

The History of The Mount Gambier Bowls Club Inc.

The first Hundred Years 1904 - 2004

This history has been compiled using Club records, newspaper articles and information gathered from the archives at the Mount Gambier library. I wish to thank The Border Watch for their press clippings and photographs I also want to thank members who have given me photographs to copy and others who gave me valuable information.

I also wish to thank those members who have helped me in any way in the preparation of this history and to apologise for any errors or omissions.

Any Club is only there because of its members and the Mount Gambier Bowls Club is no exception. The Club has had wonderful, dedicated members over its hundred years, who have worked assiduously to make the club what it is today. Those members who chose to go on committee have developed the club to be a club we enjoy and are proud of, the volunteer army of members who keep the garden and surrounds looking good, others who look after the clubhouse and bar. The administrators who ran the club so that bowls could be enjoyed, the greenkeepers who over the years have given the bowlers good greens to enjoy and of course the ladies who over the hundred years have looked after the inner needs on tournament days. There are always unsung heroes and quiet workers and if there are bits left out or omissions I apologise but I have tried to cover as much as I could. The honour boards tell the story of deeds on the greens and are there for all to see but the battles on the greens so keenly fought made the games won or lost, are why we love the game. There have been and will continue to be wonderful characters in the game and perhaps they should be recorded, that's for another day. Sponsors, we need them before we can run any tournament and we have a lot of them , major or minor, the club thanks them and we encourage members to use them so that we repay their generosity.

History compiled by Rawdon Mitchell for the Club Centenary 2004

Edited and printed by Peter Clark.

Foreword.

In August 1876 the first attempt to form a club was made, then in September 1893 Messrs. John Watson, and C. B. Flint gathered 20 likely players together, while a third attempt was made in 1896, but all were unsuccessful. In a local newspaper of March 1882 it was reported "We noticed at the Autumn Show on Wednesday, a set of bowls with jack complete, exhibited by Dr. Craig. There are in Mount Gambier a number of gentlemen whose cricketing days are over and who would, we should imagine, be only too glad to participate in the less exhausting but quite exciting game of bowls. If a level piece of ground could be secured for a green we do not think there would be any difficulty in forming a bowling club. The cost of keeping the ground in order, could easily be met by fifteen or twenty gentlemen. Bowls may be obtained for seven shillings and sixpence a pair in Melbourne; a couple of coconut mats on which to kneel while delivering the bowl, and a locker in which to keep the property of members would be all that would be required for a start. The game is very popular in Sydney and Melbourne and in many Victorian country towns where middle-aged and elderly gentlemen meet at four or five o'clock during the season, and have a game of bowls almost as regularly as they have their dinner



The History of The Mount Gambier Bowls Club Incorporated

is published to mark the occasion of its Hundredth Birthday

The history of the Club from its inception in 1904 at Hedley Park and its change to the present site at Vansittart Park in 1940 was recorded by Mr. V.F. Day in a series of articles published in the Border Watch in 1941. These were also printed in a souvenir booklet form for distribution to club members. Mr. Les Hill O.A.M., a club member and local historian, included a section on bowls in his book "Mount Gambier City around a Cave". The Border Watch was also researched for articles on the history of the club and we thank them for their help.

This Continuation of the history of the Club covers the period from 1940 on and show the many changes which took place in the club to make it what it is today. These changes were only made possible by the hard work of dedicated members of the club, men and women who worked willingly, and still do today.

“A Game of Bowls” (Author unknown)

Bowls is a science, the study of a lifetime in

Which you may exhaust yourself

It is a contest; a duel calling for courage,

Skill, strategy, and self control.

It is a test of temper, a trial of honour,

a revealer of character,

it affords the chance to play the man

and act the gentleman

it is a game for care, an antidote for worry

and provides not only physical health,

but moral force.

