

HISTORY OF BRISTOL INDOOR BOWLING CLUB

Acknowledgement

Where to begin? I had not long joined Bristol Indoor Bowls Club and therefore had little knowledge of the Club history myself. I knew where it has started. I also knew some members had played for England, but when? My initial thoughts were that I had bitten off more than I could chew.

After asking long serving members for guidance it was very clear that one person had all the answers. But would he share them with me?

Therefore I approached Peter Brimble, a well respected former International bowler and selector. A man who had held many National positions that would help shape the game that we all love.

Peter could not have been more helpful. His memory, proof reading expertise and his willingness to help made this a pleasure to write.

Peters name appears many times within this history. That is simply because he has played an enormous part over his 52 years membership, so far, of Bristol Indoor Bowls Club.

We have not finished yet. We still have to cover the search for, and occupancy of the premises that we enjoy today together with the battle to keep it a viable concern. Thankfully we are now seeing the fruits of many of the current members endeavours.

If any of you reading this can add to the Clubs history, I will be pleased to consider it for inclusion.

Barry Major (Web Author)

The Beginning of Indoor Bowls

W.G. Grace is acknowledged by many as the man responsible for bringing the game of Lawn Bowls indoors. In 1888, while President of the English Bowling Association (E.B.A) he laid a carpet across the floor of the Crystal Palace in London and proceeded to demonstrate that bowls could be played throughout the year, not just in the summer months. It took another 17 years before the first indoor club was opened at Synod Hall in Edinburgh. The Edinburgh Winter Bowling Association was formed as a result. 28 Years were to pass before the English Indoor Bowling Association (E.I.B.A) was formed in 1933 as an indoor section of the E.B.A.

Bristol Indoor Bowls

It was not until 1948 that Bristol considered the formation of an Indoor Bowls Club. Until then "bowlers in the know" had to travel many miles to play indoors. It is thought that the nearest indoor rink to Bristol was in Rugby, 100 miles away. Travelling would have been difficult and time consuming without the advantage of today's motorways. Many journeys were made by rail.

The nearest thing to indoor bowls in Bristol at this time was Skittles (Nine Pins) and many of the bowls fraternity took to playing this as an alternative.

Sam Morgan, Archie Morrish and Sam Bryant (a relative of David), decided to look for suitable venues that would allow indoor bowls to be played. Bristol City Council were approached and persuaded to let bowlers use Bristol South Baths (Bedminster) in the winter when the swimming bath was boarded over. Therefore in October 1948 Sam Morgan, Archie Morrish and Sam Bryant became the Founder members of Bristol Indoor Bowls Club.

The baths in those days were already used for such diverse sports as Roller Skating (very popular), Boxing, Table Tennis, Gymnastics etc.

Bowlers were allowed to use the facility on a Monday, Tuesday and occasionally on Friday afternoon. Three rinks were set out using green baize. Chalk lines were marked on the baize to signify "the ditch". The rinks had to be removed on the Tuesday evening and set out again the following Friday or Monday. Not very good but better than nothing. Membership was an encouraging 220 men and around 24 ladies.

The green fees at the time were initially two shillings (10p) for two hours but, just like today nothing is forever, the fees gradually increased. A Cashier, employed by Bristol City Council collected all the

monies from the various sports organizations that used the baths. Green fee collection was not to change until 1964.

In 1949 Archie Morrish was elected as the Club's first President.

Affiliation the E.B.A (Indoor Section) followed in 1950.

In 1952 the Club's first Annual General Meeting was held.

The first visit to the Club by the E.B.A. (Indoor Section) was a prestigious event in 1955.

In 1957 the clubs committee agreed a subsidy of Five Pounds to each player picked to play in International matches in Perth.

The success of the Club and its players started to generate National interest. So much so that Peter Brimble was asked to submit items of interest about the Club for publication in Bowls News. The first of these articles appeared in December 1959.

