

Our History ...

The English Bowling Association (EBA) was founded by legendary cricketer W.G Grace, among others, in 1903 but of course many individual clubs existed before this. In this area St Albans (Clarence Park) was formed in 1903, Tring in 1908, both Crown Green at this time, and Rickmansworth in 1904, then at the bottom of Scots Hill. Also in 1904 Watford Clarendon Sports Club - Bowls Section, was formed and they played behind the Clarendon Arms (now known as the 'Pennant') beside Watford Junction Station. This club became defunct in 1912 and their many members joined several new clubs just formed in the area ie; Herts BC (Rickmansworth Road), Bushey BC at their current site, Bushey Heath (on the Vicarage Lawn) and Bushey Grove on Bendysh Road Sports Ground.



These were the main clubs who came together with the idea of forming a local bowling association for competitions and matches against other associations.

The Inaugural Meeting took place in St James Restaurant in High Street Watford in September 1913. Watford and District BA commenced the 1914 season with eight clubs affiliated as founder members. Four clubs became members for competitions only ie; Bushey, Bushey Heath, Harrow Weald & Oxhey BCs. The following joined to take part in competitions and also to be members of the Association League: Bushey Grove, London and North Western Railway (Headstone Lane), McVitie and Price (Willesden) and Upton House BCs

You will notice that Herts BC were not members but were (and still are) active members of the London & Southern Counties BA which had been founded in 1895. However they were always good friends of our Association and from 1914 up to 1980 when they joined W&DBA, they always loaned their wonderful facilities to us so that we had a neutral green for our Finals Day. Since then we have requested clubs' application to stage the finals with often the then current President's Club being successful.



The first President of the new Association was Mr (later Sir) Hedley Francis Le Bas (Upton House BC) and he presented the Hedley Le Bas Cup for the league winners. Sir Hedley was President until the end of 1916 when all operations were suspended for 1917 & 1918 (along with the EBA and L&SCBA) during the Great War. When normal service was resumed in 1919 William Massey (Upton House) was the President and again in 1920. 1921 saw William Batchelor (Bushey Grove BC) take office. Other early Presidents were: 1922-1928 Thomas Rushton (St John's BC/ Radlett Road renamed Colne BC in 1924), 1929 for a second time William Batchelor, 1930-1934 George F Goddard (Bushey Grove BC).

Referring back to our first President, Sir Hedley Francis Le Bas, Bill Smith found out the following about him: Born in Jersey in 1868, the son of T A Le Bas. Hedley enlisted in the 15th Hussars when only 16 years of age and served 7 years in the ranks before commission. On leaving the Army he became Governing Director of Caxton Publishing Co Ltd and also a Director of George Newnes Ltd. In 1913 he was the Liberal Candidate in the West Herts Division covering Hemel Hempstead and parts of Watford, but resigned through ill health in early 1914. During a 1913 speech to Liberals at Bourne End he said he was President of 42 football clubs and 37 cricket clubs and Vice—President of lots of other sporting associations and clubs. Hedley was knighted in the 1916 King's New Year Honours List for service to the Prince

of Wales and War Dept as Joint Secretary to The National Relief Fund and adviser on publicity in connection with security and the War Loan. His home was at 2 Camden Hill Road, Crystal Palace SE5.

For many years the Association was run by just 3 people; the President, the Chairman and the Secretary, who combined that job with the duties of Treasurer until the latter post was taken in 1930 by H H Denbigh (North Watford BC). In 1928 the Deputy President was created and in 1930 the Deputy President took over the Chairman's position. In 1932 a post of Assistant Secretary was taken by the previously mentioned Thomas Batchelor. The first Competition Secretary in 1930 was F Andrews (Bushey Grove BC). In 1951 the position of Junior Vice President was created.

It may be a surprise to learn that until 1953 there had not been a committee. In 1953 an Emergency Committee was created and continued into the following year. From 1955 to date an Executive Committee consisting of the officers and seven members elected at the AGM run the affairs of the Association.

From 1946 the position of Honorary Life Member of the Association could be conferred for meritorious service. Subsequently given to retiring Presidents, in 1946 it was awarded to six surviving past holders of that office. It can also be awarded to other Officers within the Association. Bill Smith has recorded every HLM since 1946. Bill also listed every President, Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer since the Association's formation.

Watford Urban District Council (pre 1922) and Watford Borough Council (from 1922) The Mayor of Watford, Aldermen and Councillors, besides council executives, etc have always been keen supporters of the sport of bowls in many ways and in different parts of Watford.

Upton House BC was maintained by the Council from about 1903. It had a three rink green, on which now stands Gade House next to the High St overpass, and issued season tickets for players. The club was renamed Watford BC in 1922 and moved to Cassiobury Park in 1924. The green was opened on 31st May 1924 by the Mayor, Ald R A Thorpe, who was a founder member and first President in 1912 & 1913 of Upton House BC.

