



From the top: Frederick Curtis, Bill Hart, Phyl Judd, an image of the moment the Mayor of Southend laid the last piece of turf of the new bowls green at Southend on Sea Bowls Club

100 YEARS ON THE GREEN

Jim Cousins and Natalie Bollu from the Southend Bowls Club share a brief history of this active club as it celebrates a century of playing one of England's most popular sports

LAWN bowls is one of the nation's most popular sports and has been played here for hundreds of years, although from 1541 to 1845 the law determined the game could only be played on Christmas Day. In Essex, it was 1908 when the Essex County Bowling Association was formed and just two years later the Mayor of Southend laid the last piece of turf on the green, now one of the finest bowling greens in the UK, which became home to Southend on Sea Bowls Club.

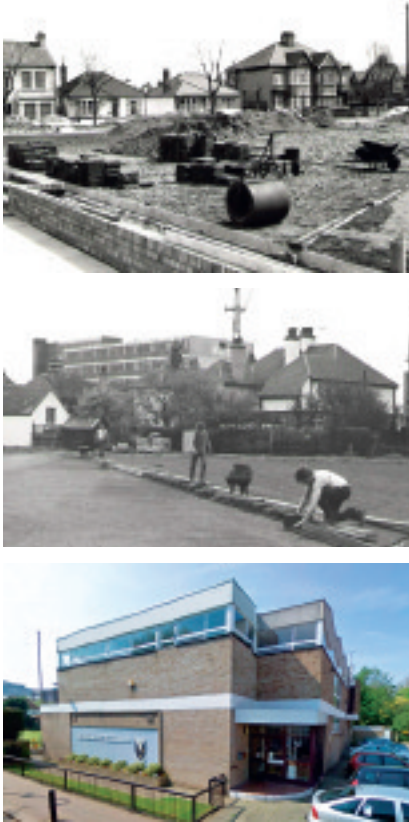
The first report of a match on this green appeared in newspapers on June 23, 1910 and was between Southend and Boumemouth Park, the latter winning 92 shots to 63. A long and friendly rivalry between the two clubs remains strong to this day.

One of Southend Bowls Club's most celebrated players was Frederick George Curtis who became the single-handed champion at the club in 1911. He then went on to repeat this feat seven times in the next 17 years while going on to become the single-handed champion of Essex and represent England between 1914 and 1935.

Along with all his great wins, Frederick also found the time to be club captain ten times between the years 1913 and 1935. Indeed, the 1920s was seen as a golden decade for the club which won the counties singles title and the London and southern counties triples. In 1921 Curtis and Owen won international recognition by being selected to play for England and in the same year Curtis became the ERA District champion.

In the 1930s Southend continued its dominance of the Southend Open by once again winning the singles, fours and pairs. Unfortunately in the 1940s most of the national and county competitions were suspended because of war and local bowling was also curtailed.

Bowls soon got back to pre-war competitions in 1945 and Southend's bowlers soon started to win again. The 1950s was another winning decade with the club claiming the county single rink title and the Southend Open, while in 1951 and 1953 WE Hart became the Champion of Champions for the Southend area and



First column: A series of images showing the development of the Tunbridge Road site at various stages. **Top right:** The 1973 County Double Fours winners. **Above right:** The 1966 County Single Fours winners. **Above middle:** The 1951 County Shield winners

also played for England. Nicknamed Bill, WE Hart dominated the bowls world at this time. In addition to his outstanding success and international career, Bill played 123 times for Essex, captained England and was president of the Southend Bowls Club twice. In 1990 Bill died at the age of 87, but he is still remembered dearly and one of the most popular competitions in bowls is now played for The Bill Hart Trophy each summer.

In 1968 the history of the club at 70 Victoria Avenue came to an end and the move to the Tunbridge Road site took place during the winter of 1968 and spring of 1969.

The 1970s again showed a winning streak with the club winning the pairs and enjoying its first success in indoor bowling. The club also expanded the clubhouse and a social area was built which was capable of hosting up to 130 people.

Through 1977 to 1980, PN Richardson was selected for trails for England and he became the Champion of Champions in the

Southend area in 1980 and won the Ashby Cup. Southend also won the county pairs along with the County Shield and the London & Southern Counties title. Also in this year, plans were drawn up and approved for a new major project involving the extension of the indoor green, which was finally completed in 1982.

With a new refurbished club, the 1990s became another successful decade. The fours were won in the Southend & District finals along with the London & Southern Counties triples.

In 2002 the decision was finally made to allow the ladies to apply for full membership including outdoor bowling and today it is hard to understand why this process took so long. In 2007 Eileen Fowler became the first lady president of the club and by 2009 the number of ladies had risen to more than 50 and few people could deny that the move has been a success.

While the current decade has shown a marked reduction in the club's success on the green, a number of initiatives off the green have enabled

the club to recruit and retain a healthy full membership. The social side of the club continues to grow and flourish, even with the difficult financial times of recent years and the high travel costs of getting to away games.

However, mixed bowling is growing in popularity and fun days are proving to be popular alternatives to inter-club friendly games. The dress code is changing dramatically and coloured clothing is being introduced to attract the younger generation and keep the sport popular.

The sport of bowls has been played for hundreds of years but it now faces bigger challenges than ever before. The sport is too slow for most youngsters and apart from all the ball and racket sports there is the lure of video games and electrical gadgets, which are now seen as more entertaining. With life expectancy increasing and people having many more years of retirement, the next generation may still find the same enjoyment and friendship that we experience today.