From Border Watch 22/07/1903 p.26

Bowls & Tennis Club A third meeting of the gentlemen interested in formation of Bowling and Tennis Clubs at the Mount was held last night in the Town Council room. It was held to receive a report of the committee appointed on the 11th Inst., and to take further and decisive measures for the establishment of clubs. There were about a dozen gentlemen present. Mr. T. Yates for the Committee, reported that they had debentures taken up as follows, for the bowling club L120 and for the tennis club L64, and subscriptions for the bowling club L90 and the tennis club L50, making for the bowling club L210 and for tennis L114. They estimated the cost of the land necessary for both purposes at L150 and contingencies L20, total L170. This would leave the bowling club with L125 and the tennis club L30 after paying their shares. They recommended that the two clubs be formed, that the land be purchased by the two clubs and that it afterwards be divided into two blocks and each club erect its own fencing and do all their own necessary improvements. The proposal they had to place before the meeting was that a committee be formed to purchase the land. They had inspected three blocks of land they called No.1 they considered most suitable and thought it could be purchased at a cost of L150, No.2 was in a better position but was more expensive at a cost of

L250 and would be their second choice. No.3 would cost about L100. Each block was about an acre in area. After the purchase the bowling club would have enough to lay down a green and erect their fencing. The tennis club would have enough to erect their fencing and have a pound or two towards a court. The committee formed was from the bowling club Messrs. J.Spain, W.Nicholls, T.Yates and T.Haig. and from the tennis club Messrs. I.Lester, W.H.Jermyn, D.E.McLellan and I.J.Lawrie. Mr.Yates was appointed to see Mr. Daniel representative of Executor Trustees.

W. Nicholls, D.E. McLennan, Tom Yates, E.J. Daniel, James Spain, Fred Lester, Dr.V.H. Jermyn and A.E. Wilson are pictured on the opening page photograph.

The Bowling Club worked hard for over 12 months preparing four rinks and it was a gala day on Wednesday, November 30, 1904 when the Hon. George Riddoch, M. L. C. opened the greens for play.

From the Border Watch of 6.12.1904



Mount Gambier
Bowling Greens 1909

Bowling F.H.Daniel,
J.Watson (arms folded) and other bowlers
watching. Opening of the
new Green.

The pretty and well appointed bowling green which The Mount Gambier Bowling Club have laid down on their property adjoining the Tennis Club's ground in Hedley Park was formally opened on Wednesday afternoon last (Nov.30) in the presence of a large gathering of townspeople. The game of bowls is an English pastime whose origin dates back to somewhere to the obscurity of the thirteenth century. Like other games which have withstood the tests and vicissitudes of time, it has not lost any of its interest through being transplanted to a warmer clime and a newer civilisation, and this 'green' the 'jack' and the 'bowls' are terms almost as familiar in Australia as they are in the old country. The game is springing rapidly into popularity and affords recreation for hundreds who are past the age of more active pastimes and for whom the more violent exertions of cricket, football and tennis have lost their charm. Though it has been classed as "an old mans game" it still requires considerable practice on the part of the player to attain even reasonable proficiency, and the study of the 'bias' (the curved sweep made by the bowl on being played) and the various twists by which this is obtained and regulated becomes, in course of time, quite fascinating. The Mount Gambier Bowling Club is in every respect, a model one, and the ground, in the opinion of competent judges, vies with any either inside or outside the city. This result has not been attained without considerable outlay, and up to the present the Club has spent about L400 in laying down the green and beautifying the surroundings. A full description of the improvements effected appeared recently in our columns, and a visit to the green, which is open to public view, will amply justify all that has been said in its praise. The executive of the Club have been canvassing only a short time for

members but already there are a hundred names on the roll, and the players themselves take a lively interest in the pastime and practice assiduously.

O Bowlers who bowl your great balls o'er the grasses
Beware of the law that is mighty and strong
Beware lest an excess of sweet inclination
May cause some fond bowler
To sing a strange song
In the time of King Hal we know twas enacted
That no one should bowl for pleasure or fee
And tho seasons have passed and the wheels have turned onward
That law still applies gentle bowler to thee

