

History of Oakley Bowling Club

Part 1 The Formation

On the 11th January 1978, a meeting was held in St Leonard's Centre to discuss the possibility of forming a bowling club in the village. Attended by 60 interested parties, the meeting was chaired by Arthur Dolton, with Councillor Geoff Rogers representing the Borough Council. Considerable enthusiasm was expressed for forming a new club and a Steering Group was set up with a view to producing proposals for an Inaugural meeting to be held as soon as was possible.

That meeting was held on the 15th February when recommendations were made that the Club should initially look to play outdoors on a new recently built green at Carpenters Down at Popley and should, longer term, try to establish, within the village, facilities for both outdoor and indoor bowls. These recommendations were accepted unanimously with Arthur Dolton being elected as President for 1978. Spencer Kerley was to be the Secretary and Barry Lee and Kay Kerley were Committee members. Peter and Ruth Bown (then Ruth Paice) and Life Vice Presidents Frank Tuffs and Bill Britchford (now living in Australia) are believed to be the only current 2020 members present at the meeting. The subscription for that first year was set at a minimal £3.

The next few months were busy ones. In March, the Club played its first ever match indoors at East Dorset. The coach cost £50 and we lost 132-98. Arrangements were finalised with the Council for the Club to have use of the facilities, such as they were, at Carpenters Down. Negotiations were also opened with the Council to build both an outdoor green and an indoor club on land recently compulsorily purchased at Andover Road, adjacent to the Tennis Club.



The 1978 outdoor season began with the formal opening of the new green at Carpenter's Down by Mrs Sheila Knight, the Chairman (they were not referred to as Chairs in those days!) of the Leisure and Recreation Committee. The season saw the Club playing two friendlies against Basingstoke Town (the home game had to be played at the Town

because of the inadequate facilities at Popley – the Oakley Ladies did the catering at the Town!). The Club also travelled to the Atherley at Southampton where we played on the newly installed and at that time rare surface – an artificial green. It also proved possible to run the first Club Competitions. That year there were 27 entries in the Men's Singles won by David James and 22 in the Women's Singles won by Gladys Dolton with 23 teams competing in the Pairs event. Interestingly Finals Day was on the 24th September.

Whilst all this bowling was under way, the Committee and Officers were heavily involved in trying to develop an indoor facility at Oakley. The Club affiliated to the English Indoor Bowling Association, having agreed to use the Rushmoor Club at Farnborough as its indoor

base and a huge amount of effort went into looking at how other indoor clubs operated and what might be needed to have a successful Club in Oakley. Meetings with the EIBA Development Officer, with Cignet, the prospective builder and with Council Officers and Councillors all seemed promising and it looked as if, after many years of trying, Basingstoke might at last have an indoor facility. Indeed, by October our Councillors were informing the Club that the Leisure and Recreation Committee fully supported the proposals and that, whilst a detailed feasibility study would be required, the Club should now go ahead and obtain outline planning permission.

The Club's optimism was shared by local bowlers many of whom joined Oakley to be able to play indoor bowls and by October the Club had a membership of 221. To accommodate this interest, the Club arranged 14 indoor away games for the 1978/79 season and even entered the Denny Cup where amazingly Banister Park were beaten in the first round. (Banister at that time shared the Atherley indoor green – their splendid facilities at Stoneham were built a few years later when their home opposite the then County Cricket ground was sold to developers). For indoor games we travelled, by coach to venues as far apart as Bristol and Paddington with the coaches costing £1.50 per head. A programme of indoor games has continued right up to 2020 though of the original fixtures only that against East Dorset has been played continually throughout the Club's history. In amongst this indoor programme there was also time to have a weekend trip to Eastbourne where we played matches at the Indoor Club at Hampden Park and stayed at the 3 star Wish Tower hotel for the princely sum for Dinner, Bed and Breakfast of £10.50 per head. Social and fund-raising events also featured heavily in that first year. A Jumble Sale raised £150. That is £750 in today's money. There was a Skittles evening at the Wheatsheaf and a Disco in the Andover Road Hall. By the year end, Treasurer Harold Line was reporting reserves of over £700.

1978 ended on a high. A new outdoor bowling Club had been successfully established. The New Year would see its members participating for the first time in District and County events and hopes were high that Oakley would soon have on the Andover Road site both outdoor and indoor greens, giving the village probably the best bowling facilities in the County. As we all know Oakley went on in 2013 to be voted the National Club of the Year but it is a Club quite different to that envisaged by its founders. In the next few articles, we will explain what happened to the Indoor dream and how the Club came to play at Malshanger.