

# ECBC HISTORY

## The Club

In **1901** Southend Corporation purchased Chalkwell Park, which at the time contained a bowling green located on the present Garden of Remembrance site. It was not documented, though it is believed that this green was of ordinary lawn turf and merely offered a stepping stone to something more desirable.

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 Mayoress 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, until that time used as a Tennis Club, was purchased. The ground had a footage of 292 feet with a depth of 310 feet. 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 builders' hands. The President of the Club from 1907 to 1909 was Mr. A.W. Robertson.

On 6th July **1907** the South Green was officially opened in perfect weather and in the presence 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, the Club President, as a souvenir of the opening ceremony. A concert was held in the evening to conclude the day's festivities. The Club also has copies of the Southend and Westcliff Graphic's original detailed report on the occasion as part of our history display.

It was soon apparent that with the increase in membership a second green was required. The following year on 8th 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 11th February 2003 from the granddaughter of Mrs. A W Robertson. After the death of her grandmother the jacks 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. Reading the inscription showed her that the jacks were unique, having been presented to the wife of the then President of the Club. At that time the whereabouts of the silver jacks was only known to a few people. Shortly after correspondence between the Club and Mrs. Robertson's family, the family decided to graciously donate the jacks back to the Club, where they remain to this day on display.*

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 match between Essex County Bowling Club and Southend Bowling Club for a Shield presented by HP. Dodridge of Southend Bowling Club, which can be found on display in the Club to this day. In 1928 Mr G E Cutler, immediate Past President of Essex County Bowling Club, presented a new Shield to be played for between Essex County, Bournemouth Park, Southend on Sea and Thorpe Bay Bowling Clubs on greens laid in Cumberland turf. This competition, suitably known as the Cutler Shield, is still played to this day and now incorporates all of the private bowling clubs in the Southend borough.

The original Limited company was later liquidated and the property was acquired by a great friend of the Club, the previously mentioned Mr. A.W. 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 completely 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.

The original Social Club, built on the west side of the ground in 1907, had been damaged by the fire in 1924. When it was decided to erect a new Social Club on the same site the members readily responded to the appeal for loans. The new Clubhouse, costing £3,400, was opened by the President of the Club in May **1931** (to coincide with the Club's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary). The following description was lifted from a handbook shortly after this time: *"The Social Club is entered from a small lounge from which runs an oak staircase. Opening out from the former is a large lounge elegantly furnished. Beyond is a reading and writing room. The floors throughout are of polished oak and the panelling of Oregon pine. A card room, service room and lavatories are also on the ground floor. Above is a second card room and a billiard room with three tables, two of which were presented to the Club."*

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 the second world war the Club suffered severely owing to the general evacuation, nearly three-

quarters of the population having left the borough. The membership dropped from 200 to 70, and the usual matches and social engagements reduced to a minimum. From **1941** to the close of the war, however, members gradually returned and by economy and the generosity and devotion of friends and members, the financial position of the Club which had materially suffered was re-established and full membership attained.

In **1956** (the Club's Golden Jubilee year) the membership was 180 Full Playing Members and 60 Social Club Members.

In the mid-**1960s** a number of members of the Club, interested in playing Indoor Bowls during the winter months, made the first steps towards this vision becoming reality. The full timeline of events is as follows:

The first planning permission to build the Indoor bowling arena was received in late **1964**, with an original proposed starting date for bowling of October 1965 and a cost estimated at £10,000. In the Committee's letter to the membership regarding this project they assured the members that the indoor game "provides excellent sport and recreation during the long winter months and is a close second(!) to the outdoor game".

In **1966** the project had still not fully got off the ground. Members of the Club got together with leading members of the other local outdoor clubs to form a sub-committee moving forwards. They now estimated the cost of the project to be in the region of £30,000 – which they were looking to raise as soon as possible by various means. Included in these were brand new Indoor membership categories as follows:

*FOUNDER MEMBERS* – Subscribers were required to furnish a minimum of £250. This entitled them to free annual subscription for life and free green fees for life.

*LIFE MEMBERS* – Subscribers were required to furnish a minimum of £50. This entitled them to free annual subscription for life.

*INITIAL MEMBERS* – Subscribers were required to furnish £5.5.0, their entrance fee, and were excused their first year's annual subscription of £3.3.0.

Ladies were originally charged a lower annual subscription of £2.2.0 due to less availability to the green.

Only a few months later, in early **1967**, the fund had reached £10,000 (contributed by 270 local bowlers). As such a sizeable loan was anticipated to be necessary, repayable over a ten year period. However, the possibility of a government grant was being investigated too.

