceiling. Installing a new carpet on the viewing area surrounding the rinks completed the project.

In **2002** a new carpet and underlay were installed.

In **2005** the old clubhouse was renovated, inside and outside by volunteers from the membership.

In **2006** Work was also carried out by members in refurbishing the existing clubhouse in readiness for the clubs centenary.

In **2006** During the Clubs Centenary year a number of top class events took place against Associations, clubs and guests. The indoor arena was decked out as a restaurant, for 243 guests, to hold the centenary dinner and entertainment.

In **2006/07** Ev Schooling was again the English Women's Indoor Bowling Association President.

In **2007** a substantial building project was approved. This was to replace the Green keepers workshop/storage building, erect a new office, new club entrance way and provide a disable toilet facility.

In **2008/09** John Andrews, Bobby Locke, Jim Bunce and Martyn Jackson became the Indoor National over 60's Fours Champions.

In **2009** it was identified that a new Aerator machine was required to maintain the state of the greens at a high level. The state of the greens had fallen way below the required standard not only for club members but also County and National matches. It was quantified by a visit of The Bowls England Green Maintenance Advisor and a new machine was subsequently purchased.

In **2009** Edward Morris gaining a place in the Junior England team.

In **2010** **David Johnson** became **President of Essex County Bowling Association.**

In **2010** club member **John Stewart** arranged for the National Police Association to hold their Championship at the club, with players from England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales participating. This event continued to be played at the club until 2015.

With the passing of the **Equality Act** in **2010** measures had to be taken to ensure the club was not in breach of the Act. A small sub-committee was set up to look into this matter and where necessary changes were made to the club constitution.

In **2010/11** ECBC Men won the National DENNY Cup Plate for the first time in their history.

In **2011** the South bank of the North Green collapsed and had to be replaced. The work required was carried out by club members.

Over the period **2012/2013** the banks of the North and South Greens collapsed and had to be replaced.

In **2012** due to the kitchen not meeting Health and safety criteria when inspected by the authorities a complete overall of the kitchen commenced and was completed in **2014**.

New gas heaters were fitted in the Indoor Arena.

In **2012/13** Jim Bunce was enrolled as Essex County Indoor Bowling Association President.

ECBC Men won the County League, Div. 1 title for the first time in their history.

ECBC Men won the L & SC Single rink.

In **2013** with the inauguration of the Equality Act and a falling in the outdoor member's numbers after one hundred years plus the members agreed to have a **Ladies Outdoor Section**.

In **2013** the club was dealt a financial blow by the Inland Revenue - "In their opinion the club did not meet the criteria of the Community Amateur Sports Club Scheme (CASC)". This meant that the club lost its 80% reduction in its Council rates bill.

In **2013** the Ladies changing room was renovated from funds provided by the Ladies Indoor Section.

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To provide an additional income the upper floor of the old clubhouse was leased to a private company.

The front fence facing the public highway had to be replaced due its bad condition. The work was carried out by club members Ian Jennings and Malcolm Artus.

To reduce electricity cost and increase income the Indoor Arena roof area was rented out to a company to house a range of solar panels.

In **2013** Ed Morris and Lloyd Sabatini winning the Outdoors National Pairs and were called up to the England National Trials

Ed Morris reaching the Outdoor National Singles Champion Semi-Finals.

The club also reached the Semi-Final of the Outdoor National Double Fours.

ECBA Singles Winner Ed Morris.

ECBA under 25 Singles Winner Lloyd Sabatini.

ECBA Secretary's Cup Winner David Dar.

The club also won the ECBA South Essex Fours, the ECBA Hood Cup, The ECBA Shield and ECBA Double Fours.

In **2014** Mrs Jackie Edwards inaugurated as the clubs first Lady President.

In **2014** a Ladies Outdoor section was created and with a membership of 2 ladies.

The Indoor Arena lighting was upgraded.

**2014** was a year where a number of issues had to be addressed regarding the upkeep of the Estate:-

- a. A complete replacement of the metal guttering of the old club house following a section collapsing during a storm.
- b. A complete survey of the sewage drainage was carried out to enable the problems being experienced to be resolved.

All of which meant a significant expenditure.

In **2014** Another successful year with both male and female outdoor members winning County and National honours.

Ed Morris was called up for National trials and James Fuge called up for under 18 National trials.

In **2014/15** ECBC Men again won the L & SC Single rink.

ECBC were runners up in the National Mixed Fours.

In **2015** Mrs. Evelyn Schooling was inaugurated as the clubs Lady President

In **2015** the **Policy Board** agreed that the men's toilet was in a sorry state and needed to be modernised and work commenced in September of that year.

Following a survey of the Indoor Arena floor, carpet and underlay it was also agreed that the Indoor carpet underlay should be replaced which was completed in time for the indoor season, cost £750.

In **2015** was again a success with Ed Morris becoming County Singles Champion and being called for national trials and finishing up representing England and James Fuge was called up for National U25 trials then going on to represent England.

In **2015/16** ECBC Ladies were runners up in the National Mason trophy.

ECBC Men again won the L & SC Single rink.

ECBC Men won the County League, Div. 1 title.

During the summer months of **2016** the Indoor arena undertook a total facelift involving: -

- upgraded electrical supply
- installation of air conditioning in the arena, restaurant/bar area and the office
- replacement LED lighting
- a new blue carpet
- walls & panelling re painted
- surrounding carpet cleaned

The bar area was also refurbished.

In **2016** unfortunately it was discovered after many inspections by different parties that the solar panels had been incorrectly fitted. This meant that remedial work had to be carried out on the solar panel anchorage to overcome the damage to the Indoor Arena roof. The cost of the remedial work was covered by the original installation company.

In **2016** Ed Morris was called up to represent England in a tournament held in Hong Kong.

Following this his success continued when he became the first player, since 1961, to successfully

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defend the County Singles Championship which he had won in 2015. James Fuge gained Junior International status.

In **2016** Ed Morris made his senior England debut.

In **2016/17** John Stewart won the National over 60's Singles.

In **2017** the clubs administration computer system was updated following the purchase of a software package – BOWLR. This allowed the tracking of matches to be processed easier and reducing the manual calculations as previously required. The new system was able to operate many of the necessary administration tasks previously carried out by the club office staff.

In **2017** Sue Kemp, Ed Morris, along with Elaine Score and Mark Nullmeyers won the National Mixed Fours.

In **2017/18** ECBC Men won the County, Div. 1 title.

John Stewart and John Andrews won the National over 60's Pairs.

Over the years the Club has produced winners over the wide range of both Indoor and outdoor County and National Club and individually entered competitions.