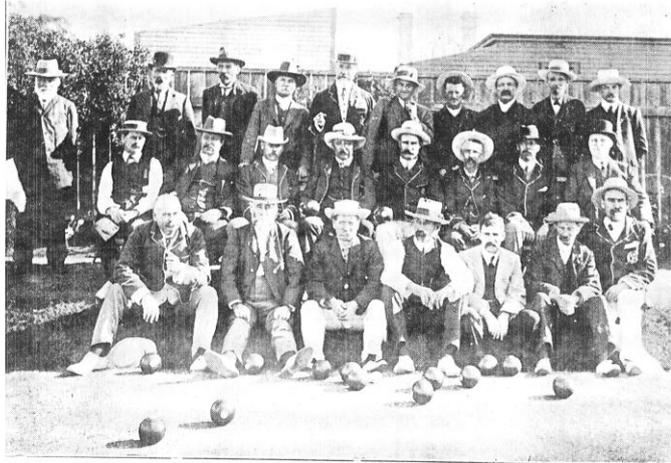
And the pains and the penalties thereby enacted
Were typical both of the age and the law
Fines and imprisonment stocks and exactions
Were the common enjoyment of bowlers galore
Beware for the time may'nt be long in its coming
When the frenzy for bowls will again sweep the land
And the law Gorgon headed will rise then in terror
And haul off each bowler his trial to stand.

Then what will you say to the judge who austere
Looks down from his bench on the gathering throng?
What case will you state for a critical jury
To prove that you could not and would not do wrong?
Your argument then that the search for a 'bias'
Is healthy, and joyous and good for the mind,
That the jack is a creature that needs circumvention.
Will be worthless as dust and but chaff in the wind.

And the judge will direct the dignified jury
To bring in a bill that is worthy and true,
And the outcome, dear bowler, in truth, very surely
Must be a slight outgoing of spare cash from you.
You may say that these lines are but biased by bias,
And that bowls, too, are useful to bowl out an ass;
But time – and the weather – will prove very truly
If what I now prophesy will come to pass.

Author unknown, Mount Gambier, December 1st 1904.
Border Watch, December 3rd 1904

MOUNT GAMBIER BOWLING CLUB'S FIRST OFFICIAL OPENING.



Top row:-C.Beale, C.McKenzie, J.I.Fairweather, C.W.Tucker, J.J.Lawrie, H.Hammer, Dr.F.Jermyn, R.J.Sexton, and F.Barnett.

Second row :-R.S.Craig, J.Spain, J.Rowe, T.Yates, R.Hutton, C.H.S.Williams, A.Leith, A.Loutit.

Sitting :- H.Gaillard, Cap't. Fowler, H.Jobling, J.H.Moody, (some not known one may be Mr. T.Yates.

Wednesday afternoon was delightfully warm and sunny, and a large number of people availed themselves of the invitation issued by the Club, and were present to participate in the opening function. The grounds looked their best in their sward of emerald green, and together with the neatly trimmed borders and profusion of roses and other flowers made a picturesque setting for the vari-coloured costumes worn by the ladies. A number of garden seats and forms were arranged at intervals around the green, and from those points of vantage and comfort the spectators were afforded an opportunity of viewing the play. Two streamers of flags fluttered gaily from poles erected on either side of the ground and Pipe-Major A. Stewart and Piper D. MacPhee gave an added zest to the proceedings by playing some stirring airs on the bagpipes. The opening ceremony was performed by The Hon. G. Riddoch M.L.C. and there were about 200 people present when he proceeded to the centre of the ground with the officials of the Club to declare the grounds open.

Mr. Riddoch was accommodated with a slightly raised platform placed on the sward, and from this point of vantage he delivered an interesting address. It gave him great pleasure, he said, at having been asked to take part in the opening of the green. It is a matter for congratulation that they were favoured with such fine weather and such a good attendance, and he thought the fact that the public were taking an interest in the game of bowls augured well for the Club and its future prosperity. He had to compliment the club in its choice of a ground. It was he thought the best site that could have been chosen; it had been well laid out, and as the South East had been designated the Garden of the Colony he had no doubt that in course of time, it would become a garden in the centre of a garden. The Club was established to afford pleasure to those who enjoyed playing games, and he was sure it would prove the success it was intended to be. He hoped they would not take offence if he told them this was an old man's game. The young people had their tennis, their football and other games, but in this age of steam and electricity when people lived at a higher pressure,

