

OUR HISTORY

This article is an amalgam and précis of two articles on Cobham Bowling Club originally published to note the 60th and 75th anniversary of the founding of the club as it exists today. We thank Ted Hayes for these contributions.

Cobham Bowling Club as we know it today was formed in 1932. Its history though goes back to the 1920's. Cobham was once a village (and still is in the minds of many residents) and any English country village worthy of the name should always boast a local pub, or two, or three (and more?). Cobham was no exception, and by 1850 this village had no fewer no than 15 hostelries, as well as a brewery of its own.

Over the years most of those pubs have gone, amongst them the Antelope and the Royal Oak, which both played a part in the Clubs history. Around the 1910-20s there was a private bowling club playing on a green behind 'The Antelope' in Portsmouth Road. Cobham Bowling Club was, by all accounts, a little bit "exclusive", and did not readily welcome new members. Eighteen would-be bowlers held a meeting in 'the Royal Oak' pub, also on Portsmouth Road, and decided to start a new bowling club. The club could play on the council-owned bowling green in the corner of the Recreation Ground and would be called Cobham Recreation Bowling Club.

That was on the 15th December 1912 and so a new 'star' was born. In those days as much concern was shown to social events and outings as to bowling and records refer to coach trips to various seaside locations, dinners, and seemingly most popular of all, the smoking concert. These were regular events and in 1937 the entertainment at one such 'smoker' included a pianist, two comedians, a ventriloquist and a tenor - all for the fee of four guineas (£4.20). In 1934 a Cobham Ladies Club was established.

County records (the only ones available) show affiliation by Cobham to the County in 1921. This ceased in 1941 and after that 'The Antelope' and its bowling green disappeared. As to Cobham 'Recreation' no club records were kept during the 1939-1945 war years although it seems the club chugged quietly along but after the war the club drifted with membership falling to 34 in 1946 and as low as 21 in 1950 and remaining at that figure for a few years. Paradoxically, this period was also probably the most successful in bowling terms in the Club's history. Having joined the West Surrey League, Cobham were usually in the top four or five and managed runners-up position in 1958, finally becoming champions in 1960 and again in 1962. Other successes included being runners-up in the West Surrey Henry Mills Triples in 1956 and then winning the trophy the following year.

More recent successes included reaching the final of the West Surrey Fours in 1982 and the semi-final of the West Surrey Triples in 1988. Latterly they won the Surrey Midweek League in 1990 and the Guildford, Woking & District League Triples League in 1991. In more recent times, in the 2015/6 winter (Short Mat) season Cobham won the Lightwater Monday League and were runners up in the SHAB Knockout Cup.

Over the years the Club had issues with the green, the maintenance of which was in the hands of the council. The change to contract maintenance by the council made life more difficult, not only for Cobham, but for many other Council dependent clubs.

The original Cobham Recreation Bowling Club had a groundsman's hut which was used for storage of bowling equipment etc and also acted as a changing room. The hut has long been demolished, replaced with a concrete Marley building. The brick pavilion in the recreation ground was built and served as a clubhouse. It was however built facing the football pitches and not the bowling green, had a wooden verandah which was a mecca for all the local youngsters and became the subject of vandalism. Vandalism became so bad as to warrant the building being closed down completely for two years. The Cobham Day Centre was "press-ganged" into use and the club were indeed most grateful for that. The old brick pavilion was renovated by Esher Council, but was still very inadequate for a thriving bowls club. It is still used in the winter months by footballers.

In 1987 the Club, having in 1975 dropped the 'Recreation' from its name, finally decided to amalgamate with the Ladies to have a joint club which continued to expand with the membership figure reaching 100 in 1991 for the first time. More matches were played, more innovations made, and winter bowling holidays became de rigeur for many of the members. Plans to take over green maintenance went hand in hand with long term hopes for a larger clubhouse with a bar to entertain their opponents and visitors, and also support winter bowling. By a lot of hard work from the members - and with not a little help from the National Lottery - Cobham Bowling Club opened its new clubhouse in 1996.

The club currently has many members and is still very active in league and friendly matches with other clubs across Surrey not only during the summer season on its contract-managed green but also during the winter months when the clubhouse is transformed into a "Short mat" bowling venue which houses two indoor rinks.