Oxhey BC, formed as a three rink green in 1910 at the Grange, Watford Heath, moved to a new six rink green and was opened by Mayor, Ald Finlay McKenzie on Saturday 27th August 1966. In 1933 Watford Council took over the maintenance of the green following the Club being in a poor financial state. Ald F W Jeffs, Mayor of Watford in 1931 was a member of Oxhey BC and a good bowler too. He completed 21 years as a member of Oxhey on Monday 1st February 1937, during which time he was the Club President. The famous golfer Ted Ray, Professional at Oxhey Golf Club, British Open Champion in 1912 and the American Open Champion in 1920, won several competitions at Oxhey and was Vice-President during his membership. He presented a Cup to the Association to be played for annually. Councillor Joseph Evans, Mayor in 1933 was also a well known member of Oxhey. Councillor F J B Hemming had been bowling in 1921 for Oxhey for 20 years, confirming that Oxhey had been in existence many years before being formally founded as Oxhey Bowls Club. Councillor Hemming was Mayor of Watford in 1929.

North Watford BC was formed in 1926 following a meeting on Tuesday 29th June at Jefferies Hall, St Albans Road. Councillor Harold Horwood was elected Chairman at this meeting. NWBC had a six rink Cumberland Turf green in Ashby Road, Gammons Lane. A new Pavilion was erected and opened on 5th May 1979. Charlie Brown who was Club President in 1967 was also Match Secretary for 17 years. Ald William Tucker was a good club member but died during his Presidency in March 1937.

Garston BC was formed in 1937 in preparation for the new six rinks Cumberland Turf green laid down in Lea Farm Recreation Ground. It was opened by the Mayor of Watford Councillor Thomas Rigby Taylor on Saturday 24th September, 1938. This was followed on 1st May 1939 when the new Pavilion was opened by the Mayor Councillor Harry Horwood. Watford Ladies BC, which was founded on 12th April 1935 and used the green at North Watford BC, moved to Garston BC in 1946.



Owls BC, at Woodside Playing Fields, Horseshoe Lane, Garston play on a six rink grass green laid by the Corporation in 1965 for the use originally of the Woodside Community Association. This Association was disbanded in 1976. The green had always been shared with Odhams (Watford) Ltd BC who changed their name to OWLS BC in 1967. Previously Odhams in 1939 were sharing a green at Oxhey Hall Social and Sports Club in Raglan Gardens, Oxhey Hall. They too disbanded in 1942 during WW2, unable to maintain the green due to call-up for war service. The bowls section was re-formed in 1945, but records show that they played most of their matches away.

When food rationing eased after WW2, the Association followed the Hertfordshire BA custom of arranging an annual tour. Each year the President arranged a bowls tour covering a week, usually at a coastal town. The first one was in 1948 when President Frank Fowler (Kings Langley BC) toured the Isle of Wight and it is recorded that he won four and lost two of the matches arranged.

Undoubtedly the most notable bowler from the district was Reg Pickering (Watford BC) who represented England for twelve years from 1926 onwards and was captain of his country in 1932. Reg also won the County Singles on eight occasions, a record number for a Hertfordshire player and the District Singles 7 times. Stan Simmons (Rolls Royce & Garston) won the District Singles on five occasions and Alan Cawdell (Watford) was successful on four consecutive years. Although he never won the District Singles Andrew Briden (Herts) was runner-up in the National Singles in 2002, when

he qualified for Worthing as the runner-up of the County Singles, an unusual feat. A probably unique feature was recorded in the pairs in 2003 when Geoff Gough (N Watford) won the District Pairs with Ron McCarthy and the County Pairs with Ray Puddephatt.



The Ray Cup (3 rink knock-out competition) presented by champion golfer Ted Ray in 1927 was stolen in 1987 but was replaced by the Championship Cup of the BLUES BC (the club disbanded in 1986). The most wins in this competition has been by Watford BC who have been successful 21 times.

The Griffin Cup (2 rinks) was presented to the Association by Cllr Charles Griffin in 1934. Again Watford BC have recorded the highest number of iwins (13).

The Friday Evening League has been running since 1968 and Watford BC has won it 7 times, closely followed by Kitcheners (under various names) and Mill End with 6 wins each.

The League Championship was played for in 1914 and has been running ever since. It is thought that this makes it the longest continuously running league in the country. As previously noted the Trophy was presented by the founder President Mr Hedley Francis Le Bas and as in other sports is considered to be a reflection of a club's overall strength and depth. North Watford has the most wins (26) followed by Mill End BC with 15 and Watford BC with 14. In 1992, the last year of the club's existence, Rolls Royce BC for the only recorded time won every match.

In more recent years the Association has struggled with diminishing competition entries with Clubs struggling to survive the pressures of modern living where time restraints and other leisure opportunities have had an impact.

In 2016 the Association faced closure as Executive numbers and interest dwindled, it was rescued by three Club officers who set about re building the structure of the Association and installing confidence in its member clubs. The Association is delighted to report an upturn in competition entries through its re branding, communication and club engagement, the association marked the new era by gifting every club with a sail flag as a statement of its intention to evolve and succeed.

'drawing clubs together'