they required more rest and relaxation than in olden times, and a game of bowls supplied this. He had been asked to make a few remarks about the starting of the movement for the laying down of the green, and he learned from the genial secretary of the Club, Mr. W. Nicholls, that the first public meeting to consider the formation of bowling and tennis clubs was called in July 1903. They were all aware of the subsequent steps that had been taken and of the success that had attended the efforts of the promoters. Two fine courts had been laid down and a pavilion and other conveniences erected on the ground adjoining for the benefit of tennis players and the bowling green and its surrounding had been laid out. The amount expended on the green was close upon 400 pounds. This seemed a large sum but 100 members had already joined the Club and he thought it would be in a flourishing condition financially in a very short time. He had been asked on behalf of the Club to thank Mr. Thos. Haig for the practical assistance he had rendered, especially in laying out and supervising the improvements carried out on the ground (hear, hear) and he felt sure also that a great deal of credit was due to the energetic secretary, Mr. Nicholls, who had worked hard to ensure success. (applause.) He would be very pleased to become a member of their club if they would allow him and swell the ranks of their membership. (applause.) He had been reading up in some of his books about the game of bowls and had found it was a very old English game which was already established and much played in the 12th century. In the course of time it became very popular, and took up so much of the time and attention of the people, that archery and other pursuits practiced for the defence of the nation were neglected. This led to laws being framed against the playing of bowls, and from the reign of Henry VIII to George II laws were enforced against those indulging in the game, and bowlers were punished with fines and imprisonment. He was sure, however, that they would not allow their legislators to enforce such drastic measures now, and although they sent men into Parliament to draw the 'long bow' (laughter) he was sure they would not allow them to draw it in that direction. He hoped they would enjoy themselves as he intended to do, and he was sure they would all join with him in wishing the Club success. (applause) Mr. Riddoch then formally declared the green open, and at the request of the officers threw the jack and bowled the first bowl.

Much of the initial credit must go to Messrs. T. Yates (chairman), Tom Haig, J. Spain and W. Nicholls (secretary), and the hard working committee who had complete charge of the project during 1903-04. By the opening day the club had 100 financial members and the expenditure had been £381.19.1d, which included purchase of land, laying greens and beautification of surroundings.

The first greenkeeper was Mr. Sid Bailey. Mr. Charles Beale was appointed in 1906 and Mr. G. Marriott in 1912. The club made progress before World War I, visiting Adelaide and other centres besides regularly entertaining visiting teams. Club matches and tournaments were contested but with the outbreak of war, membership fell alarmingly to as low as 25. Interest was renewed after the war and intertown fixtures were resumed.

During the Winter of 1922 one of the club members, Mr. Charles MacKenzie, was a member of the Australian Bowling Team that toured England and Scotland. On his return he presented the club with badges from all clubs visited by the team overseas. The club adopted a blazer in 1926 and electric light for night play was installed in January 1928.

The period from the start of the Club to 1940 is covered by a history written by Mr. V.F. Day. Published as a series of thirteen articles in the Border Watch from October 22 1940 to June 25 1941

and as "A SOUVENIR to commemorate our EXPANSION SCHEME together with a series of articles outlining the history of the Club"

A reprint of this booklet will be available from the Mount Gambier Bowls Club Inc.

The Club has survived through two World Wars and the Depression and has always had Members who wanted to make the club better and a club to which they could be proud to belong.

The Club outgrew the site at Hedley Park and in 1937 when the upgrade of the pavillion at Hedley Park was discussed it was left in abeyance till an investigation of a new site was completed. In 1939 several sites had been inspected and on May 10, a deputation comprising Messrs. B.A.Fox (President), T.H.Clark (Treasurer), and V.F.Day (Secretary) met with the Corporation with a view to leasing an area at the SouthWest corner of Vansittart Park for the laying down of twelve rinks and the erection of a stone pavillion. This request was approved at the next meeting of Council. The terms of the lease finally granted by the Corporation were very attractive, being on a sliding scale commencing with 10/ per annum rental and increasing every five years so that during the last six years it would be £10 per annum. This considerate rental was much appreciated by the committee and members as it helped us in the first years of the new venture when the establishment costs would be heavy.

