

SKELTON INDOOR BOWLING CLUB

At a meeting of the Skelton Village Hall Committee in 1989 Jeff Sealby suggested an indoor (short mat) bowling club be started. Jo Routledge and Jeff Taphouse were nominated to look into this and take all necessary steps to get a club launched.

The hall purchased three bowling mats and other equipment. These are hired out to the club together with the premises either two or three times a week (depending on other bookings). There is a £6 annual membership charge plus £1 per session.

The maximum number of bowlers at any one time is 32 (8 per mat) - this is the present (and ideal) size of group. The club operates in the winter months only. It is a mixed club and all teams include both men and ladies. The members come from a wide area and practically all are also in the Skelton Bowls club during the summer. A regular round of 11 matches (each two leg) is played against local clubs each season.

JMB. Nov'99

SKELTON BOWLING CLUB

This article was made possible by the outstanding efforts of 'Jim' Rothwell who painstakingly researched numerous historical documents.

In the early 1920s, the Toppin Memorial Hall started life as a large hole in the ground, leaving a large heap of earth which eventually had to be disposed of. It was levelled out and turned into a bowling green which became just one of the many amenities provided under the umbrella of the new hall. An extract from the original Minute Book of the Club makes interesting reading: as follows:

Members for season Bowls Club Committee Meeting 6.4.26; Membership for the bowling club was drawn up

1/6; Non-members for season 3/-; Visitors 1/- per week. Loan of shoes free

From the end of the 1960's the green fell into disuse. The Skelton Picnic Committee used the bowling green for their Rose Queen Crowning Ceremony and the children ran their races on it. It is a sad fact that the Rose Queen Picnic no longer exists.

Towards the end of 1980 the village magazine suggested that the bowling green be restored and such was the resulting enthusiasm that by the autumn of 1981 the old green had been regraded and prepared to receive seed or turf.

A meeting held in the Hall in the spring of 1982 was well attended and it was unanimously decided to re-form the Bowling Club. Work started on the green, funds were raised, turf ordered and laid, perimeter ditch formed and fencing erected.

We now had a green and a bower, and what these lacked in scope and size we made-up for in enthusiasm. When electricity eventually arrived at Skelton, the generator was removed from the exterior building and the space made available as a bower. The accommodation was not what one would expect going into the new millennium - no kitchen, no toilets, no tables, no carpets, no heating, in fact all it consisted of was a door, three walls, a roof and room for about ten people all squeezed onto two benches "borrowed" from the hall. Still, it was our bower and it was cleaned out and decorated by the ladies.

The green was only four rinks wide, and play could only take place in one direction. This was not acceptable for play in the Eden Valley League and home matches were by courtesy of our friends at Caldbeck Bowling Club. This has sealed a special friendship with Caldbeck, a friendship which still endures and which we take into the new millennium. There was never any difficulty in finding opponents for friendly matches and the Ladies Section earned the club a high reputation for their home baking and catering, which still applies.

It soon became obvious that the club would never advance beyond the level of a "fun club" unless the green could be extended, so as to permit play in both directions and to make it acceptable to the Eden Valley League for home matches. In 1981, the necessary land was acquired and another massive DIY operation began. Now we had a legal green which could be played in both directions

and it was acceptable for home league matches, but we still had the old engine house for a bower, and a tent had to be erected for the major events.

Deep in the heart of Greystoke Forest was a sectional timber hut, which had fallen into disuse, but was still in good condition, and a reasonable price was negotiated with the owners, and again with a massive DIY exercise, the hut was dismantled and transported to the bowling green. A design was evolved, which incorporated proper toilet facilities and access for disabled people. Later on a covered veranda was added to overcome congestion caused by visitor's bowling bags and allowing better viewing of the play in progress. All this culminated on 19th May 1995, when armed with a large pair of scissors, Cumbria County Bowling President John Pearson, cut the blue ribbon across the doors of the bower and declared it open.

In the last year of the 20th Century, club activities abound and it is a wonder how so many are crammed into the season. The 1999 season fixture card shows the Officers, Committee and all matches. The club has tasted some success in recent years - Eden Valley Ladies League Champions and the Stan Bragg North Cumbria Triples League Champions. So far we have not produced any individual international champions. However, good players abound and we hope to produce winners in the new millennium. The Club is entering the Millennium with confidence and with a strong base of 70 members. So far all this has mainly been about the club and not the people in it, but it would be very difficult indeed to name any member who has not made an input of some kind or other beyond the scope of ordinary club activities. All Club Presidents, since the reformation of the Club and all trophy winners are recorded on the Honours Boards in the bower. In conclusion Skelton Bowls Club can be summed up in one word, and that word is: ENTHUSIASM.

Ever since the great benefactor Mr. FT Toppin was inspired to build this great facility, and present it to the people of Skelton, there has been enthusiasm. The farmers with their tractors, transport and road haulage, the working parties, fund raising activities which have been enthusiastically supported by the village people, the co-operation of the Hall Committee and Trustees, the labour and expertise, freely given by local artisans, the donation of cash, goods and materials by local people, interest-free loans, and grant aid by local councils, the help and hospitality given by the Eden Valley Bowling Clubs, the gifts of cups and trophies for club competitions, the ladies who have earned the Club a great reputation for their catering and cooking, all this and many other things all combine to exemplify the enthusiasm which has combined to bring about the great success of Skelton Bowls Club.

The Club looks forward to 2000 and beyond with that same enthusiasm and we are confident that club descendants will be writing a follow-up article about Skelton Bowls Club in the year 2999!!

Ken Johnson, Secretary of Skelton Bowls Club, December 1999

(Re-printed from
Skelton Parish Histories
sponsored by Eden District Council as a Millennium project in 1999
Sub. Committee, Jan.2000 - Jean Bloomfield, Nancy Hullock, Jane Stronach.)