Prior to 1961 the only National Competition was the Denny Cup, the Club Championship of England. Bristol first entered the competition in 1954 with the first match against Birmingham. The agreed format for this competition was one rink to be played at home and one rink to be played away. Both rinks were to play simultaneously on a Saturday morning. As the club only had the use of Bristol South Baths on a Monday, Tuesday and the occasional Friday playing at home was out of the question so the club was forced to play both rinks away. The players were granted the "princely sum" of One Pound subsistence for this game. Playing away was a massive disadvantage in this match and subsequent matches in this competition because of the variety of greens. "Home" rinks were played at Worcester in later years which required a 120 mile round trip at personal expense. Despite this, in 1958 the Club entered two teams in the competition. The area that Bristol fell in stretched from Coventry in the North to Budleigh Salterton in the South and although the club had some excellent players, distance proved to be a big handicap. Despite this situation Bristol were to reach the Semi-Final of the Denny Cup in 1965, losing on the last Wood.

Our first Life Member, Sam White was elected in 1961. That same year saw the introduction of the first Club Badge and Club Tie while Peter Brimble won the Welsh Open title.

Our first Club Captain, Tommy Deane, was elected in 1962. Peter Brimble was his Vice Captain. Hopes were raised in 1962 when Bristol City council promised to look for a site more suited for bowling, but needless to say nothing materialised.

In March 1963 a Presentation was made to David Bryant after winning the Empire Games Gold in Australia. Also in 1963 Percy Rendle (Club Secretary) was made the Clubs second Life Member. When in 1964 Peter Brimble considered the green fees situation to be less than cost effective for the Bowls Club. He persuaded Bristol City Council to allow the club to pay rent. Thereby saving them from paying a Cashier. He calculated a rent considerably less than the total green fees, thus allowing the Bowls Club to build a substantial reserve of more than Two Thousand Pounds that would eventually help when the time came to find an alternative venue.

The alternative venue nearly became a reality in 1965 when Peter Brimble persuaded Bristol City Council to provide a plot of land at Bower Ashton for Bristol Indoor Bowls Club to build a purpose built facility.

Peter found six backers (four from England and two from South Wales) to put up Sixty Five Thousand Pounds for six rinks. Procrastination by Bristol City Council caused much frustration among the bowlers and backers alike. When, eventually, planning permission was granted one backer had died and another had withdrawn his support, so the project failed.

Despite Peter's continued requests to local businessmen for assistance the status quo existed up until 1970.

In 1970 Peter persuaded Harry Dolman (Chairman of Bristol City Football Club) to incorporate six rinks under the new stand at the Ashton Gate Stadium. Harry, himself a bowler (Bristol St. Andrews President) and a much respected businessman was, at first, sceptical about the venture but Peter's persistence and projections of membership and revenue eventually convinced Harry that it was viable.

Now agreed, the project moved relatively quickly. Always the business man, Harry Dolman looked for cost reduction and decided to employ a building contractor to put down the screed (base) and bought the cheapest playing surface, thick baize. Harry would not listen when told it was a counterproductive policy. By 1973 the surface had to be replaced. After repair work was done on the screed the baize was replaced by greengage.

In January 1971 the six rinks were commissioned for use and the Club opened. The Club became very popular. So much so that it became one of the top four Indoor Bowling Clubs in the country for membership.

Although things were vastly improved bowling wise, Harry Dolman was unhappy that, after 18 months, Peter Brimble's forecasted returns to the Football Club were not as good as expected. Harry had decided, when the green was opened, that his own manager should control the financial returns. It was suggested to Harry that in view of the results of the investigation that followed the "less than predicted" returns, it would be better business if the bowling club took control of the bar and catering in return for an initial rent of Five Thousand Pounds per annum to the Football Club. Harry agreed this recommendation shortly before his death in 1974.

As each contract was renewed the rent increased, but now, with 99% occupancy, the bowling club flourished and the football club got guaranteed rent. The club even considered building a seventh rink but found it structurally impossible.

During the time spent at Ashton Gate the Football Club revenue was increased to a total of nearly One Million Pounds as a direct result of the Bowls Club tenancy.