By September 1939 the fencing , levelling, and water services were finalised and an expert from Melbourne, Mr.A.E..Weir was engaged to sow the greens. Grasses common to Victoria were sown as they were deemed preferable to couch grass owing to the similarity of climate. By March 1940 the grasses on the new greens were well established, and the time was at hand to consider the erection of the pavilion in Conjunction with the financial position. The president, Mr. E. A. Fox, submitted a design which was placed before a special general meeting of members for consideration. It was decided to do without an assembly hall and to provide a spacious verandah in the front in lieu, which could be enclosed at a later date. Plans and specifications were authorised to be prepared and tenders called. A building committee was elected comprising Messrs. A. Cameron, S. C. Davis, .1. E. Topham, D.J.Papworth, A.C.Haig and W.S.Clark, with the president (Mr. E. A. Fox) and secretary (Mr. V. F. Day) ex officio. The successful tenderers were Messrs. Kuhl Bros., and Mr. J. E. Topham was appointed clerk of works on behalf of the club.

During the winter months the special sub-committee had all the garden arrangements completed. The area was terraced and ornamented with Mount Schank stone. Its sameness was broken with recesses for seats. Members were circulated to contribute the cost of one standard rose. Mr. Sealey kindly offered to plane up and paint stakes for the rose trees. Mr. Fox provided zinc plates for names of roses and donors. Entrance gates were considered and erected. Everything was now ready for the laying of the foundation stone of the pavilion and the opening day ceremony. At the end of 1939 40 our membership had increased to 54 and the season was the most profitable one the club had ever experienced, showing a net profit of £104, mainly attributable to special efforts by the committee.

It was unanimously resolved that the president of the S.A. Bowling Association (Mr. J. C. A. Rundle) be asked to perform the ceremony of the laying of the foundation stone, and in the event of his not being able to officiate the selection of another was left in the hands of the committee. Owing to ill health, Mr. Rundle much regretted he could not journey to Mt. Gambier to conduct the

ceremony, and the committee elected Mr. V. F. Day to perform the task, in consideration of the great interest and organising activities he had shown throughout the venture.

The task of laying the foundation stone was performed by Mr. V. F. Day, secretary of the club, who was presented by Mr. Fox with a silver trowel for the purpose. The stone of red dolomite was fashioned by Mr. J. E. Topham. Mr. A. C. Haig was also honoured for the great work he had rendered as area supervisor, and was presented with a silver key with which to officially open the pavilion. Mr. Fox opened proceedings with a brief history of the expansion programme of the club.

Congratulatory speeches were made by the Mayor, the member for the district, and the chairman of the District Council. Mr. Day conveyed on behalf of members their deep appreciation of and thanks to all those who had contributed by gifts, labor, and concessions, towards reducing the overhead and making the venture as economical as possible. He estimated that such benefits altogether amounted to approximately £100, which was a very great consideration in such a programme as the club had before it at the outset.

After the stone had been laid the sum of £25 was placed under it and amounts promised by others unable to be present brought these voluntary contributions to £35. At the conclusion of the ceremony Mr. T. H. Clark expressed an appreciation of the sterling services rendered by Mr. Fox as president, and the keen interest and enthusiasm he had displayed in promoting the venture. Reverting to the new season, Mr. A. C. Haig was, at the annual general meeting, appointed greens manager, with Messrs. C. H. Hirth and Parish as assistants. During the year Mr. Haig had to be relieved of his duties temporarily owing to ill health, and Mr. D. J. Papworth kindly officiated in his stead until Mr. Haig. was well enough to resume. It was also decided to combine the sub-committees functioning during the establishment programme, and Messrs. Hirth, Fox, Haig, Davis, Topbam, and W. S. Clark, with the president (Mr. A. Cameron) and secretary (Mr. V. F. Day) were appointed to this committee, known as the works committee.



Standing L-R

Miss Eva Hay (Secretary), Mesdames T.H.Clark (President) and J.W. Miller (secretary).

Seated L-R

Miss Sassanowsky, Mesdames W.Wilcox, R.B.Pocock, Alex Cameron and C.A.L. Schinckel

Steps were taken to form a ladies' auxiliary club, and the rules and regulations were amended to provide for associate members and lady social members. In May, 1940, a ladies' inauguration committee was formed, and comprised Mesdames T. H. Clark (president), C. Schinckel,

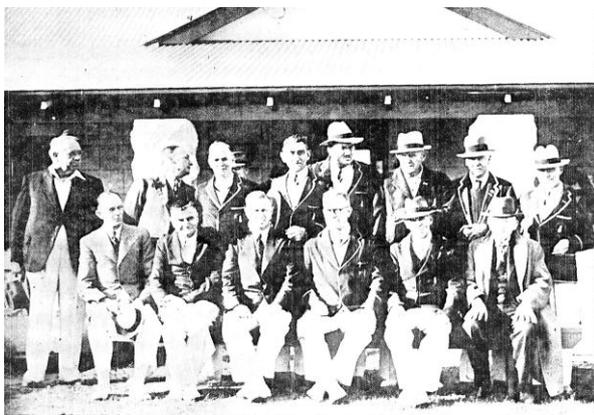
F. Gifford, F. Laurie, R. F. White, C. Sankey. H. B. Pocock, P. Pepper, and Miss E. Hay (Secretary). There were two changes before the photo shown below.

