



## **An Introduction to the Victoria Bowling Club**

The earliest document belonging to the Victoria Bowling Club is a lease signed in 1870 by the landlord of the "Upper Green", Robert Allen, and the Chairman of the Victoria Bowling Green Club, George Whincop. This makes our club one of the oldest in the country. Hanging in the club-house is a lovely photograph in sepia of some forty well attired gentlemen of whom more than half were wearing top hats. They were, almost certainly, founder members of the club.

The first of our continuous records is an account of the AGM of 1888 handwritten in a new minute book. This and other minute books, together with very many documents, records, plans, photographs and artefacts that are now safely stored in the club archive. A summary of all minutes from 1888 to 1990 and a catalogue of contents of the archive are published in two books which are retained in the club-house. A history of the club by Percy Bannock was published in 1970 as part of the celebrations of the club's centenary. A second history, titled "Many Pleasant Hours", written by Norman Wordsworth, was published in 1996 and is on sale in the club-house. Arthur Towson prepared a list of events from 1870 to 2000 and an Inventory of the contents of the club in 2002.

Many long and eventful years have passed since those early days in the 1870s as succeeding generations of members have bowled on the Victoria Green. The passage of time has wrought much change. The club was, in the early years, dependent on the landlords granting leases until, in 1917, the freehold was purchased, and the club achieved independence. Members purchased repayable shares and the Club was put in Trust to members. The management of the Club was to be overseen by Trustees and this still prevails today. The purchase price was £825 with the total rising to £880 including expenses.

In 1925, the lovely thatched pavilion was presented as a gift by John Youngs and, in that same year, the present club-house was erected to replace a dilapidated structure known to

all as “the duck house”. The splendid thatched roof of the Clubhouse was lost in a fire on Guy Fawkes Night 1972, and was replaced with tiles and a locker room. New toilets were added. The boy wipers, for so long a feature of play on the green, have gone. A car park was constructed and more recently the club has entered the high-tech era with modern machinery to maintain the green (which had to be re-laid in 1974 and a new watering system installed). At the same time the Green was extended by some 6 feet along the John Young’s edge.

But some things have changed little. Our lovely green and gardens are still a source of wonder to visitors. Eric Fowler, writing in the Eastern Daily Press in 1970, began an article with these words: “Within less than a mile of the middle of Norwich, and surrounded these days by houses, there is a beautiful bowling green that has been there for more than 100 years. All around it there are pleached limes and garden beds glorious in this season with roses. To one side of the green there is a club-house, with a bar at the end of it, and a long table where members sit down socially together for tea”

Many traditions have endured the long years. Members value and cherish them. They make our club unique. New members soon become familiar with them such as waiting on a bench for a “six” and the draw from a bag to pick sides; afternoon tea in the club-house; the call of “anyone in” echoing across the green; summer evenings in the deepening twilight playing in a President’s v Deputy President’s match; a drink at the bar; crowded competition days; the club flag fluttering from the masthead and the ending of the season with an Annual Lunch.

During the many years of The Victoria Bowling Clubs there have been international crises, World Wars and pandemics but play has continued throughout these periods thanks to the efforts of the Presidents and Committees in office at these times, ensuring the continued existence of The Club.

A proposal to accept women as members was originally rejected in 2018 but at an EGM in 2023 the proposal was overwhelmingly agreed.

Membership of Victoria is special. It is enjoyed in the company, friendship, and fellowship, all of whom first and last play the game of bowls for pleasure and enjoyment.

**As members we share a commitment to pass on to those who follow this privileged inheritance.**