Unfortunately after the death of Harry Dolman in 1974 the club did little to help the bowls and the remaining years spent at the site were times of uncertainty. Over the ensuing years, with the growing use of private transport, parking became a problem.

In 2000 the writing was on the wall as it were. The football club was looking to expand its Corporate Hospitality Facilities and the area occupied by the Bowls Club was seen as potentially the best site for such activities.

Bristol Indoor Bowls Club was on the move again.

International Representation.

In spite of poor bowling conditions in the early years, Bristol provided a number of England Internationals. W. G. "Chick" Tanner made his debut in 1955, and went on to make 25 appearances. Gilbert Attwood made his debut in 1957, at the age of 56, and went on to make 27 appearances. Reg Bryant made four appearances in 1958 and 1959.

In 1960 Peter Brimble, at the age of 28, became the youngest player to represent England (by an amazing 22 years) and made a total of 45 appearances for his country before voluntarily dropping out to become England Team Manager. Peter was to stay Team Manager for 21 years.

David Bryant, synonymous with the game of Bowls, made his International debut for England in 1965 while a Bristol player. David went on to make 24 appearances during his stay with Bristol before transferring to his home town club Clevedon when they opened in 1975.

Other Bristol players to gain international recognition for England were Roy Hedges who played 15 times, Jim O'Brien 6 times and Mike Prosser 5 times.

International recognition is not confined to the Club's men bowlers. While the ladies have yet to win a National Competition, Olive Williams made her England debut in 1973 and made 14 appearances, while Jean Croot played 16 times after her debut in 1975.

National Competitions

In 1971 Bristol, for the first time since 1961, found themselves in a position to compete (Nationally) on equal terms. After a dramatic extra end win in a tense Semi-Final, the Denny Cup was won after beating Teesside at Maidenhead in the final. The skips that day were Peter Brimble and David Bryant.

During 1971 the E.I.B.A decided to extend the Denny Cup to two rinks Home and two rinks Away. Once again Bristol triumphed beating Ipswich with shots to spare in the Final. Thus Bristol became

the last club to win the Cup on a two rink basis and the first on a four rink basis. Further wins were recorded in 1980 and 1989 while finishing runners-up in 1979.

In 1961 the E.I.B.A introduced a National Singles competition. This was a difficult proposition for Bristol players in view of the vast pre-motorway distances involved, even in the early rounds which were usually played on a Saturday morning. As a result, nearly all the games had to be played away. In spite of this Pete Brimble reached the semi-final.

In 1963 he won the title with the last wood at Croydon.

In 1964 and 1965 David Bryant won the title and in 1966 Gilbert Attwood won the title, beating David Bryant in the Final.

David Bryant won the title again in 1967 and 1969. Therefore a Bristol bowler held the title in five of the first seven years, a remarkable record. David went on to win the title in 1971 and 1972 by which time the club had moved to Ashton Gate.

The National fours were introduced in 1967. Peter Brimble's four reached the Semi-Final in 1974.

In 1976 Roy Hedges and Peter Brimble were Runners-Up in the National Pairs Championship a competition the Indoor Section of the E.B.A. had introduced in 1964.

National Officers

Bristol Ladies may not have had any success in the Nationals Competitions but Jean Croot was elected to the E.W.I.B.A for two years in the 50's.

W.G. "Chick" Tanner served on the Indoor section of the E.B.A Executive from 1966 until his death in 1968 and Gilbert Attwood served from 1969 to 1971.

Peter Brimble was elected in 1972, the year that the E.I.B.A. was formed (separate from the E.B.A.) and served for 30 years until 2002. He was elected as E.I.B.A. President in 1973/74, spent 9 years as Competition Secretary and 6 years as Executive Chairman. Was Selector for England from 1973-2002. Made a life member of the E.I.B.A in 1975. Became President of World Indoor Bowls Council in 1989 and life member, serving 20 years on the Executive. In 1994 he was elected President of the British Isles Indoor Bowls Council and a life member serving on its Executive from 1977 - 2002.

Barry Major 2007