The official opening of the new greens was held on Saturday, October 23, 1940, Mr. A. Cameron was President and His Worship the Mayor Mr. S. C. Davis) was chosen to perform the ceremony. The pavilion and area was beflagged, and the gardens a mass of blooms, and altogether presented a picturesque appearance to the numbers gathered for the ceremony. Visitors were present from the Naracoorte, Millicent, and Penola clubs. The Mayor paid great tribute to the club committee and members for what they had achieved, not only by their programme, but also by beautifying and making so attractive the area they had taken over from the Corporation. Mrs. Davis then threw down the first jack and Mrs. Cameron rolled the first bowl.

In December 1940 the committee approved the work of glassing in the western end of the verandah, and the secretary was empowered to collect voluntary subscriptions towards defraying the cost. In 1941 the ladies kindly undertook the enclosing of the Eastern end.

Mr. Conboy, a local nurseryman, also kindly offered 500 anemone bulbs free of charge for planting in the garden about April, and to draw up a plan and color scheme for the arrangement of the garden next year.

In May the committee delegated Messrs. A. Cameron (president) and T. H. Clark (treasurer) to approach the Council for the control of further sufficient land to lay down another six rinks, so that the area could be gradually prepared for



Men's Committee opening day

Standing L-R J.E.Topham, G.G.Keats, D.C.McDougal, A.E.Fox, T.H.Clark(Treas.),G.A.Parish, A.C.Haig and C.H.Hirth

Seated L.R. V.F.Day(Secretary), .D.J.Papworth, Mayor Mr.S.C.Davis, Mr.A.Cameron(President), A.G.Sealey and R.Wallace.

this extension after the war. Approval was given for an area West of the Clubhouse, where at least five rinks can be established.

In 1939 when the club was being changed to Vansittart Park there was agreement by the South Australian Bowling Association that a pennant competition could be started between Penola, Millicent Naracoorte and Mount Gambier.

In 1942 At the Annual meeting Mr. Cameron was finishing his term as president and handing over to Mr. A.G.Sealey when the club secretary Mr. A.C.Haig was made a life member for his work in establishing the greens at Vansittart Park. The Club was divided into Green and Brown sections and they competed against each other and electric light play was organised for Tuesday and Thursday evenings. A proposal was put forward to divide the town into four regions and a pennant competition be started.

World War 2 from 1939 to 1945 saw a large number of young men and women going into the services and those left behind had to continue the war effort on the home front. As a result the bowling club found it difficult to increase membership numbers, The men stayed around the fifty mark but the Associates dropped from twenty five when the ladies were admitted to sixteen at the end of the war. There was a flight training school at the airport and I have been told some of the airmen would play when off duty. 1945 and the end of the war saw servicemen and women returning to settle in the South East and soldier settlement bringing another influx of people to the area. In 1945 the membership started to grow and by 1948 there were over a hundred men and the ladies were back to twenty six and increasing.

The Club was not permitted to serve or have liquor on its premises during this period and in November 1942 a letter from the S.A. Bowling Association confirmed the “dry” status should continue. It is perhaps relevant to comment on the reflection of the attitude of the community at this time for the greens were closed on Sundays as people were expected to attend church on this day of rest. **It was not until 1948 that Sunday play was permitted** and “Such Sunday play to be from 2.00pm to 5.00pm for the purpose of practice of members. No organised competition or inviting players from other clubs was permitted.” *It was also necessary to get Council approval before this change took place.

In 1945 when Mr. Skinner was President Claude Ralston became Club secretary a position he held until 1950 when he was forced by ill health to give it up and Bert Uhe took over until the Annual meeting when George Small was elected.