Later in the year, a licence was negotiated from the Essex County Bowling Club Limited and the sub-committee also obtained a Bank Guarantee from the Company which, together with other monies raised by a bank loan of £18,000, bonds and donations, ultimately enabled the Essex County Indoor Bowling Club to be formed as a separate club.

In **1968** play finally 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.

Following this vast expense, insufficient funds were available to provide separate dressing rooms or toilets to the Indoor section. A corridor had to be used as a changing room and the small toilets of the Outdoor Club were used by the members and visitors to the Indoor Club. In **1974** new changing rooms were built to accommodate the 650 men and 225 ladies of the Indoor Club at a cost of £5,000 – the finance for which was provided by another issue of loan units of an amount which also enabled the original bank loan to be repaid.

In **1975**, as an experiment, at the instigation of Mr. “Puggy” Penn and Mr. Rex Gillard, the 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, Belfairs and Eton House Schools, together with the School’s Sports Masters. The Club’s ideas were placed before this meeting and all agreed it was a scheme worth trying which would add a further sport to the schools’ 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, all six of the pupils presented themselves for coaching and the following year those six boys applied to become the first Cadet Members of the Club. Of these original six all but one became full outdoor members in due course. This pattern prevailed in the following years with an average of six pupils enrolling each year maintaining a constant Cadet membership of approximately 20 members.

In June **1977** a fire (caused by vandals breaking into the pavilion) completely destroyed the Secretary's office and extensive damage to the pavilion was sustained, as well as the loss of all records. The pavilion was re-roofed and repaired and brought back into use in December 1977 but at the instigation of the President, Mr. LW. 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.

At 1977, the Club’s membership consisted of 230 Outdoor members, 875 Indoor members (650 men, 225 ladies) and 70 social members.

In **1980** the Indoor Club did not renew its licence so that as from 1st May 1980 all bowling was administrated by the E.C.B.C. as one Club divided into sections, i.e. Men Outdoor, Men 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. This was pre-planned many years in advance so that it coincided with our 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary. In the same year an Automatic Water System for the greens was installed, costing £4,700. 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, all at a cost of £44,000. 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. Incredibly, none of these many improvements required the Club to borrow money to finance them.

The fillip and popularity given to the Sport through increased TV coverage resulted in membership for all sections being at capacity, accompanied by a waiting list for new Indoor members; as such, the Club was able to look towards the future with confidence.

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

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

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 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 the Indoor arena.

In **2005** the old (social) 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 Club's centenary year and celebrations. During the 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 Evelyn Schooling was the English Women's Indoor Bowling Association President for a second time.

In **2007** a substantial building project was approved. This was to replace the Greenkeeper's workshop/storage building, erect a new Club Office, new Club entrance way and provide a disabled toilet facility.

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 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. Since then the Club has made every effort to ensure we have the best quality greens possible.

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

since returned, with competitors remarking how exceptional our facilities are and how well looked after they are!

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 **2011** the South bank of the North Green collapsed and had to be replaced. The work required was carried out entirely by club members. Over 2012 and 2013 various other banks of the North and South Greens collapsed and had to be replaced.

In **2012** the kitchen was found to not meet current Health and Safety criteria when inspected by the authorities. A complete overhaul of the kitchen commenced and was completed in 2014.

In the same year, in order to provide an additional income to the Club, the upper floor of the old clubhouse was leased to a private company. This company maintained their tenancy right up until 2020, whereby they left and were replaced by another company. Such revenue is key to keeping other costs down elsewhere within the Club.

In **2013** with the recent inauguration of the Equality Act and falling outdoor members numbers, after one hundred years plus the members agreed to have a Ladies Outdoor Section for the first time. Membership rates were kept deliberately low in the first instance to encourage growth in the section and membership was immediately taken up by a very good number of ladies.

In the same year the Club was dealt a serious 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. Following this decision, members of the Club's Policy Board worked tirelessly to get the Club reinstated back into this scheme. A huge number of hours were worked, completely voluntarily, in order to do this and the Club can show a great deal of thanks to those involved.

Also in 2013 the Ladies changing room was renovated from funds provided by the Ladies Indoor Section.

In **2014**, in order to reduce the Club's electricity consumption/costs, the Indoor Arena roof area was rented out to a company to house a range of solar panels.

Also in 2014, following the inception of the Outdoor Ladies section the previous year, Mrs Jackie Edwards was inaugurated as the Club's first Lady President.

2014 was a year where a number of issues had to be addressed regarding the upkeep of the Estate, all of which meant a significant expenditure:-

- a. A complete replacement of the metal guttering of the old clubhouse, 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.

c. 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.

In **2015** the Policy Board agreed that the men's toilet was in a sorry state and needed to be modernised. Work commenced in September of that year. In 2019, following continued blockages and other problems, these toilets were renewed once again.

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 playing carpet
- walls & panelling re painted
- surrounding carpet thoroughly cleaned
- bar area refurbishment

Around the same time, 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 **2017** the Club's administration computer system was updated following the purchase of a software package – BOWLR. This allowed the whole process of running Indoor Leagues and Competitions to become much more streamlined, without the many manual calculations as previously required. The new system was also able to operate many of the necessary administration tasks previously carried out by the club office staff.

In **2018** the Indoor Section of the Club celebrated its Golden Jubilee. This encompassed many prestigious games against other Clubs and Associations, including the EIBA. We also had a dinner and dance to mark the occasion.

In **2019** both the Ladies and Mens toilets got a most welcome modernisation by way of a complete refitting. These were the only major projects during that year.

## **Competitions**

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

The full Outdoor Club Honours can be found here -

<https://www.essexcountybowlsclub.com/files/clubhonours.pdf>

The full Indoor Club Honours can be found here -

<https://www.essexcountybowlsclub.com/files/indoorclubhonours.pdf>

However some of the highlights from over the years are as follows:

## **Outdoors**

### **National/International**

The Club's first National success came in 1960, where the quartet of P Smith, G Brigstock, R Stevens and A Pratt lifted the National Fours trophy, beating a team from Durham in the final 25-11.

Next came a success in the National Pairs in 1989 for Paul Maynard and David McCathie, overcoming a team from Lancashire in the final 25-16.

Rather improbably, the title returned to the Club in 2013, with the Cadet/Ex-Cadet partnership of Lloyd Sabatini and Edward Morris triumphing 21-16 in the final vs Northumberland.

In 2017, Club members Sue Kemp and Edward Morris triumphed in the National Mixed Fours event, with teammates from The Springhouse and Wanstead Central.

Edward Morris won his first Singles National title in 2018 in the 2-Wood event, winning the Final 14-13 after a tense extra end.

In 2019 Edward Morris won the most prestigious event in English bowling, the National Singles – a first success for the Club in this competition. As such he will also be the first player from the Club to compete in the World Champion of Champions Singles later in 2020. He beat multiple World and European Champion Jamie Walker from Northamptonshire in the final, one of 5 international players he faced throughout the competition.

Edward Morris was also awarded the title of Bowls England Bowler of the Year in 2017 and 2019.

Multiple players from the Club were also involved in Essex successes in the Balcomb Trophy (County Top Two Fours) in 2017 and White Rose Trophy (County U25 Top Two Fours) in 1993, 1995, 2008 and 2016.

We have twice come within a whisker of lifting a Club National Title, losing in the final of the Club Two Fours in both 2010 and 2014.

The list of International Players from the Club is as follows:

**Full International Players**

1928-1932, 1934, 1938	A. Brown
1932-1933, 1938	F.W. Gibbon
2016, 2018-	E.P. Morris

**Junior (U25) International Players**

1990-1993	P.J. Maynard	(Captain in 1993)
1992-1994	S.J. Cooper	
1996	A.R. Blake	
2009	E.P. Morris	
2016	J.A.L. Fuge	

**U18 International Players**

2015	J.A.L. Fuge
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In 2016 Edward Morris was called up to represent England in international tournaments held in Hong Kong and China, achieving a Bronze medal in the Hong Kong event.

## County

Our first ever County competition success came in 1909, the inaugural season for County competitions, where the only competitions were the Singles, Fours and Double Fours. Mr. R. Jack (a good name for a bowler!) won the first County Singles representing Essex County. Since then, many more competitions have been added over the years – Our full record in all County competitions is as follows:

Competition	Titles	Notes
Singles	8	When Edward Morris retained the title in 2016 he was the first player to win consecutive titles for 55 years!
Pairs	9	4 titles in first 98 years, 5 titles in past 8 years. 1989 was an all-Essex County final.
Triples	3	The last of the 'Open' Championship events to be won by the Club, in 1965.
Fours	10	The Club's most successful of the Championship events.
2-Wood Singles	1	Commenced in 2012.
U25 Singles	10	Commenced in 1995, 10 successes in 24 is testament to the Cadet system at the Club and its productivity in terms of competitive bowling.
Double Fours	9	The Club had 4 successes up to 2011, whereby we astonishingly won the title in 4 consecutive years, a record.
Shield	15	We have had success in every decade since the 1960s, which perfectly illustrates our strength in depth over the years, as this competition is played over 4 rinks.
Benevolent Singles	5	3 different winners from the Club in the past 4 years.
Secretaries Singles	6	First success in 1985, followed by 5 wins between 2013-2018.
South Essex Fours	4	The winners play the North Essex Fours champions for the Hood Cup, which we have won 3 out of the 4 occasions.
Unbadged Singles	2	Often described by bowlers as one of the most difficult competitions to win due to the vast number of entrants.

The County Championship events, lead on to the Eastern Counties Championships where the Club boasts the following winners:

Under 25 Singles – A Lyons (2003)

Pairs – J Fuge & E Morris (2018)

2-Wood Singles – E Morris (2018)

## Indoors

### **National/International**

Our first major individual entry Indoor National Title was won by the trio of P Guyot, S Hooper and A Thorpe in the National Triples in 1975/76, beating Atherley in the Final.

In 1987/88 Wendy Barker and Evelyn Schooling were runners up in the National Pairs.

We had to wait until 2008/09 until our next success for John Andrews, Bobby Locke, Jim Bunce and Martyn Jackson in the first ever National Over 60's Fours competition.

In 2014/15 Sue Kemp, Natasha Patient, Neil Jackson and Edward Morris were runners up in the National Mixed Fours, losing to future World Champion Mark Dawes (Blackpool) in the Final.

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

In 2017/18 John Stewart added to his success the previous season, along with John Andrews won the National Over 60's Pairs.

We have also had a number of **team** titles over the years:

In 1981/82 ECIBC Ladies won the Yetton Trophy and followed that success by winning the same competition again in 1989/90.

In 1994/95 the Club won the Egham Trophy. This is played with 8 men and 8 ladies.

In 2010/11 ECIBC Men won the Denny Plate, beating Lincoln & District in the Final, held at Falcon in front of a partisan crowd.

In 2015/16 ECIBC Ladies were runners up in the Mason Trophy.

### **International Players**

#### Men – Juniors

1989/90 - 1994/95	S.J. Cooper
1989/90	P.J. Maynard
1996/97	A.R. Blake

#### Ladies – Senior

1986/87 – 1994/95	E. Schooling
1986/87	P. Spurgeon
1993/94	W. Barker

## County

It only took us 2 seasons of play to win the first of many County Titles, with success in the Fours. As with Outdoors, many further competitions were added over the years. Our record in each is as follows:

Competition	Titles	Notes
Champion of Champions Singles	12	11 of which were won by the great Richard Hart (18-time Club Champion between 1980-2005).
Champion of Champions Pairs	4	By 8 different players, in 4 different decades.
Triples	11	Including 3 consecutive success for R. Hart, M. Freeborn & A. Lockyer and for teams containing J. Stewart & E. Morris.
Fours	7	The oldest County competition, which commenced in 1968/69 – the year of our Club's creation.
U25 Singles	8	Including 4 successes for A.R. Blake between 1991/92 and 1995/6.
Unbadged Singles	4	Commenced in 2007/08 – E. Morris became the first player to win both the Indoor and Outdoor Unbadged Singles when he triumphed in 2009/10.
Mixed Pairs	2	Commenced in 2013/14 – Both successes for the Club come via S. Kemp & N. Jackson.
Mixed Triples	0	Commenced in 2018/19.
Mixed Fours	1	Commenced in 2017/18. The inaugural winners were S. Kemp, B. Bowyer, J. Stewart & N. Jackson.
County League	4	The County League commenced in 1985, but we had to wait until 2012/13 for our first success, 3 more followed quickly after. We also won the Division 2 title 3 times.
Over 60s County League	2	Commenced in 2003/04.
Over 60s Double Rink KO	1	We were champions in 2016/17.

The County Championship events, lead on to the Eastern Counties Championships where the Club boasts the following winners:

Singles – R. Hart (1986/87, 1990/91, 1991/92, 1995/96)

Pairs – A. Lockyer & K. Blackman (1991/92)

Triples – R. Hart, M. Freeborn & A. Lockyer (1983/84, 1985/86)

Triples – B. Glyde, J. Andrews & E. Morris (2012/13)

Triples – B. Glyde, J. Stewart & E. Morris (2013/14)

Fours – A. Blake, P. Parkinson, S. Cooper & R. Hart (1995/96)